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D i f f e r e n t

S u b j e c t

A virtual dialogue on

resistance between Michel de

Certeau and Michel Foucault

Publishable article

A Different Subject

A virtual dialogue on resistance between Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault

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Abstract

This article deals with the different conceptualizations of resistance in the work of Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault. Their understanding of resistance departs from a similar critique of society, scientific discourse and the constitution of the subject. Both are concerned with the normalization and limitation of human thought and conduct that occurs through historically determined power relations in conjunction with discourses on truth. From his critique, Certeau develops an understanding of resistance that revolves around practices and experiences that rupture the 'strategically' constituted subject and introduce 'otherness' in our daily lives. Foucault's understanding of resistance, on the other hand, revolves around a critical investigation of one's own historically determined limitations and the deliberate act of autonomously constituting oneself as subject.

Referencing and use of translations

The references in this article conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Since this article is intended for a broad, English speaking audience I always cite and refer to page numbers from English translations. For major works, the original French title and publication information is provided. In the case that, besides the English translation, an original French term is used for extra clarification, the page number of the French publication text is also provided.

I hereby declare and assure that I, Marius van Rosmalen, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated. Nijmegen, 07-11-2021.

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Introduction

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) addresses the close relationship between his own work and that of Michel Foucault (1926-1984). The questions he raises in this cultural analysis are, according to Certeau, ‘at once analogous and contrary to those dealt with in Foucault’s book’.¹ The work of Foucault has been given a lot of attention in the past decades, but the closely related work of Certeau, which operates within the same horizon of a critique of modern culture, has not been studied as extensively. Especially the way their works relate to one another is still underexplored. In order to contribute to this field of study, this article explores the following question: how do Foucault and Certeau conceptualize resistance in their respective critiques of society?

In broader introductory works on Certeau’s thought, the topic of resistance is always addressed.² However, contrary to Foucault’s work, the way Certeau understands resistance has not served as a topic for extensive study. There are some articles where the topic of resistance is mentioned, often as a characterization of the wider context of Certeau’s oeuvre. Michael Smith for instance argues that Certeau’s work must be understood as a ‘practice of a subversive scholarship’.³ The Parisian student revolt of May ‘68 is also a recurring theme in the discussion of Certeau’s oeuvre.⁴ His first-hand experiences of this “resistance” effected a change in Certeau’s writings. From this point onwards, Certeau, the historian of spirituality, extended his focus and started to address problems of modern culture. Resistance and subversive behaviour already formed a focal point in Certeau’s studies into mysticism and spirituality, therefore, some of the most extensive discussions of resistance in the work of

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiv. Originally published as *L’invention du quotidien: I Arts de faire* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990). The book by Foucault that is referred to is *Discipline and Punish*. This is the work Certeau refers to the most. However, he was familiar with all of Foucault’s works up to *Discipline and Punish*. As far as I know there is no engagement with later works. See: Michel de Certeau, “The Black Sun of Language: Foucault” in *Heterologies: Discourse of the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 172. See also: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977). Originally published as *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975).

² Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other* (Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, 1995), 185; Graham Ward, ed., *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford (UK): Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 100; Inigo Bocken and Eveline van Buijtenen, *Weerbarstige spiritualiteit: Een inleiding in het denken van Michel de Certeau (1925-1986)* (Heeswijk: Berne Media, 2016), 124-125.

³ Michael B. Smith, “Michel de Certeau’s Microsubversions,” *Social Semiotics* 6, no. 1 (1996): 26, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10350339609384461>.

⁴ Rudi Laermans, “Geloven, handelen, weten: Michel de Certeau en de moderne cultuur,” in *Sluipwegen van het denken: Over Michel de Certeau*, ed. Koenraad Geldof and Rudi Laermans (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij SUN, 1996), 24, 69; Bocken and Buijtenen, *Weerbarstige Spiritualiteit*, 85-107.

Certeau come from the field of theology and spiritual studies.⁵ However, the study of how the concept of resistance functions in Certeau's cultural analyses is lacking. Precisely this conceptualization of resistance is addressed in this article by exploring Certeau's relation to Foucault. After all, Certeau discusses the work of Foucault most extensively in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, directly relating it to questions of cultural theory and the topic of resistance. The way this article can be situated in the extensive scholarship on Foucault and resistance will become clear during the course of this introduction, first it is important to clarify what "resistance" designates in this article.

In English the word resistance immediately calls to mind protests or revolutions, in French however it carries a variety of other connotations that do not translate well. Resistance might also designate something like stubbornness or resilience; something immovable or a strength of will. Both Foucault and Certeau were part of a French academic climate that enjoyed ambiguous language and a lot of plays on words, as such, they refer to resistance in a myriad of ways. In any case, resistance is not treated by them as the outline for a specific political project or a deliberate transgression that opposes a certain institution of power. Instead it concerns a cultural and theoretical question that investigates the constitution of free actions and thoughts as well as its limitations.

The question of resistance must also be understood in the context of Foucault's and Certeau's philosophical climate which was heavily 'structuralist' at the time. Structuralist theories are characterized by the fact that it critiques the idea that man has an innate or essential rationality that governs his actions. Instead, structuralist analysis, be it historical, linguistic, cultural or psychoanalytical, aims to show in some way that man's actions and thoughts are constituted by a hidden, 'unconscious', structure.

I generalize this structuralist thematic in this article as 'the constitution of the subject'. This theme is at the heart of Certeau's and Foucault's inquiries into resistance. Essentially, they both ask: by what processes are we formed and what possibilities do we have to resist these processes? The critiques of culture they develop thus make use of many themes found in structuralist analysis, but both of them are also very critical of structuralist methods. Consequently, both are involved in developing new methods for understanding the

⁵ A good work to familiarize oneself with the discussions in this field is: Herman Westerink, ed., *Critical Spirituality: Spirituality as Critical Practice in the Global Modern Age*. Studies in Spirituality 28, Titus Brandsma Institute. (Leuven: Peeters, 2017). The epilogue by Herman Westerink contains an especially fruitful comparison between the work of Foucault and Certeau from a spiritual perspective. See also: Bocken and Buijtenen, *Weerbarstige spiritualiteit*, 117. For a more conventional, theological discussion of Certeau's resistance and an American point of view, see: Antonio Eduardo Alonso, "Listening for the Cry: Certeau Beyond Strategies and Tactics," *Modern Theology* 33, no. 3 (July 2017): 370, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12333>.

constitution of the subject, which are often called ‘post-structuralistic’.⁶ In search of such methods, both authors have made many contributions as historians, but also as linguists, literary scholars, students of religion and even art critics, to name just a few of their vocations. As mentioned above, I approach their work through the lense of cultural theory and will compare their critiques of contemporary culture that result from these diverse investigations. Understanding Certeau’s and Foucault’s respective methods for critical cultural analysis forms an essential context for understanding their conceptualizations of resistance. The most important aspect of this lies with the fact that resistance is understood as a relation to a very specific understanding of power.

The conception of power used by both authors is mostly developed in the work of Foucault. Foucault’s early work, which forms the departure for Certeau’s cultural theory, investigated how certain procedures of power in conjunction with the organization of discourses on truth shape our acts and thoughts. Foucault describes it as the ‘movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth’.⁷ Foucault’s, now famous, elucidation of how ‘disciplinary’ procedures are historically engrained in society forms the context for their inquiry into resistance. According to Foucault, power functions through ‘subjectification’ (*assujettissement*), that is, through the production of a certain sense of self, identity or ‘subject’.⁸ This is what makes the question of resistance so tricky, because it cannot simply be understood as a negation of a restricting force, the absence of constraint, rather it is an

⁶ For a general introduction of structuralism and the rise of post-structuralism see: Sam Han, “Structuralism and post-structuralism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory*, edited by: Anthony Elliott (Abingdon: Routledge, 19 nov 2013), 37-48.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?,” in *Politics and Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 47. This is a definition Foucault gives of his concept of ‘governmentality’. Throughout his work Foucault has expressed his ideas on power in many different forms. This definition of governmentality is especially precise, since it contains the three interrelated elements that are essential in Foucaultian cultural analysis. See also: footnote 91.

⁸ The term subjectification needs clarification. Foucault’s early work makes extensive use of the term ‘*assujettissement*’ which means being subjugated or subjected to. However, during the course of his career Foucault addresses more and more that this is not a purely passive subjugation and that individuals play a role in their own subjugation. From the 1980’s onwards, Foucault more and more uses the term ‘*subjectivation*’ to describe this and which is referred to in this article as ‘self-subjectification’. *Assujettissement* thus often refers to those processes whereby an individual is subjected or made into a subject by external forces and *subjectivation* to those processes whereby an individual transforms himself into a subject. In this article I have chosen to speak of ‘subjectification’ or ‘subjectifying processes’ as the umbrella term for all the different, interrelated processes that ‘transform individuals into subjects’, specifying where possible the distinction between self-subjectification and subjection by external processes. For Foucault’s usage of these terms compare: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, Volume I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976), 81; Michel Foucault, *Herméneutique du Sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Gallimard: Hautes Études, 2001) 347-348. For a good discussion of Foucault’s usage of these terms over time see: Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “The Aesthetic and Ascetic Dimensions of an Ethics of Self-fashioning: Nietzsche And Foucault,” *Parrhesia* 2, no. 55 (2007): 55. http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia02/parrhesia02_milchrosen.pdf.

inquiry into the possibilities for agency in relation to a power that is productive and constitutive of the way we understand ourselves.

It is on the basis of this conceptualization of power that Foucault has critiqued contemporary society and especially the dominance of the scientific discourse on truth. This discourse, and especially the sciences of man, has made procedures of ‘subjectification’ possible that normalize and limit human thought and behaviour. Certeau similarly critiques the scientific enterprise, and the corresponding ‘strategic’ procedures characteristic of modern society.

Besides adopting part of Foucault’s work, Certeau also critiques Foucault, especially for not developing a conception of resistance.⁹ Indeed, Foucault’s earlier works on the ‘panoptic’ character of power and the disciplinary procedures that shape our thoughts and acts seem to leave little room for free agency, let alone resistance. Responding to this, Certeau states that his work is concerned with finding an ‘antidiscipline’ or how a ‘society *resists* being reduced to’ the ‘grid of discipline’ outlined by Foucault.¹⁰

Certeau’s critique on Foucault is closely related to a substantial discussion in the current Foucault scholarship. Early critics on Foucault have argued that his critique of society lacked a conception of agency and normativity which might constitute the changes he deems necessary.¹¹ Notable critics in this regard are Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and Jürgen Habermas.¹² However, from his critique, Certeau moves into a quite different position than these well-known critics. Instead of developing a political program or normative guidelines for resistance he situates resistance in the creativity of everyday practices.

Even though many have found Foucault’s work lacking in this regard, in the growing scholarship on Foucault the general consensus seems to trend towards the fact that resistance, or freedom as he often calls it, is actually his main concern. Johanna Oksala has produced the first extensive study centered around precisely this argument.¹³ This debate on Foucault’s

⁹ That Certeau’s relation to Foucault is ultimately one of admiration can be observed in the beautiful essay: Michel de Certeau, “The Laugh of Michel Foucault” in *Heterologies: Discourse of the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 193-198.

¹⁰ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv. See also: Inigo Bocken and Eveline van Buijtenen, *Weerbarstige spiritualiteit: Een inleiding in het denken van Michel de Certeau (1925-1986)* (Heeswijk: Berne Media, 2016), 117. Italics mine.

¹¹ Saul Tobias gives a good overview of the development of these criticisms. Saul Tobias, “Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 22, no. 4 (2005): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405053721>.

¹² Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (May, 1984): 152-183; Nancy Fraser, “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,” *Praxis International* 3, no. 1 (1981): 272-287; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). Originally published as *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

¹³ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

work seems to stem from the fact that the theme of resistance is only explicitly treated in his later works. Here, Foucault expands his conceptualization of power as ‘subjectification’ by exploring the importance of the ‘relation between self and self’ for autonomous self-constitution.¹⁴ I argue that this expansion of the concept of subjectification is what allows Foucault to address the topic of resistance more concretely than in his earlier work. While some have argued that Foucault’s ‘ethical turn’ constitutes a break with his earlier work¹⁵, I agree with those scholars who argue that his late work contains the elaboration of why he studied power in the first place.¹⁶ Amy Allen, for example, has convincingly argued that the expansion in Foucault’s later work ‘poses in a particularly productive way what is a central question in critical theory: how we can understand the self as both constituted by power and yet still capable of being autonomously self-constituting’.¹⁷

Also from the field of feminist studies comes the only article I know of that specifically compares the conceptions of resistance of Certeau and Foucault.¹⁸ In this article, Claire Colebrook relates their conceptions of resistance to questions in feminist theory. What is at stake in her discussion of resistance is the possibility for an ‘outside’ to power, which will figure in my discussion as well.¹⁹ That an ‘outside’ to power is essential for the practice of resistance is one of the biggest points of contention in the works that discuss Foucaultian resistance.²⁰ An alternative to Foucault’s ‘immanent’ view of resistance, that is, resistance as situated within power relations, is found by Colebrook in the work of Certeau who’s ‘logic of the other’ furnishes for her such a point outside of power.²¹ What Certeau is conceiving as resistance, according to her, functions as the ‘limit, or outside to the operation of power’.²²

Colebrook’s reading addresses important points, but is missing some crucial elements. Mainly, she brushes aside the late work of Foucault which I argue is essential for Foucault’s

¹⁴ Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 4, 163-164.

¹⁵ Michael Peters’ for instance, argues for a discontinuity in Foucault’s work. He writes: ‘Clearly, Foucault remodels himself and his thinking changes and evolves throughout his life. Indeed, he was forever reformulating what he saw as his own ‘project’. Michael A. Peters, “Foucault, Counselling and the Aesthetics of Existence,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 33, no. 3 (2005): 385, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880500179616>.

¹⁶ This argument in Foucault’s own words can be found in: Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1982): 777-781. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>.

¹⁷ Amy Allen, “Foucault and the Politics of Ourselves,” *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2011): 52, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0952695111411623>.

¹⁸ Claire Colebrook, “Certeau and Foucault: Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 543-574, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/30706>.

¹⁹ Colebrook, “Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” 544, 549.

²⁰ Andrea Rossi, for instance, writes: ‘[T]he belief that an outside is needed in order to ‘think of’ and ‘make’ resistance is – I want to argue – precisely what Foucault sought to demystify [..].’ Andrea Rossi, “Foucault, Critique, Subjectivity,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 21, no. 4 (2017): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2017.1370486>.

²¹ Colebrook, “Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” 564.

²² *Ibid.*, 544.

conception of resistance.²³ Furthermore, I read Certeau's criticism of Foucault less as an opposition to his work, but rather as an attempted expansion.²⁴ Bryan Reynolds and Joseph Fitzpatrick similarly argue that Certeau is not trying to 'debunk Foucault' but instead 'sets more inclusive parameters that expand Foucault's chosen area of investigation'.²⁵ As mentioned above, Foucault's late work can likewise be seen as an expansion of his earlier work. What I will mostly discuss then, is how both authors work within a shared horizon of a critique of modern culture, but develop different conceptions of resistance from a similar point of departure.

At stake for Foucault in his expansion is what is described above as the possibilities for self-constitution. This question, the freedom of subjectivity, remains one of the most hotly debated topics today. The popularity of Foucault stems largely from the way he observed that 'nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection - against the submission of subjectivity- is becoming more and more important[.]'.²⁶ What ways are open for us to autonomously shape ourselves, when it has become commonplace to acknowledge that our subjectivity, our actions and even our thoughts, are being shaped by relations of power in conjunction with the discourse of truth? Exploring the possibilities for this is what is at stake in Foucault's discussion of resistance as self-constitution. Certeau however takes a quite different path. He does not focus on an autonomous constitution of the self, but focuses on the importance of the 'Other' and letting go of the self. Certeau's cultural theory clearly takes up elements of his numerous studies into mysticism and spirituality. Resistance for Certeau is constituted by a desire for an 'Other'; by opening up to something 'Other'. Below I will discuss Certeau's and Foucault's critical cultural analyses respectively and show in more detail how the concept of resistance figures in their critiques of culture.

²³ Colebrook, "Tactics and Strategic Essentialism," 550.

²⁴ This approach is also inspired by John Marks, who has compared the notion of plurality and 'otherness' in the works of Certeau and Foucault. He argues that an interesting 'point of convergence' exists between Foucault's late work and that of Certeau which should be studied further. I agree with this sentiment, and have taken up the challenge. However, I disagree with his approach to resistance in the work of Foucault. According to Marks: 'opportunities for resistance are rare' in the work of Foucault. John Marks, "Certeau & Foucault: The Other and Pluralism," *Paragraph* 22, no. 2 (July 1999): 124, 129, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43263358>.

²⁵ Bryan Reynolds and Joseph Fitzpatrick, "The Transversality of Michel de Certeau: Foucault's Panoptic Discourse and the Cartographic Impulse," *Diacritics* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1566237>.

The debate whether Certeau's critique must be read as an 'undermining' of Foucault or an 'expansion' of Foucault is ongoing. Ahearne, for instance, argues the former. See: Ahearne, *Interpretation and its Other*, 143-147. Later in this article I will discuss some of Certeau's own words on the matter which, I believe, shows that he sees his work mostly as an expansion of Foucault's theory.

²⁶ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 782.

I. Michel de Certeau: resistance as tactics without subject

Certeau's most extensive treatment of resistance is found in his cultural analysis *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Ahearne describes the 'central thrust' of this work as follows:

‘The central thrust of the *The Practice of Everyday Life* is thus to affirm the resilience and inventiveness of ‘ordinary men and women’ against the analyses which present them as entirely informed or crushed by the economic and cultural apparatuses which set the terms of social life.’²⁷

The cultural analysis in *The Practice of Everyday Life* arises out of two interrelated critiques. Firstly, Certeau critiques the modern, scientific way of cultural analysis.²⁸ This critique functions within a second, larger critique, of the connection between procedures of power and strategic, rational discourse in general. In this section, Certeau's critique of social science and the development of his own alternative method is discussed first. After this, his critique of power and strategic operations is discussed. I make extensive use of the concept ‘subject’, which is very typical for Foucault's analyses and will be addressed extensively in the section on Foucault. Even though Certeau uses this word far less often, it is very fitting to describe his work. I have chosen this approach, firstly, because Certeau uses Foucault's conception of power as subjectification. Secondly, the question at stake for Certeau is what constitutes our actions and thoughts. This is precisely what Foucault designates as the formation of the subject. Lastly there is already precedent for reading Certeau's work as concerning the question of the formation of subject. For example, Ian Buchanan argues on the basis of Certeau's work that ‘our understanding of culture must commence with an understanding of the formation of the subject’.²⁹

Cultural analysis of the ‘Other’ and the critique of science

The main story in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, is about practices that follow a ‘logic’ which is different from the procedures of ‘functionalist rationality’.³⁰ According to Certeau, this

²⁷ Ahearne, *Interpretation and its Other*, 185.

²⁸ For an extensive discussion of Certeau's complex notion of modernity see: Koenraad Geldof, “Economie, exces, grens: Michel de Certeaus genealogie van de moderniteit,” in *Sluipwegen van het denken: Over Michel de Certeau*, ed. Koenraad Geldof and Rudi Laermans (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij SUN, 1996), 174, 186.

²⁹ Ian Buchanan, “Heterophenomenology, or de Certeau's theory of space,” *Social Semiotics* 6, no. 1 (1996): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350339609384466>.

³⁰ ‘As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices [...] “indirect” or “errant” trajectories obeying their own logic.’ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xvii.

‘unspoken’ and ‘errant’ logic is not a rational or scientific procedure, but is nonetheless constitutive of our daily lives and ‘popular culture’. He introduces his analysis with the statement that his research will not prioritize ‘individuality’, which ‘[has served] over the past three centuries [...] as the historical axiom of social analysis’.³¹

Contemporary social ‘science’ is, according to Certeau, dominated by a ‘social atomism’ which explains cultural phenomena on the basis of the ‘modern’ image of man as a rational and sovereign individual. Such ‘social atomism’, which takes a sovereign and rational subject as the ground for its discourse, has existed, according to Certeau, at least since the time of Descartes.³² Which is why Certeau refers to the analytical procedures he critiques as a ‘Cartesian gesture’. Not only is such ‘strategic rationality’ typical for social science, and science in general, it can be observed in political, military and economic fields as well.

‘[A]ll “strategic” rationalization begins by distinguishing its “appropriate” place from an “environment,” that is, the place of its own power and will. A Cartesian gesture, if you will: to circumscribe one’s own in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. A gesture of scientific, political, or military modernity.’³³

Instead of a ‘social atomism’ that ‘circumscribes’ its own ‘proper’ place of power, Certeau grounds his own discourse on the notion of ‘relationality’.³⁴ In this view, the constitution of

³¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi.

³² The word subject comes from the Latin *subiectum*, which is a translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon* meaning literally: something that is ‘thrown under’, or the ‘underlying thing’. It designates a foundation or ground, in contemporary philosophy, it often designates the ground of knowledge or discourse. Marc de Kesel very succinctly addresses the ontological changes that the notion of ‘subject’ has undergone. De Kesel tracks the differences of this “fundamental” concept from Aristotelian logic, to classical theological discussions and into a modern crisis that can be discerned in Christian mysticism, which forms the topic of his book. The mystic’s awareness of the ontological change in subject, he argues, correlates historically to the work of Descartes. In this period, no longer god, but man as individual becomes the ground, or subject, for discourse which is why the mystic’s discourse is characterized by the experience of a loss of god as his ground. This ontological change in subject, characteristic for modernity, eventually forms the basis for the secular scientific discourse. This paper owes much to de Kesel’s discussion of the modern subject in mysticism, which in turn owes a lot to Certeau’s historical work on the matter. One of Certeau’s main contributions to the study of mysticism consists in showing how the mystic discourse is perhaps the earliest example of a discourse affected by the aforementioned change towards the modern subject. See: Marc de Kesel, *Zelfloos: De mystieke afgrond van het moderne Ik, Essays over mystiek* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Kok, 2017), 61-62. See also: Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech” in *Heterologies: Discourse of the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 91-92.

³³ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36.

³⁴ Certeau’s discussion on the relation between writing and speaking is important for understanding his terminology such as ‘circumscription’ and ‘trans-cription’. The scientific enterprise for Certeau is an exertion of power on an environment which is often explained through the metaphor of writing. ‘What is writing, then? I designate as “writing” the concrete activity that consists in constructing, on its own, blank space (*un espace propre*)—the page—a text that has power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated.’ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 134; Certeau, *L’invention du Quotidien*, 199.

the subject, or individual, does not rest on some inherent or essential rationality, but a complex system of cultural relations. For Certeau, a 'plurality' of social relations is what constitutes the way we act and think.

Analysis shows that a relation (always social)- determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact.³⁵

The fundamental concept which structures Certeau's cultural theory of relations is that of 'alterity', 'difference' or 'otherness'.³⁶ It is the difference between two related terms that 'determines' the elements that are thusly related. The way Certeau conceives of the constitution of the subject thus rests on a fundamental alterity present in the relations that 'determine' us.

Certeau develops an abstract model to describe the general contours of such determining cultural relations. He distinguishes what is 'proper' (*propre*) from what is 'different' or 'other' (*autre*).³⁷ Proper describes something that is your 'own' or that is 'owned', as in property. It also describes something clean or pure. It can refer to a clearly defined and delineated place, physical and imaginary, or field of knowledge. However, practices that aim to institute such a proper place must always be thought of in relation to that which it is not; what it excludes from itself because it is improper. That 'remainder' is what is 'other'. This is the pluriform, the untransparent, contradictory and unknown. Certeau's cultural analysis is aimed at finding a way to express the role that this 'remainder' plays in the constitution of our daily practices.

The otherness Certeau sees as fundamental in everyday life, cannot be expressed by the scientific method.³⁸ In fact, the scientific procedure relies on excluding everything that is other from its operation. This is how science has been instrumental in shaping the various procedures that delineate a 'proper', which Certeau sees as characteristic for 'modern',

³⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi.

³⁶ Marks compares the different uses of this concept by Certeau and Foucault and shows how it changes over time. Although they use this concept differently in their respective cultural analyses, the conception of 'otherness' originates from a similar stance with regard to historiography. 'Certeau acknowledges the importance of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* in this move towards a history which understands that social-scientific knowledge is frequently constructed upon an Other which becomes a remainder or a lacuna.' Marks, "The Other and Pluralism," 120.

³⁷ See for example: Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, xlvii

³⁸ Problematic in this regard is that the scientific method obstructs expression of the 'specific' or different. Through the development of rigid scientific procedures the scientific enterprise limits what is regarded as knowledge. As such it is unable to express a 'logic' that is different from its own scientific enterprise. Certeau develops this critique as early as *La Prise de Parole*, where he states that the commentators on the events of May '68 can not describe the cultural uniqueness, or 'otherness', of the event because of the way their discourse on knowledge is structured. See: Laermans, "Geloven, handelen, weten," 20.

‘technocratic’ society. Modernity is characterized by a gap between proper scientific discourse and the ‘otherness’ which it cannot express because it follows a different ‘logic’. This otherness, this remainder, is what Certeau regards as ‘popular culture’.

‘Ever since scientific work (*scientificité*) has given itself its own proper and appropriable places through rational projects capable of determining their procedures, [...], ever since it was founded as a plurality of limited and distinct fields, in short ever since it stopped being theological, it has constituted the *whole* as its remainder; this *remainder* has become what we call culture. This cleavage organizes modernity.’³⁹

The modern scientific method, which finds its advent in the time of Descartes, institutes a ‘cleavage’. This cleavage must be understood in two ways. Firstly, this cleavage refers to the break with the old theological model of knowledge; an ‘epistemic shift’.⁴⁰ Secondly, and more crucial for Certeau’s cultural analysis, it is a cleavage between rational procedures and the actuality of cultural practices; ‘the art of doing’.⁴¹ The reality of our everyday practices, which is often constituted through a ‘different logic’ and a continuous encounter with something inexpressible and ‘Other’, becomes more and more shrouded in darkness as our society becomes more scientific, strategic or ‘technocratic’.

The procedures of social science are critiqued as being a ‘transcription’ or a ‘reduction’ by Certeau.⁴² Scientific discourse ‘transcribes’ everyday practices, which are essentially ‘without discourse’, into concepts that are limited by the ‘proper’ scientific language. The artificial language of science has more and more lost the ability to express ‘the art of practice’. The central attempt of Certeau’s cultural analysis is to overcome this limitation or ‘cleavage’ and find a ‘voice’ that might describe the ‘otherness’ which is an essential aspect of the reality of practices.⁴³ This is why he liked to characterize his own work as a ‘heterology’ or a ‘science of the Other’.⁴⁴

³⁹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 6; Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 19.

⁴⁰ The term ‘epistemic shift’ is the most common way to refer to a central concept in Foucaultian historiography which designates a rupture or discontinuity between different time periods (*episteme*) in the way that knowledge is organized. See for instance: Bernhard F. Scholz, “On Foucault’s idea of an Epistemic Shift in the 17th Century and its Significance for Baroque Scholarship,” *Literator* 11, no. 3 (November 1990).

⁴¹ Certeau’s chapter V ‘*The Arts of Theory*’ is dedicated to this problem of a ‘science’ of practices. Especially the last two sections of this chapter are an ingenious reflection on the possibilities for a cultural analysis that might be able to express ‘the art of doing’. See: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 69-75.

⁴² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii-xix.

⁴³ On the artificiality of the scientific language versus the natural language that organizes ‘common signifying activity’ see: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 6. For the distinction between writing and orality, or ‘scriptural apparatuses’ versus ‘the Voice of the people’ see the chapter *The Scriptural Economy*: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 131-153.

⁴⁴ Luce Giard, “Epilogue: Michel de Certeau’s Heterology and the New World,” *Representations*, no. 33 (1991): 216-217, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928764>.

The term ‘science of the Other’ is clearly paradoxical. In fact, as Certeau was well aware, the attempt to ‘speak the other’ amounts to speaking what is unsayable. Certeau himself understood perfectly well that the discourse he wanted to establish was perhaps impossible. According to his close friend and colleague Luce Giard, Certeau’s heterology in the end ‘remained an unattainable but always beloved object of desire for de Certeau, always escaping any appropriation.’⁴⁵ Giard’s description of Certeau’s heterology seems the best way to value his work; even if the proposed destination seems impossible to reach, we must value the pursuit of following his path. Giard argues this when she says that instead of a strict ‘science’, Certeau heterological analyses should be considered as an ‘art of doing’ themselves.⁴⁶

‘It was an “art of doing,” as he liked to say, that consisted “of *passing* more than of founding” in the “gesture of clearing a path, without cease.”’⁴⁷

Giard corroborates this with the words of Francois Hartog. Instead of working to establish a stable foundation, the characteristic procedure of the scientific discipline, Certeau’s heterological analyses are more like a wandering path through unknown territory.

‘He discovered, but without measuring, he traveled through, but without inhabiting, this heterological space of which he was, in a certain way, the inventor and the historian, but a historian without territory, the instigator of a proceeding rather than the founder of a new discipline.’⁴⁸

The wandering path is one of the most common metaphors used in Certeauian scholarship.⁴⁹ Instead of the institution of a place of one’s own, which forms the precondition for constituting a clearly ‘circumscribed’ subject, Certeau describes everyday practices through the image of a wanderer who has no place. Man is also a traveler who finds himself on the territory of another.⁵⁰ This metaphor of the wanderer correlates to his conceptual

⁴⁵Giard, “Epilogue,” 217.

⁴⁶ Following this reading of Certeau, it can be argued that Certeau doesn’t solely write about resistance. Instead, his writing must also be understood as ‘practicing resistance’. This is what is meant by Giard when she reads Certeau’s work as an ‘art of doing’. This theme is repeated by many authors. A similar stance is taken by Smith for instance, see: Smith, “Microsubversions,” 26. It is argued for as well in *Weerbarstige Spiritualiteit*, see: Bocken and Buijtenen, *Weerbarstige spiritualiteit*, 212-215.

⁴⁷ Giard, “Epilogue,” 219.

⁴⁸ Cited in: Giard, “Epilogue,” 219.

⁴⁹ A good example is Graham Ward’s introduction to *The Certeau Reader*, where he likens the work of Certeau to the cinematic genre of the road movie. Graham Ward, “Introduction” in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford (UK): Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 1-17.

⁵⁰ *Walking in the City*, the most well-known chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, deals with the image of such a wanderer. Here, the ‘common man’ who wanders the streets of the modern megalopolis is juxtaposed with the rational procedures of city-planners who constitute the city as a ‘grid’ of proper places. In this

distinction between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*).⁵¹ His critique of what constitutes the subject has thus also a distinctly ‘topological’ character. What his critique amounts to in these terms is that we tend to believe that the subject is constituted through the institution of a ‘proper place’. The reality of our daily lives, he argues, shows something else. Much of our practices can better be understood through the logic of wandering which opens up a space in which we can lose our fixed identities and become constituted by ‘the other’. A place can only be occupied by one individual, necessarily distinct from all others, yet a space is determined by the relation between those who occupy it together. Only by relinquishing a strict sense of individuality and proper identity, by opening to the ‘other’, might one ‘escape’ the oppressive constitution of the modern technocratic system ‘without leaving it’.⁵²

What Certeau is outlining in his ‘heterological’ analysis of culture, can also be described as the experience of ‘shattering’ (*éclatement*).⁵³ For Certeau this experience of fragmentation or disruption, which corresponds to specific sort of practices, is equally characteristic of modern life as ‘proper’ technocratic institutions. On the one hand man is constantly shaped by rational procedures that aim to ‘circumscribe’ a clear and distinct place for each individual. On the other hand this ‘strategically’ constituted subject is constantly broken and shattered through its encounter with something, or someone ‘other’. The ‘knowledge’ Certeau is looking for, the knowledge of the other, can be understood on the basis of this experience; the experience that shatters and fragments our preconceptions and the stability of our sense of self.

‘Knowledge of others is measured by the “astonishment” that marks our anticipation, leaves its zigzag trace through our discourse, shatters our expectations.’⁵⁴

The next section addresses how these practices and experiences which revolve around the encounter with ‘the Other’ function as a form of resistance according to Certeau.

confining, rational grid that structures the modern megalopolis, Certeau describes the possible constitution of divergent ‘spaces’ that come about through wandering in the street. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91-108.

⁵¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117; Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 172.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xviii

⁵³ The term shattering here is chosen on account of Certeau’s usage of the word *éclatement*. This is an important term in Certeau’s theory of Christianity but a very similar argumentation is made in his cultural analysis. *Éclatement* contains an ambiguity that Certeau likes to play with. *Éclat* means shining or brilliance, whereas *éclatement* means to burst or explode. Certeau argues that not the stability of dogma’s but the shattering of the Christian discourse, the constant ruptures it goes through, are in fact indicative of its brilliance. The light of an ‘Other’, shines through in these moments of disruption. For a description of Certeau’s theory of Christianity and its ‘éclat’ in the context of his time see: Marc de Kesel, “Faith in Crisis: Reflections on Michel de Certeau’s Theory of Christianity,” *Coincidentia* 3, no. 2 (2012): 415-438.

⁵⁴ Cited and translated by Smith in: Smith, “Microsubversions,” 22.

Strategic power and tactical resistance

‘The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices.’⁵⁵

Certeau’s heterological critique of social science is intertwined with a critique of power-relations. Ahearne describes this correlation when he explains that Certeau’s work shows ‘how epistemically controlled interpretative operations may be read as a function of more explicitly political operations’.⁵⁶ In other words, the procedures of science conform to certain power relations in our society. These ‘political operations’ function as a reduction and ‘repression’ of alternative logics and instead ‘work to bring diverse populations into conformity with prescribed political programmes’.⁵⁷

Certeau’s analysis of the interconnectedness of scientific procedures and relations of power, draws heavily on the work of Foucault. Foucault analyzed the relation between the ‘sciences of man’ (*sciences humaines*) and the subjugation of man in *The Order of Things*.⁵⁸ As mentioned, Certeau sides with Foucault’s critique, but he also points out a lack in his work. In a review of *The Order of Things* he says of Foucault’s critique:

The moment it demystifies the “positivism” of science or the “objectivity” of things by defining the cultural shifts which “created” them, it opens onto the nocturnal underside of reality [...].⁵⁹

The ‘nocturnal underside of reality’ points towards the dimension of ‘otherness’ in everyday life Certeau explores in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Foucault’s histories, as Certeau reads them, describe the ‘disciplinary procedures’ that are constitutive of the dominant doctrines or ‘ideologies’ of our time. Certeau lucidly explains how Foucault’s discourse analyses are not concerned with discussing the validity of any ideology. Instead, his work shows how a plurality of discursive practices with specific, ‘disciplinary’, effects of power are in fact constitutive of the dominant ideologies in a given society. Foucault’s analysis of these disciplinary procedures, or ‘subjectifying practices’, is discussed in more detail below. For now it suffices to say that Certeau regards Foucault’s work as the attempt to show the primacy of cultural procedures over ideologies in the constitution of the subject.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xvii.

⁵⁶ Ahearne, *Interpretation and its Other*, 131.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002). Originally published as *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 16.

⁵⁹ Certeau, “The Black Sun of Language,” 175.

⁶⁰ About *Discipline and Punish* Certeau says: “[T]he basic story the book has to tell [...] postulates a fundamental dichotomy between ideologies and procedures, and charts their respective evolutions and intersections. In fact,

As mentioned in the introduction, Certeau aims to ‘expand’ from this Foucaultian perspective of the constitution of the subject on the basis of procedures of power that depend on the scientific discourse. John Marks describes this beautifully, as the attempt to ‘put’ Foucault’s thought ‘into motion’.

‘[I]t can be argued that Certeau puts Foucault’s thought ‘into motion’, showing that the disciplinary diagram is not what we are, but what we are ceasing to be.’⁶¹

Colebrook reads Certeau’s response to Foucault as arguing that ‘there are other modes of knowing, writing, and reading that open up a thought of the absolutely other, or that which transcends.’ According to Colebrook, the practices that conform to this ‘logic of the other’ function as a resistance to subjectification through the ‘disruption of a dominant logic’.⁶²

Certeau’s central critique of Foucault, rests on the argument that it is ‘impossible to reduce the functioning of a whole society to a single, dominant type of procedure[.]’.⁶³ There are always experiences and practices that disrupt or resist these procedures. He sees Foucault’s analysis of cultural procedures as limited to only those procedures that have constituted a dominant ideology. According to Certeau, Foucault’s bias stems from the ‘historical success’ that his described procedures have seen.⁶⁴ Instead, Certeau wants to extend Foucault’s analysis so that it includes those procedures that have not become a dominant discourse; practices that do not ‘organize discourse’ but ‘persist’ nonetheless.

‘On this view, then, a society would be composed by certain practices which, selectively withdrawn and externalized, now organize its normative institutions, alongside innumerable other practices which, having remained “minor,” do not organize discourse itself but merely

what Foucault analyzes is a chiasmus: how the place occupied by humanitarian and reformist projects at the end of the 18th century is then “colonized” or “vampirized” by those disciplinary procedures which have since increasingly organized the social realm itself.’ Michel de Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,” trans. Fredric Jameson and Carl Lovitt, *Social Text*, no. 3 (1980): 10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466341>.

⁶¹ Marks, “The Other and Pluralism,” 127-128.

⁶² Colebrook, “Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” 545. After a discussion of the merits and the risks of the positions of Certeau and Foucault, Colebrook concludes that both an ‘anti-essentialist’ and ‘immanent’ critique of power as well as a ‘tactical’ and ‘metaphorical’ use of an essential femininity have their place in feminist thought. As long as one is aware of the risks involved in both positions, one can adopt a stance that sees them as complementary. She writes: ‘The answer is not to cleanse thought of these risks but to bear the responsibility for both. In the case of feminist ethics all those tactical uses of strategy have to recognize their complicity, or situation within, the dominant logic. (There is no pure heterology.) At the same time, no matter how stringent one might be with a critique of the feminine as essence, one cannot ignore the tactical uses to which such an idea or metaphor might be deployed.’ Colebrook, “Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” 572.

⁶³ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 48.

⁶⁴ Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices,” 11. Compare: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 48.

persist, preserving the premises or the remnants of institutional or scientific hypotheses that differ from one society to another.’⁶⁵

Certeau’s preferred terminology for these ‘minor’ procedures that follow a different logic is ‘tactics’, which are distinguished from ‘strategies’. The abstract relation between *propre* and *autre*, schematically described above, is invoked in this relational model as well. A strategy is an execution of power on an exterior. Certeau calls it a ‘force-relationship’ that becomes possible when a ‘subject of will and power [...] can be isolated from an “environment”’. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper [...].⁶⁶ A strategy is for instance the scientific enterprise, but can also refer to the governance of a state or the competition between businesses. According to Certeau all ‘political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.’⁶⁷

A tactic, on the other hand, is defined by the fact that it ‘cannot count on a “proper”’ and is characterized by ‘otherness’.

‘The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.’⁶⁸

Tactics have no ‘proper’ place and don’t exert force. As such they do not constitute a subject. Instead they function as a negation or disruption of the subject that is constituted through ‘strategic’ procedures of normalization. Tactics can thus be understood as ‘subjectless’, since they are constituted by an ‘otherness’ that disrupts the stability of the subject to the point of its negation. Because of this specific character of tactics, Certeau argues that they fall outside the field of ‘subjectifying’ procedures that Foucault outlines; they are ‘the outside’ of power.

‘[T]actics are thus essentially determined by the absence of power fully as much as strategy is organized by power as precondition.’⁶⁹

The view of society that Certeau constructs is that of a clash between procedures that subjectify people by instituting a ‘proper place’ that ‘represses’ all that is ‘other’, and tactics

⁶⁵ Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices,” 11. Compare: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 48.

⁶⁶ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix. Note that Certeau introduces this concept directly in response to the epistemological problems of reduction and transcription as described above. ‘To avoid this reduction, I resort to a distinction between tactics and strategies.’

⁶⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix..

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices,” 7.

that resist or disrupt this process. While strategic procedures are a typical ‘modern’ phenomenon, so are tactics. They correspond to the experience of ‘fracture’ or ‘rupture’ which is equally ‘modern’.

‘Where dominating powers exploit the order of things, where ideological discourse represses or ignores it, tactics fool this order and make it the field of their art.’⁷⁰

Describing power in terms of ‘repression’, rather than oppression, is one of the ways that the influence of psychoanalysis shows in Certeau’s work. Certeau refers extensively to the work of Sigmund Freud for instance.⁷¹ How the theme of ‘repression’ is taken up in psychoanalysis serves as a model for Certeau’s cultural analysis of power relations and the functioning of resistance. Certain ‘ways of doing’ are repressed by ‘conscious’ strategies of power. However, the repressed always surfaces to problematize and resist the repressive procedure. The themes of the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, which were very popular in France at the time, are also omnipresent throughout Certeau’s work.⁷² The work of Lacan is especially important to mention because it sets the stage for why the question of resistance is such a problem for both Certeau and Foucault.⁷³

Lacan’s structuralist approach to man posits a dichotomy between ‘law’ and ‘desire’. Schematically speaking, Lacan discusses how man is limited and restricted by a law that is imposed on him but this law also constitutes someone as a subject of desire that, through these desires, is able to take part in the ‘symbolic order’ of society. For Lacan, man is essentially a subject of desire, constituted by a restrictive law. This desire often takes the form of a transgression of the law, a “resistance” against what restricts and shapes you. However, such a transgression can not be seen as a true resistance to the law, since it is constituted by the law and the struggle against the law only serves to confirm its constitutive power.⁷⁴ As will be addressed in the next section, Foucault explicitly moves away from thinking man as a subject of desire and power as a restrictive law. Certeau stays closer to Lacan’s structuralist format of analysis, but similar to Foucault he tries to think of resistance as something else than a struggle against a restrictive law, determined by the law itself.

⁷⁰ Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices,” 4.

⁷¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 24-26, 39.

⁷² For Certeau on Lacan see: Michel de Certeau, “Lacan: An Ethics of Speech,” trans., Marie-Rose Logan, *Representations* 3, no. 3 (1983): pag nr. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3043785>. For the influence of Lacan on both Certeau and Foucault see: Herman Westerink, “The Subversive Practices of Desiring Bodies,” *Studies in Spirituality* 31 (2021): 229-246.

⁷³ Colebrook also stresses the importance of Lacan’s influence on the topic of resistance. See: Colebrook, “Tactics and Strategic Essentialism,” 544, 545.

⁷⁴ See: Herman Westerink, “The Subversive Practices of Desiring Bodies,” *Studies in Spirituality* 31 (2021): 235-236.

However, resistance for Certeau, or tactics, still have everything to do with innate desire. Certeau seems to maintain the Lacanian interrelation of law and desire as what constitutes man as subject. However, Certeau argues that his work is mostly concerned with ‘different interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop.’⁷⁵ What Certeau describes as resistance is constituted by a desire to escape from what Lacan would call the ‘symbolic order’. Certeau accounts for the persistence and prevalence of modern strategic procedures on account of the interdependence of a desire for meaning and knowledge and the correlative power of the law. Resistance, however, the creative tactics performed in everyday practices, stems from a different sort of desire; a desire for the other.

One can see the interplay of these different desires for instance in Certeau’s famous passage *Walking in the City*. Here Certeau describes strategies and tactics through the metaphor of the modern megalopolis and pays special attention to the different ‘pathic drives’ and ‘lusts’ that are involved. He contrasts the experience of standing on top of the World Trade Center with wandering through the streets below. The experience of the first is that of the ‘voyeur’ who takes pleasure in ‘seeing the whole’. His vantage point ‘transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it [...], looking down like a god.’ This strategic and “panoptic” position, isolated from one’s environment, yet able to understand it, follows from a ‘gnostic drive’, and the ‘lust of being a viewpoint’.⁷⁶

Contrarily, Certeau discerns ‘walkers’; ‘ordinary practitioners of the city [who] live below the threshold at which visibility begins’.⁷⁷ Making use of the same metaphors of vision and desire, Certeau shows the difference of their desire with regard to the ‘pan-optic’ voyeur.

‘These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other.’⁷⁸

Modern society is thus understood as a relation between strategic procedures that normalize and rationalize the individual on account of a desire for knowledge. On the other hand, countless practices can be discerned that destabilize knowledge, rupture identities and

⁷⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xvii.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 92. This is a good example of Certeau’s unique writing style which constantly mixes metaphors (‘like a god’), theoretical concepts (the vantage point as ‘proper place’, the concept of ‘writing’), and descriptions of sensory experiences (‘gnostic drive’, ‘lust of being a viewpoint’).

⁷⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

must be understood as 'other'. It is ultimately in these practices, tactics that negate the constituted subject, that Certeau discerns a resistance to strategies. These strategies follow our desire to be something rational and meaningful but instead function as a repression.

‘[T]he only force opposing this passion to be a [meaningful] sign is the cry, a deviation or an ecstasy, a revolt or flight of that which, within the body, escapes the law of the named. Perhaps all experience that is not a cry of pleasure or pain is recuperated by the institution[,] collected and utilized by the discourse of the law.’⁷⁹

At the heart of Certeau’s conception of resistance one thus finds a loss of self, identity or subject. The desire for the ‘Other’ functions simultaneously as the desire for the negation of the self. Certeau corroborates his theory, that man’s practices are always in part constituted by this fundamental desire, through many descriptions similar to that of the city’s wanderers. What Certeau aims to show is that in these tactical practices there is always something introduced that is purely particular or singular which cannot be reduced to general representations or strategic production and always remains other.

Certeau discusses in this vein how an inexpressible ‘otherness’ is always at play in practices such as speaking, reading, walking, cooking, etc.⁸⁰ In every act of speaking, something new is introduced through a creative utilization of the rational system of language.⁸¹ By walking through the city a unique path is introduced, a particular ‘space’ is created that conforms only to that single usage of the city’s street and not the strategies of city planners. For Certeau, resistance is understood as a specific ‘utilization’ of the rational order. It is a tactical ‘consumption’ which he defines as a ‘fleeting and massive reality of a social activity at play with the order that contains it’.⁸²

The particularities that are continuously produced in these tactical practices disrupt and even negate the strategic procedures that constitute the subject. Ultimately, these particularities of everyday life evade any totalizing generalisations, and open unto an unknowable and ‘anonymous’ domain; an inexpressible domain without subject. Smith

⁷⁹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 149.

⁸⁰ Smith, accurately notes that ‘etcetera’ is ‘perhaps Certeau’s most personal stylistic trait’. Smith, “Microsubversions,” 17.

⁸¹ Certeau develops a theory that makes consistent use of the, now famous, notion of ‘speech-act’. However, instead of using this notion to build a formal theory of the rules of language, as is often the case in contemporary speech-act theories, Certeau shows how something in the act of speaking always escapes the formal limits of the language system. In this sense, his ‘speech-act’ theory takes the form of a cultural analysis instead of a linguistic one. Speaking up, involves a resistance to the formal, and culturally dominant, structures that made this speech possible. For the problem of ‘enunciation’ see: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xxiv.

describes the movement from the personal experience of the specific, to the unknowable and negative as the fundamental idea in Certeau's work.

‘[T]he fundamental idea is that the point of departure for every individual (spiritual) experience is and must be specific, but that this experience should then move on to a negative moment of ‘not here, not here’, that can only be designated as a restless transcendence toward a ‘beyond’: an otherness that is ultimately unknowable.’⁸³

According to Certeau, otherness proves in the end more fundamental than the strategic procedures that constitute us as subjects. An even more originary drive in man, the desire for the other, constantly disrupts and resists this repressive procedure. This desire constitutes a tactical domain of practices which, even though it is not its goal, constantly subverts and disrupts society's repressive procedures. According to Certeau these practices are like the unconsciousness of culture, an originary constitutive domain that is as old as life itself and will always resist the ways man consciously and rationally tries to dominate others.⁸⁴

‘The procedures of such art can thus be found as far as life itself exists, as though they transcended not merely the strategic separations of historical institutions but also the very break inaugurated by the institution of consciousness itself. They thus assure the formal continuities and the permanency of a memory without language, from the ocean's depths all the way to the streets of today's megalopolis.’⁸⁵

Although the logic of these practices remains perhaps impossible to express, it is ultimately the effects of such a fundamental ‘otherness’ that Certeau's ‘heterology’ of tactics desires to ‘illuminate’ as so many different forms of resistance that occur in our everyday lives.

⁸³ Smith, “Microsubversions,” 20.

⁸⁴ This ‘originary’ domain is mostly described by invoking different metaphors. Often recurring is the image of the sea. Compare for instance Certeau's remarks on the ‘age-old ruses of fishes’ with the ‘oceanic rumble of the ordinary’. See: Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi, 6. This metaphor refers to the origin of life, a life before consciousness and before culture. This metaphor can also be found in other works. For instance, in the preface of *Culture au Pluriel* Certeau describes the aim of that work as the attempt to lose himself in an anonymous sea: ‘[This work] moves toward an obliteration of ownership and the proper name. This path leads, though I am not yet capable of it, toward the anonymous sea in which creativity voices a violent song.’ Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, ed. Luce Giard, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), vii. Originally published as *La culture au pluriel* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974).

⁸⁵ Certeau, “On the Oppositional Practices,” 9.

II. Michel Foucault: resistance as self-subjectification

As discussed in the previous section, Foucault's work shows the primacy of procedures over ideology. He prioritizes the relations of power that discursive procedures on truth have as their effect, over the specific content of what is said. Foucault analyzes the way these procedures are historically determined and constitute man as subject. In this section, Foucault's notion of power as 'productive', or 'subjectifying', as well as his method for cultural analysis are discussed before moving on to his conception of resistance.

Power as subjectification and the relation of self to self

As mentioned, Certeau develops his conceptualization of a tactical resistance constituted by otherness because he feels that Foucault's work lacks a conception of resistance. In his late work Foucault addresses this 'lack', but he fills this lacuna in a quite different fashion. He locates his work on resistance in the domain of the 'relation of self to self' and connects it with a discussion of 'autonomy' and 'critique'. Oksala describes this 'move' in Foucault's career:

'The subject is studied now not only as an effect of power/knowledge networks, but also as capable of moral self-reflexivity – critical reflection on its own constitutive conditions – and therefore also of resistance to normative practices and ideas. Subjects constitute themselves through different modes of self-understanding and self-formation.'⁸⁶

Critique is such an essential aspect of Foucaultian resistance that Andrea Rossi completely equates them: 'Critique is resistance.'⁸⁷ To understand the notion of 'critical resistance' that is developed in Foucault's late work it must first be placed within the context of his oeuvre. An oeuvre that, as he claims, is concerned with the question of the subject. In one of his latest and most concise articles Foucault explains that 'it is not power but the subject which is the general theme' of his research.⁸⁸

'My objective, instead [of an analysis of power], has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 4, 163-164.

⁸⁷ Rossi, "Foucault, Critique, Subjectivity," 338.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1982): 778, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>.

⁸⁹ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 777.

The question of the 'subject', however, is intimately related with the question of 'power', or 'government'. Foucault understands power as a 'productive', 'subjectifying' procedure.⁹⁰ It is through the transformation of individuals into subjects that they enter into relations of power with others. Foucault is concerned with the contemporary meaning of the word subject, which is someone that is 'subjugated', as in: the king and his subjects. However, this conceptualization of 'subject' is tied up with that of 'knowledge', specifically a knowledge of our 'self'. In producing knowledge of man, of the self, lies a production of power relation that functions through making individuals into subjects. These three interrelated elements form the fundamental aspects of all Foucaultian analysis: the production of truth, specifically truth about man, relations of power and the constitution of subject.⁹¹

'There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.'⁹²

The main aim of Foucault's work is thus to show how the interrelated procedures of knowledge and relations power can be understood as 'subjectifying' practices. He categorizes different forms of 'subjectification' by investigating 'processes of objectification'. Although the terminology is quite confusing, objectification and subjectification both refer to processes that 'transform[s] individuals into subjects'.⁹³ Objectification denotes processes whereby human beings are treated as objects in different ways. Subjectification then, is the general effect of many different forms of objectification that exist in a given society.

Foucault categorizes the multitude of 'objectifications' he has studied into three 'modes'; three general ways an individual is transformed into a subject because he is treated as an object. These modes give a good overview of different facets in the oeuvre of Foucault.⁹⁴ As such, it gives the necessary context for understanding Foucault's conception of resistance which depends on the last mode of objectification.

⁹⁰ See footnote 8.

⁹¹ Frederic Gros, has summarized this 'trilogy of Foucault's critical work' very precisely as: 'a study of modes of veridiction (rather than an epistemology of Truth); an analysis of forms of governmentality (rather than a theory of Power); a description of techniques of subjectivation (rather than a deduction of the Subject) [...]'. According to Gros, all of Foucault's studies take a specific domain of inquiry and then explore the 'intersection of these three dimensions'. Frédéric Gros, "Course Context," in *The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II. Lectures at the Collège De France 1983-1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 344.

⁹² Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 781.

⁹³ Ibid., 777.

⁹⁴ Oksala similarly introduces three distinct 'periods' in Foucault's work. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 3-4.

‘The first [objectification] is the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences [..]’⁹⁵

The first mode of objectification that transforms a human being into a subject is that of the sciences of man.⁹⁶ First, Foucault has investigated the historical trajectory by which man has become an object of science. Sciences of man include biology, economy or linguistics for example. What Foucault shows in the analysis of these ‘disciplines’ is the interrelation between the sciences of man and relations of power that become possible on the basis of its subjectifying effects. This work entails the critique of man as an essentially rational subject, which bears many similarities with the critique of Certeau.⁹⁷ Man is not an innately rational subject, rather he is ‘made’ into a subject through procedures that adhere to scientific rationality.

‘In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call “dividing practices.”’⁹⁸

In the second mode of objectification, again, a clear similarity with the work of Certeau is apparent. This part of Foucault’s studies concerns the subjectifying effects of historically formed differential pairs like ‘the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the “good boys”’.⁹⁹ In all these domains of ‘difference’, Foucault describes the ‘dividing practices’ which have constituted them and how these constitute the way we think of ourselves as human beings. In this mode of objectification one sees how the concept of ‘difference’, and ‘relationality’, a theme so central to the work of Certeau, takes shape in the work of Foucault.

⁹⁵ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777.

⁹⁶ As mentioned in the last chapter, this is Foucault’s main concern in *The Order of Things*.

⁹⁷ For Foucault, the epistemic shift that inaugurates modernity is also of the utmost importance. Like Certeau he discusses the importance of Cartesian philosophy in the development of scientific rationality. In *My Body, This Paper This Fire*, Foucault goes into a discussion with Derrida about the ‘exclusion of madness’ that Foucault argues is present in the meditations of Descartes. In the same article Foucault argues that Descartes’ ‘meditation’ must be understood as an ascetic exercise, excluding madness from the self. Foucault describes Descartes’ meditations as a certain work on the self or ‘self-subjectification’ as I will call it below. Furthermore, he argues that this meditation was so influential, that the meditative movements Descartes goes through are no longer necessary to be followed by others in order for them to be considered as essentially rational beings. Michel Foucault, “My Body, this Paper, this Fire,” in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. I, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 405-406. See also: Edward F. Gushin, “Foucault’s Cartesian Meditations,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 2005): 41-59, <https://doi.org/10.5840/ipq200545163>.

⁹⁸ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777-778.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 778.

The division that is made in these practices is understood by Foucault as a form of oppression, or an exclusion of that which is different. Foucault calls these dividing practices ‘disciplinary’. They have the effect of normalizing the behaviour of people because they correspond to specific delineations which structure scientific disciplines. These disciplinary practices are close to Certeau’s description of strategic practices; they rely on the constitution of a ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ subject.

In the inquiry into these modes of objectification Foucault is indeed not explicitly concerned with the possibilities of resistance. His investigation into the oppressive and excluding effects of relations of power, which is simultaneously a critique of the subject as innately rational and sovereign, has been Foucault’s main objective for a long time. It is mostly through the inquiry into a third mode of objectification that Foucault finds the concepts necessary to develop an understanding of resistance.

‘Finally, I have sought to study – it is my current work – the way a human being turns himself into a subject.’¹⁰⁰

This ‘current work’ mainly refers to Foucault’s last major work: *The History of Sexuality*. This work was never fully finished. Its prolongation was caused, in part, because during the writing process Foucault shifted his attention to this third mode of objectification.¹⁰¹ While studying the ‘history of the desiring subject’ Foucault explores how one’s relation to oneself is an essential aspect of the constitution of the subject, which he had neglected up to that point. With this third domain, Foucault expands his already complex history of subjectifying procedures, or ‘games of truth’ (*jeux de vérité*) as he likes to call them.¹⁰² In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes the progression of his own career as follows:

‘After first studying the games of truth in their interplay with one another, as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then studying their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices – I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject [..]’¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 778.

¹⁰¹ The first part of this work was published in 1976, whereas part two and three were published in 1984, ten days before Foucault’s death. Finally there is a posthumously published part four, which came out in 2018. Most of this was written earlier however because it was originally meant to be part two. This was changed due to Foucault’s new line of inquiry described above. For Foucault’s reflection on the changes he made, see the excellent introduction to volume two. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 1-25. Originally published as *Histoire de la sexualité, Volume II: L’usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1984).

¹⁰² See for example: Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, vol. II*, 15.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. II*, 6.

It is mostly with this last expansion of his work that Foucault's work clearly diverges from that of Certeau. Firstly, something similar to this third aspect of 'objectification' is absent in Certeau's work on resistance. As mentioned above, Certeau credits the constitution of practices of resistance to 'the Other' or the desire for the other. However, the relation of self to self, or the relation to one's own desire is not addressed in his cultural analysis. For Foucault however, this relation to the self forms a fundamental category in his conception of freedom and resistance. This divergence is made even more clear by the fact that Foucault's focus on this aspect of subjectification arises specifically out of a discussion of desire and an explicit departure from psychoanalysis and structuralism.

Foucault had announced his departure from structuralism years earlier in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.¹⁰⁴ Here he reflects on the methodology of historiography as a form of cultural analysis and argues that his work will prioritize 'ruptures' and 'discontinuities' instead of describing an essential structure. Instead of describing our history as a progression, Foucault asks: 'how is one to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity [...]?'¹⁰⁵ Although Foucault uses many of the themes of structuralism, he explicitly wants to create a cultural analysis that does not take recourse to any essential structure of man, history or power. It is especially with regard to this last aspect, power, that the theme of desire is taken up in his later work in a completely different way than Certeau. Where Certeau largely stays with a Lacanian and structuralist model of law and desire, Foucault's first part of *The History of Sexuality* shows Foucault's greatest attempt to conceptualize power, and the way it constitutes man as subject, in a wholly different way.

'[I]t seems to me that this analytics [of power] can be constituted only if it frees itself completely from a certain representation of power that I would term [...] "juridico-discursive". It is this conception that governs both the thematics of repression and the theory of the law as constitutive of desire.'¹⁰⁶

Foucault proceeds to outline the different elements of how power is usually conceived.¹⁰⁷ This conception leads to the idea that power either represses an innate drive that needs 'liberation', or that power constitutes one's desire such that one is 'always-already trapped' in power.¹⁰⁸ According to Foucault, this conception of power, even though it is faulty, is the

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 199. Originally published as *L'Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969).

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 82. Originally published as *Histoire de la sexualité, Volume I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976)

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

only one we find tolerable.¹⁰⁹ Foucault's critique consists of thinking power in a different way. Power for Foucault is not negative, not a repressive law, instead it is a productive force. However, it is not a force someone can acquire, it is a certain 'strategical situation in a particular society' that corresponds to the dominant discourses on truth.

'[P]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.'¹¹⁰

Foucault's understanding of power in this light, and not as a restrictive law, is essential for his idea of resistance because when power is conceived in this way, resistance is always already included as a possibility. Foucault describes it as 'where there is power, there is resistance'. This is easily one of the most discussed phrases of Foucault. However, the full context in which it is made is often neglected when Foucault's notion of power is critiqued for being omnipresent and 'inescapable'.

'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? [...] This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances [...]. It is in this sphere of force relations that we must try to analyze the mechanisms of power. In this way we will escape from the system of Law-and-Sovereign which has captivated political thought for such a long time.'¹¹¹

In this citation one can see how Foucault's critique of power is intertwined with understanding resistance. Resistance for Foucault entails understanding the constitution of a multitude of internal antagonisms and struggles in society which are an essential part of power relations. It is exactly in light of this investigation that Foucault uncovers the importance of the 'relation of self to self', the third mode of objectification. This became his interest in the last parts of *The History of Sexuality* and his latest inquiries into freedom, autonomy and critique. The relation of self to self is used by Foucault to show the formative

¹⁰⁹ *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*, 86. 'Power as a pure limit set on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability.'

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*, 93.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

aspect of power; the ways by which man becomes limited and ‘tied to his own identity’ through a certain self-understanding. However, it also functions as a necessary concept in understanding resistance. According to Foucault, it is in the relation of self to self that a certain autonomy is possible through the practice of ‘critique’.

Resistance and critique

Foucault’s conceptualization of resistance is tied up with a reflection on the aim of philosophy in general, which he understands as ‘critique’. For Foucault, the aim of critique does not lie in resisting or escaping power as such. It also does not lie in correcting a wrongful truth. It is not the enforcement of any normative ideology. Instead, it must be understood in practical or procedural terms as a ‘work on the self’ with the aim of thinking differently than one is implicitly inclined to.

‘But, then, what is philosophy today -philosophical activity, I mean- if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?’¹¹²

What Foucault ultimately describes as his aim in the second part of *The History of Sexuality*, which is a freedom of thought, can be read as the description of Foucault’s philosophical project in general.

‘The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.’¹¹³

This critical work is described by Foucault as the ‘historical’ or ‘critical ontology of the self’.¹¹⁴ His work has studied history, not in the effort to find a historical structure or a universal

¹¹² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. II, 8-9. ‘There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The “essay”-which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication -is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an “asceticism”, *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.’

¹¹³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. II, 9.

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. I, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 316.

truth, but to free thought from the historically determined normalization that constrains it. This is essentially what Foucault envisions what the practice of a critical resistance looks like.

‘Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. [Critique] is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.’¹¹⁵

What the ‘third mode of objectification’, the relation of self to self, allows Foucault to express is that the historically determined ‘limitation’ of ourselves relies, in part, on a certain self-subjectivation or self-limitation. A critical reflection on one’s own history therefore allows one to form an ‘attitude’ which puts these historically determined limitations into motion by questioning their necessity.

‘We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined. [...] These inquiries [...] will be oriented toward the ‘contemporary limits of the necessary,’ that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects.’¹¹⁶

In the lecture *What is Critique?* and the article *What is Enlightenment?* Foucault further specifies what he understands as the critical enterprise of thinking differently. In both instances, the aim is to explore critique as the ‘work of freedom’ which he treats as the precondition for resistance. This critical freedom is described as ‘desubjugation’ or ‘desubjectification’ (*désassujettissement*).¹¹⁷ But, as I will show below, this is quite different from Certeau’s negation of the subject and not completely the same resistance. As can be read in the citations above, critique is a liberation of thought from its determining and limiting history; a specific work to enable a different thought. I propose that Foucault’s concepts of freedom and resistance, which are so closely related that they are almost the same, are useful to distinguish in order to expose Foucault’s general idea of critique. Critique then, would be the term that encompasses both freedom and resistance. Critique is often described by Foucault as a movement from freedom, understood as a desubjugation, to resistance, which entails a “self-subjectification” (*subjectivation*).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 316.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 313.

¹¹⁷ Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce que la critique? (Critique et Aufklärung),” *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 84, no. 2 (1978): 39.

¹¹⁸ Self-subjectification is my term for the sort of subjectification Foucault describes as his third mode of objectification: ‘the way a human being turns himself into a subject’. See footnote 8.

One can see this movement of critique in *What is Critique?* Here, Foucault discusses his concept of critique in relation to his concept of ‘governmentalization’. Governmentality functioned for Foucault as an umbrella term for the different forms of subjectification that ‘govern’ our thoughts and actions.

‘[...] If governmentality 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, well 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. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation [*désassujettissement*] of the subject in the context [*le jeu*] of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.’¹¹⁹

Foucault argues in this lecture that any history of government, the history of subjectifying procedures, must also account for those critical procedures whereby man has attempted to govern, or subjectify, himself. Clearly, this is the sort of expansion of his theory that Certeau felt was needed, who critiqued Foucault for only paying attention to the dominant forms of subjectification. Foucault seems to agree, and expands his concept of power as subjectification with this notion of critique that is understood by him as a specific ‘attitude’ which is ‘partner and adversary to the arts of governing’.¹²⁰ In the article, *The Subject and Power*, he argues similarly that his understanding of power relations necessarily includes the possibility for freedom.

‘When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others , when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men—in the broadest sense of the term— one includes an important element: freedom.’¹²¹

In what then, does this critical notion of resistance differ from Certeau’s notion of resistance as tactics. This difference can best be explained with reference to the subject. For Foucault, critique and resistance do not ‘negate’ the subject and are not ‘outside’ of power relations. Furthermore, although critique follows a logic that is different from dominant disciplinary procedures, it is by no means an inexpressible logic, it functions within ‘the politics of truth’. This means that resistance is not the result of an innate desire for ‘otherness’, but that otherness, the change in subject necessary for resistance, is introduced on account of critical self-reflection. Foucault’s resistance must then be understood as a specific

¹¹⁹ Foucault, “What is Critique?,” 47; Foucault, “Qu’est-ce que la critique?,” 39.

¹²⁰ Foucault, “What is Critique?,” 47.

¹²¹ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 790.

modality of power as subjectification, which can be described as ‘self-subjectification’. As Foucault explains, the aim of his critical resistance is to struggle against a specific modality of power as subjectification, not power as such. This modality of power is the ‘identity’ politics has described in his early work that limits man to a normalized individuality.

‘[T]he main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much "such or such" an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power. [...] This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.’¹²²

Resistance then is a form of power that does not make others into a subject. But, it is ‘subjectifying’ nonetheless. However, instead of a ‘normalization’ of the behaviour of others, this power takes the form of an ‘alteration’ of the self. This is what Foucault calls ‘autonomy’. Autonomy corresponds to the constant transformation and innovation of oneself. Foucault describes this in many different ways: as a power over the self, a government of the self or, more mildly, a care for the self and the politics of ourselves.¹²³ Through his emphasis on the relation of self to self as a mode of subjectification, Foucault develops a notion of resistance that allows for possibilities of ‘self-constitution’ within relations of power. Oksala describes this as follows:

‘Resistance against forms of subjection cannot be situated outside the networks of power in Foucault’s thought, since subjectivity is only possible within them. This means that resistance also becomes possible only within them, through the subject’s lived practices, which help to constitute forms of subjectivity; through the refusal and the adoption of forms of subjectivity. [...] The way to contest [...] normalizing power is by shaping one’s self and one’s lifestyle creatively: by exploring possibilities for new forms of subjectivity, new fields of experiences, pleasures, relationships, modes of living and thinking. It consists of creative activity as well as critical interrogation of our present and the contemporary field of possible experience.’¹²⁴

¹²² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 781.

¹²³ ‘Maybe the problem of the self is not to discover what it is in its positivity, maybe the problem is not to discover a positive self or the positive foundation of the self. Maybe our problem is now to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history. Maybe the problem is to change those technologies. And in this case, one of the main political problems would be nowadays, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves.’ Foucault, cited in: Allen, “Foucault and the Politics of Ourselves,” 43.

¹²⁴ Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 167-168.

The correlation between a ‘critical interrogation of our present’ and the shaping of oneself is what Foucault understands as the central thrust of the enlightenment, which he explains in the article *What is enlightenment?* Here he shows how his notion of critique is affiliated with authors on ‘modernity’ such as Immanuel Kant and Charles Baudelaire.¹²⁵ The close relation with Kant can be observed in Foucault’s use of terminology. The central terms of ‘critique’ and ‘autonomy’, for instance, are directly related to Kant’s ideas of enlightenment. What becomes clear from Foucault’s discussion of the Kantian project is that he understands critique and resistance as still a quite ‘reasonable’ procedure. In her discussion on the different aspects of Foucaultian freedom, Oksala calls this the ‘deliberate part of freedom’.

‘Freedom is not only a non-subjective opening of possibilities, but it can also be deliberately cultivated and practised by its subjects. Subjects exercise freedom in critically reflecting on themselves and their behaviour, beliefs and the social field of which they are a part. [...] The quest for freedom in Foucault’s ethics becomes a question of developing forms of subjectivity that are capable of functioning as resistance to normalizing power.’¹²⁶

Allen stresses this ‘deliberate’ aspect of Foucault’s critique as well, when discussing Foucault’s notion of autonomy. She defines autonomy as ‘the twin capacities for critical reflexivity and deliberate self-transformation and not, for example, as referring to an independent subject that stands outside of society or power relations’.¹²⁷ It is with regard to this deliberate autonomy that a clear divergence with Certeau becomes apparent.

Where Certeau understands resistance as outside the procedure of power because it is following a logic ‘other than reason’, Foucault understands resistance as one reasonable procedure among many. It is only different because it is aimed at a different ‘technology’ of power; it follows a different procedure of ‘subjectification’. Certeau sees the disruption or negation of the subject as a typical practice and experience in modern society. Foucault, on the other hand, places the characteristic aspect of modernity in the ‘creation of ourselves in autonomy’. In the words of Allen:

‘The permanent critique of ourselves that is characteristic of what Foucault calls the attitude of modernity presupposes autonomy in the sense that, following Kant, one must be mature enough to use one’s own reason in order to engage in such a critique; but critique also aims

¹²⁵ ‘Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.’ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 312.

¹²⁶ Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 12.

¹²⁷ Allen, “Foucault and the Politics of Ourselves,” 44.

toward autonomy in the sense that critique opens up the space for what Foucault calls the ‘permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy’.¹²⁸

Foucault’s notion of resistance thus distinguishes itself by this emphasis on autonomy and critical reflection which contrasts starkly with Certeau’s reference to an innate desire for subjectlessness. However, it must be mentioned that the disruption of the subject still has an important place in this ‘reasonable’ and ‘critical’ project of Foucault. As mentioned, freedom, the first step in the constitution of the self, is a process of ‘desubjugation’, or ‘desubjectification’. Saul Tobias discusses the importance of this aspect of critique, which he relates to Foucault’s work on the ‘limit experience’.¹²⁹ He shows how Foucault is indeed concerned with the topic of ‘irrationality’ and the negation of the subject, but that this is ultimately a less important aspect of his general project of resistance. What Tobias rightly stresses in his reading of Foucault, is that the negation of the subject is by no means an aim or an end result. Ultimately, problematizing or ‘disrupting’ one’s status of subject only occurs as an aspect of the project of producing a certain subjectivity. Without this movement towards subjectivity, the activity of disruption becomes unintelligible, like ‘death’ or ‘madness’, and cannot be regarded as a resistance.¹³⁰ As Tobias writes:

‘Irrationality may signify a transgressive and experimental relation to the self, but if such desubjectivation is not followed by the reinstatement of subjectivity in a coherent form, then ethical practice, as a rational relation to oneself and one’s ends, is not possible.’¹³¹

Tobias’ discussion of the ‘limit experience’ in relation to resistance makes clear that Foucault aims to account for the disruption or negation of the subject prioritized by Certeau. Foucault is clearly aware of those experiences and practices that disrupt the supposed rationality and stability of the subject. I suggest that this aspect of human life is discussed by Foucault as freedom. Freedom is often described as a necessary condition of human activity for Foucault. These moments of disruption where one is confronted by the fact that one

¹²⁸ Allen, “Foucault and the Politics of Ourselves,” 50.

¹²⁹ Tobias, “Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities,” 73.

¹³⁰ On the topic of madness, which is a central theme in Foucault’s work, Tobias makes some interesting points. In his reading of Foucault, madness is something that is oppressed because those individuals characterized as mad aren’t allowed to constitute themselves as subjects because they are deemed incapable of this. As such, they are made into subjects by others. Instead, reading Foucault in a particular way, Tobias argues that people should be given either the freedom to constitute themselves or the support to do so if they lack this capability. Tobias argues for a distinction between an ‘ethics of concern’ and an ‘ethics of autonomy’. Where the ‘capability’ of self-subjectification is the decisive criterion between these ethics. For Tobias, Foucault’s approach suggests that ‘persons capable of forging their own ethical-political project should be left to do so, but it recognizes that not all persons, at all points in their life, may be so capable.’ Tobias, “Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities,” 83.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

cannot fully constitute oneself as a universally rational and sovereign subject, are in fact a confrontation with one's freedom. However, Foucault is ultimately interested in what one does with this freedom, what kind of critical attitude one cultivates towards this freedom. It is in this 'reflective' relation to freedom, to the self, that Foucault locates the possibilities for resistance. What Foucault says of ethics is therefore quite similar to his notion of resistance.

'[W]hat is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom?'¹³²

Resistance then, means taking freedom one step further. It is the critical reflection on, and the active shaping of our capacity for freedom. Only through such reflection might one constitute oneself as a different subject because he is produced through a different procedure than the ones that are imposed on him. Foucault calls this more playfully: 'the art of not being governed quite so much'.¹³³ Resistance is thus the practice of consciously giving shape to one's capacity for freedom through self-subjectification. This self-subjectification functions as a resistance not because it is outside of power or negates the subject, but because its procedures differ from the historically determined forms that limit contemporary subjectivity.

Conclusion

This article has explored the differences between the conceptions of resistance in the work of Certeau and Foucault. Resistance is a complex aspect of their respective cultural critiques that must be understood much broader than what immediately comes to mind. Resistance is related to those processes that constitute man's actions and thoughts. As such, the notion of 'subject' has been of the utmost importance in understanding their conceptualizations of resistance. Both authors depart from a similar critique about the constitution of the subject through dominant procedures of power that adhere to discourses of truth characteristic for modern technocratic society. These procedures normalize and limit the individual through subjectification. Resistance, then, is understood as those practices that resist this subjectification by altering the constitution of the subject. However, this alteration is approached quite differently by both authors.

¹³² Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961- 1984)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989) 434; Michel Foucault, "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté," in *Dits et Écrits 1954-1988, Volume IV: 1980-1988* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 711.

¹³³ Foucault, "What is Critique?," 45.

For Certeau, the experience of disruption, an encounter with ‘otherness’, that fractures the constituted subject is central in his account of resistance. He understands resistance through practices that are a tactical ‘negation’ of the subject and form the counterpart to rational strategies of power. This negation of the subject, an opening up to something ‘Other’ is described in countless everyday practices that make creative use of the strategically produced system. Certain practices introduce ‘particularities’ that are wholly other and cannot be reduced to the ‘repressive’ grid of discipline. It is the relation to such ‘otherness’ that places man outside of the grasp of power and lets him be constituted by something ‘unknown’. The element of ‘desubjectification’ can also be found in the work of Foucault. However, resistance is ultimately understood as a reflective and autonomous procedure aimed at actively ‘producing’ a different self.

The central difference thus lies with a negation of the subject versus an autonomy in the production of subject. This difference can also be seen in how they treat the topic of power. Foucault’s concept of resistance is not the negative or the outside of power, instead it is a specific mode of power within a complex of procedures; a mode of power that takes the form of a ‘self-subjectification’. Certeau on the other sees resistance as precisely outside of power and a sort of escape of the subjectifying system. Another way this difference manifests itself is in their relation to truth or discursive practices. For both Certeau and Foucault, the relations of power constitutive of the subject are seen as interrelated with discursive practices that produce truth. For Foucault, resistance takes the form of a discursive and ‘reflective’ practice. It is a critical and reflexive investigation of one’s own history with the explicit aim of producing one’s own subjectivity. Foucault places the significance of resistance precisely on producing an autonomous and critical subjective position within intelligible discourse. One’s logic of resistance must be “speakable”. Instead of letting dominant, normalizing discourse constitute oneself as subject, resistance consists in taking the discourse on oneself into one’s own hand. It is actively telling one’s own story by critically reflecting on the self and one’s history.

Certeau’s resistance on the other hand relies on obscure and silent practices that ‘do not organize discourse’. Tactics are not subjectifying and produce no discourse, but they are significant nonetheless. For Certeau, the experience of rupture, the shattering of one’s identity by the confrontation with something completely ‘other’ is significant in its own right, even though it cannot function as a stable ground, or subject, of discourse. Certeau is undoubtedly inspired by his historical inquiries into spiritual and mystical experiences. Such experiences can’t be explained in words, but are nonetheless of great significance for the individual who experienced it. What Certeau’s analysis explores is the prevalence of such experiences that rupture the identity of the normalized subject and how this occurs in simple

everyday activities. Ultimately, the significance of such experiences lies with an unspeakable, yet fundamental, domain of 'otherness' that always escapes discourse.

These different approaches to resistance, as negation of the subject or autonomous constitution of the subject, thus revolve around different conceptions of what changes one's status of subject in the context of objectifying procedures of power. Both agree that resistance occurs when a form of 'difference' is introduced in the constitution of the subject; when the constitution of the subject is altered. Certeau's description of this alterity, which manifests itself in tactics, takes recourse to an originary and fundamental desire for 'the Other'. It is through this desire that man opens up to an unspeakable and unknowable 'otherness' that changes him. This desire, for Certeau, is something that 'transcends' all practices and all consciousness yet structures much of our daily lives. With this analysis he remains much closer to a structuralist format of analysis, in effect describing an unconsciousness of our culture that is structured by a desire for alteration. His stance towards such an innate desire that leads us to be constituted by a fundamental otherness constructs a hidden and unspeakable structure that constitutes our resistance to strategic procedures of repression.

Foucault also places the alteration of the subject at the centre of his conceptualization of resistance, but moves away from any structuralist format of analysis. His conception of power and resistance follow from an explicit critique of structuralist ideas of a repressive law that corresponds to an innate structure of desire. Resistance is understood by him as a modality of a multitude of subjectifying practices. It does not follow from an innate desire, but originates in reflexive, critical activity. Resistance for Foucault is understood as a critical movement whereby a difference is 'deliberately' and 'autonomously' introduced into one's status of subject. Resistance means thinking and acting differently than is prescribed by historically determined forms of government that 'subjugate' people by tying them to their own identity and self-understanding. First and foremost, this entails introducing a 'difference' within the self; a different relation of the self to the self. Only through consciously and reflexively developing this different relation to oneself is one able to resist the normalizing and oppressive procedures one is subjected to in contemporary society. In other words, otherness is introduced by the self and not by the 'Other'.

Despite the similarity in themes, Certeau and Foucault have a very different conception of resistance. Ultimately, Certeau's conception of resistance revolves around the disruption and the negation of the subject. Certeau's resistance can thus be understood as a subjectless practice which follows a logic conditioned by an inexpressible 'other'. Foucault's conception of resistance, on the other hand, revolves around autonomously constituting oneself as subject. Through a critique of the historically determined forces that normalize the status of subject in contemporary society, the possibility opens up for a transformative

self-subjectification which resists the subjectifying and subjugating effects of present power relations.

‘Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.’¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 17.

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Research Proposal

Truth and Subjectivity

The post-truth debate and the critique of Michel Foucault

Summary

In this proposal I outline a programme of research that is aimed at developing a critique of the relation between subjectivity and truth in the context of the 'post-truth' debate. My research will show the misconceptions prevalent in our current understanding of truth and in the discussion about 'post-truth'. Specifically, I argue that the relation between subjectivity and truth is in need of reevaluation.

Firstly, I will outline the most influential positions in the post-truth debate and show how the relation between subjectivity and truth is conceived in these. Secondly, the work of Foucault, and its reception, is critically reconsidered and expanded in order to develop the analytic instrumentarium necessary to critique common misconceptions about the relation between subjectivity and truth. Ultimately, a critical discourse analysis is performed which shows the discrepancy between common conceptions about the relation between subjectivity and truth and how subjectivity actually functions in discursive practices today.

My critique will show that the challenge for truth today does not lie with preserving the authority of facts nor defending a radical freedom of opinion. The challenge lies in understanding the criteria by which a critical, yet subjective, relation to the truth is constituted that transcends the status of mere opinion.

Key words: Subjectivity - Truth - Post-Truth - Michel Foucault - Critique - Discourse analysis

Introduction

When Friedrich Nietzsche declared the death of God, he posed a problem whose importance is only becoming clear today. Nietzsche's statement was not aimed at defending or explaining secularization, instead it contains the warning that we do not fully witness and understand the effects of this immense historical shift. The madman (*der tolle Mensch*) who utters these warnings, addresses them not only to those in the church, but also, more crucially, to atheists in the marketplace who laugh and shrug it off (Nietzsche, 1887/2008).

Reading Nietzsche today feels like receiving an ominous prophecy. Today our society indeed looks like a secularized marketplace where people shrug off the fact that the grounds for universal truth and communal value are slowly eroding. Opinions and feelings have gained authority to the point that they have become instrumental in shaping our morality and our government. Are we today witnessing those unforeseen ramifications of God's death that Nietzsche's madman warned about? Is the secularization of our society coming into a new era where not only the belief in God, but also the belief in truth can be declared dead?

Or are we witnessing a new historic shift, the new dawn (*morgenröte*), that might come after the old truth is fully shrouded in the darkness of night?¹³⁵

In this proposal I outline a programme for research that explores the relation between subjectivity and truth in the context of what is known as the ‘post-truth era’. Post-truth refers to the decline of objective truth and the rising authority of opinions characteristic of society today. At the root of commonly held positions about the truth today lie some very old preconceptions about the relation between truth and subjectivity. Using the work of Michel Foucault, who has systematically analyzed how such preconceptions are historically determined as well as how they can change, I will give a critical analysis of the impasse truth finds itself in today and how this can be overcome by ‘revaluating’ the relation between subjectivity and truth.

Relevance

2016 was a peak year for ‘post-truth politics’. The role fake-news played in the Brexit and the Trump election led many to reconsider the state of truth today and what role it plays in the organization of our society (Montgomery, 2017; Sayer, 2017; Renner & Spencer, 2018; Hyvönen 2018, Spector, 2020). The popularity of this debate is reflected in the fact that post-truth became word of the year in the Oxford Dictionary after observing a 2000% spike in the usage of the term. The dictionary defines it as: ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’ (“Word of the Year”, 2016).

In the past five years, the debate on post-truth has expanded at an amazing rate. At least six full length books have been published that show, in some form or another, how to “fight” against post-truth phenomena (Wilber, 2017; Ball, 2017; D’Ancona, 2017; Davis, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Consentino, 2020). Although some have made up their mind about the post-truth situation today, in academic circles there is still much debate on its definition, causes and effects. However, this doesn’t stop newspapers all over the world from discussing the dangers of it. Earlier this year an article in the New York Times, responding to the storming of the capitol, stated that ‘post-truth is pre-fascism’ (Snyder, 2021). Similar sentiments were echoed in the Dutch newspaper NRC, which responded with an article about the effectiveness of the 30.000 lies Trump produced during his presidency (Blokker, 2021). However, post-truth is not only about politics. In our culture in general, the value of scientific truths is in decline and personal opinions are gaining authority. The recently grown

¹³⁵ That Nietzsche’s famous aphorism is indeed aimed at problems surrounding scientific truth and the possibility for a new way of thinking, a new way of relating to the truth, becomes clear when it is compared with aphorisms 343-344 (Nietzsche, 1887/2008, p. 199-200).

“anti-vaxxer” movement is just one example of this widespread distrust of science (Numerato et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2020). Many more examples of this sort can be offered. One thinks of “holocaust deniers”, “flat-earthers” or the myriad of conspiracy theories that are in fashion today (Harambam, 2020).

The diagnosis that we are living in, or entering a post-truth era shows that the traditional conceptualization of the truth is disappearing and that there is no viable alternative. If we want to find such an alternative for speaking the truth today, a critical assessment is needed of the ways we conceptualize and relate to the truth today. One can see a standard way of such conceptualization in the definition of post-truth given above. Post-truth as a cultural situation is understood by opposing ‘objective facts’ to subjective ‘emotions’ and ‘personal belief’. However, such a conceptualization of the truth, opposing objectivity and subjectivity, is very narrow and inaccurate.

Showing this misconception has been a central focus of Foucault’s critique of the truth. His work is aimed at showing that every postulation of the truth always corresponds to the way subjectivity is constituted in a given society. In other words, truth must not be conceived as opposed to subjectivity, instead subjectivity is truth’s necessary prerequisite. However, arguing that there exists a relation of dependence between subjectivity and truth does not mean that all we have are opinions and personal preferences. What Foucault’s work shows is that the challenge for truth today lies somewhere else than in preserving the authority of objective facts. Instead it lies in understanding how subjectivity and truth are related and, most crucially, understanding under what conditions a subjective relation to the truth transcends the status of mere opinion and personal preference.

Foucault, subjectivity and truth

Even though some scholars have addressed Foucault’s work in relation to the post-truth debate (e.g. Renner & Spencer, 2018; Harambam, 2020, Peters et al., 2020), two elements of his critique of truth remain undervalued and underutilized. The first is Foucault’s methodology for discourse analysis which he systematically perfected during his career (Gros, 2011; Lemke, 2011). The second is Foucault’s attempt to develop ‘ethical’ and ‘spiritual’ criteria essential for a critical, yet subjective, relation to the truth (Foucault, 1978/2007; 1984 ; 1984/1989). Foucault’s method allows him to express how a certain society, in a specific point in time, is organized through the complex interrelation of procedures of power, discourses on truth and the constitution of the subject. Furthermore, his work shows that the ‘epistemic’ structure of a society can change and what elements are involved in such a process. Foucault’s work thus provides the concepts and methods necessary for an analysis of the ‘epistemic shift’ we are witnessing today.

Secondly, Foucault's analyses provide us with preliminary ways to relate to the current post-truth problems. Foucault argues that his critique of truth is aimed at changing the way we perceive it, and allowing us to think differently (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 8-9). This is needed, because the way truth is organized today produces certain excesses of power in the form of a limitation and normalization of subjectivity and lived experience. Foucault diagnoses an increasing 'subjugation' of subjectivity. This subjugation is different from traditional forms like physical domination or economic oppression, because it functions 'productively' by shaping people's subjectivity, which he calls 'subjectification' (*assujettissement*). Resisting this kind of power, the struggle 'against the submission of subjectivity', is what Foucault sees as the biggest challenge for modern society (Foucault, 1982, p. 782).

As a preliminary hypothesis we might thus regard the post-truth situation as a struggle not so much against truth in general, but against a certain limitation of subjectivity that follows from the way truth is traditionally reproduced in discourse. Placed in this light, the debate on truth today concerns the 'revaluation' of it, specifically a revaluation of the relation between subjectivity and truth. The cultural changes we are witnessing today can be conceptualized as a resistance against an old regime that is grounded in a specific relation between subjectivity and truth. However, the way "traditional truth" is being contested is similarly in need of critique.

Argumentations that point out excesses of power inherent in specific discourses of truth are certainly prolific today. They form the backbone of popular liberal, emancipatory and decolonizing ideologies and the work of Foucault is often invoked as a legitimization. However, surprisingly such ideologies about the freedom of subjectivity often make use of very similar procedures of power as the ideologies they oppose. The freedom of subjectivity Foucault argued for was never aimed at defending dogmatic, political ideologies that censor speech or prescribe norms for the valuation of subjectivity. However, seeing how easily Foucault's work can be invoked as legitimization for such political, ideological procedures of power does warrant a critical distance to his work.

Specifically, Foucault's emphasis on a subversive way of life, the kind of life aimed at overthrowing and resisting all norms, should be treated with some skepticism. Today it is by no means clear what norms are dominant and what sort of resistance should be mounted against them. Can achieving the freedom of subjectivity in a post-truth era still be characterized as a resistance to all norms? In any case, Foucault's beloved image of the cynic who, like Nietzsche's madman, goes onto the marketplace and shatters the common values of society must clearly be distinguished from those storming the capitol or those censoring language. If the project of a freedom of subjectivity and the resistance to oppressive norms is

not clearly specified, Foucault's work can indeed easily serve as a catalyst for processes that are destructive of truth and shared values.

I argue, however, that such a 'relativistic' aim was never Foucault's intention. After diagnosing the 'submission of subjectivity' his research explored a vast range of different topics: spirituality, ethics, Greek culture and enlightenment to name a few. Despite the diversity of these topics, they all revolve around the problem of rethinking the relation between subjectivity and truth. In his reflection on 'courageously' speaking the truth (*parrhêsia*) and the ethics of the care for the self (*epimeleia heautou*) that permeated Greek culture, Foucault aims to develop different criteria by which one might value the relation between subjectivity and truth (Foucault, 2002/2011, p. 235; 2001/2005, p. 14, 17-18). The Greek focus on developing a 'beautiful' *ethos*, shows up again in Foucault's analysis of the function of philosophical critique and modern enlightenment. In all these explorations, the revaluation of the relation between subjectivity and truth revolves around constituting a critical and accountable relation to oneself and to the truth (Foucault, 1978/2007; 1984). In his late work, Foucault is searching to describe the 'ethical', 'spiritual' or 'aesthetic' work that must be done on the self in order to constitute a subjective relationship to the truth that is 'critical' and thus something other than a mere opinion.

Foucault's search for criteria by which we can value a subjective relation to the truth, contains valuable resources for our current post-truth era. However, his work is unfinished, not directly applicable to our current problems and, as mentioned, in need of some critique itself. For these obstacles the recent scholarship of Foucault's work proves to contain a wealth of information. There exists a great interest in expanding the research that Foucault started and finding creative ways to relate it to current problems (e.g. Butler, 2005; Allen, 2013; Koopman & Matza, 2013; Westerink, 2020). By making use of Foucault's work, as well as the ways it has recently been further developed, I will show how to overcome the impasse the debate on truth finds itself in. The challenge for truth today lies not in a radical, "anarchistic", freedom of subjectivity and opinions and neither in defending objective facts against an increasing amount of 'bullshit' (Frankfurt, 2005). The challenge lies in reconceptualizing the relation between subjectivity and truth and developing the criteria by which a subjective relation to the truth transcends the status of opinions.

General aim and research questions

The general aim of my research is to show the importance of reconceptualizing the relation between subjectivity and truth through a critical analysis of the post-truth problematic. In order to show this, firstly, an overview needs to be given of the common conceptualizations of the relation between subjectivity and truth in the post-truth debate. Secondly, an

investigation is needed that delineates the criteria necessary for a critical reevaluation of the relation between subjectivity and truth. Ultimately, these investigations will result in a critical analysis of a specific discourse, showing what kind of change in the relation between subjectivity and truth is possible and necessary. Schematically, three questions thus structure my research programme:

1: How is the relation between subjectivity and truth discussed and conceptualized in the post-truth debate?

2: How might Foucault's critical analyses be implemented in the development of criteria for a different relation between subjectivity and truth?

3: How to combine the insights from questions one and two into a critical analysis of subjectivity and truth in a specific discourse?

Structure and methodology

The three questions mentioned above form the structure of my research and correspond to a three tiered methodology that builds toward a critical analysis. The working hypothesis is that the central problematic of the post-truth debate revolves around misconceptions about the relation between subjectivity and truth and that this relation is thus in need of a reconceptualization or reevaluation. My research is structured in order to substantiate these hypothetical claims.

The questions posed above represent the three steps necessary to reach this aim. (1) Exploring the problem, that is, delineating the way the relation between subjectivity and truth is conceptualized in the current post-truth debate. (2) Developing the components for a critique of the post-truth debate, that is, delineating alternative criteria for valuing the relation between subjectivity and truth. (3) Performing a critical discourse analysis.

I will employ a three tiered methodology that is suited to the critical aim of my research programme. The first phase of my research employs a reading method aimed at orientation and representation. The orientation part of this phase consists of discussing the most important and influential contributions in the post-truth debate. From this orientation it becomes clear what is regarded by scholars as the greatest challenge for speaking the truth today and what the main points of contention are. The representation part of this phase entails showing what conceptualizations of the relation between subjectivity and truth are represented by the most influential arguments in the post-truth debate.

In the second phase, Foucault's novel approach to the relation between subjectivity and truth is critically reconsidered in order to delineate what merits and pitfalls his work has in developing an analytic to critique the positions outlined in phase one. In phase two I employ a comparative reading methodology, comparing the different contributions about post-truth challenges with Foucault's critical approach to subjectivity and truth. Besides this, a comparison between the different receptions of Foucault's work that specifically deal with the post-truth problematic is done. By comparing the challenges and representative positions in the contemporary post-truth debate with Foucaultian critique and its reception it becomes clear that Foucault's work cannot be treated as holding the solutions to the problems of truth today. Instead, the aim of this phase is to rework and expand upon Foucault's aim to develop the criteria for a critical, yet subjective, relation to truth. Foucault's work thus serves as the starting point for developing an analytical instrumentarium through which the conception of truth today can be critiqued.

As a conclusion to my research, I will produce a critical analysis of how telling the truth functions in a clearly defined discourse. The choice of discourse follows from the research in phase one, which has made clear what criteria make a discourse paradigmatic for the post-truth problematic. After demarcating an ideal-typical discourse I show how a critical 'revaluation' of this discourse can be performed through a critique of the relation between subjectivity and truth which structures the discourse. This entails a "Foucault-style" critical discourse analysis which is not aimed at producing a prescriptive norm, but is instead 'experimental and transformative' in relation to dominant forms of normative valuation (Lemke, 2011, p.74). More technically, this critique functions by exposing the interrelation between 'techniques of subjectification', 'procedures of power' and 'modes of veridiction' (Gros, 2011, p. 344) in a specific discourse. This analysis makes clear what relation between subjectivity and truth the discourse hinges on and how this differs from the ways it is usually conceived or 'ideologically' legitimized.

My critique is thus aimed at showing a discrepancy between common conceptions of the relation between subjectivity and truth and how subjectivity actually functions in discursive practices. Showing this discrepancy achieves two things: (1) it shows the importance of reevaluating our understanding of the relation between subjectivity and truth and (2) elucidating what forms of subjectivity organize discursive practices, or 'telling the truth', in our current post-truth society.

Time table

Period	Description of research	Output schedule
Year 1	<p>Answer question 1: How is the relation between subjectivity and truth discussed and conceptualized in the post-truth debate?</p> <p>Reading and reviewing the most important contributions in the post-truth debate.</p>	<p><i>Sep - Feb</i></p> <p>Publishable research article about the current state of the art of the post-truth debate and the common conceptualizations of the relation between subjectivity and truth.</p> <p><i>Mar - Aug</i></p> <p>Presentation of article at a relevant, preferably international, conference.</p> <p>Preliminary structural outline of dissertation.</p> <p>Draft of the first chapter of the dissertation.</p>
Year 2	<p>Answer question 2: How might Foucault's critical analyses be implemented in the development of criteria for a different relation between subjectivity and truth?</p> <p>Critically reworking Foucault's late work on subjectivity and truth in order to develop an analytic instrumentarium for critical discourse analysis.</p> <p>Reading and integrating the most important academic contributions that have a similar aim.</p>	<p><i>Sep - Feb</i></p> <p>Publishable article about Foucault's critical analysis and its reception in comparison with influential positions in the post-truth debate.</p> <p><i>Mar - Aug</i></p> <p>Presentation of article at a relevant, preferably international, conference and/or teaching a course on Foucault, critique and post-truth.</p> <p>Draft of the second chapter of the dissertation.</p>
Year 3	<p>Answer question 3: How to combine the insights from questions one and two into a critical analysis of subjectivity and truth in a specific discourse?</p> <p>Comparing different ways of justifying the methodology for critical discourse analysis.</p> <p>Exploring the possibilities for a discourse</p>	<p><i>Sep - Feb</i></p> <p>First stage of the critical discourse analysis: Outlining the methodology for critical discourse analysis and delineating the paradigmatic discourse.</p> <p>Teaching a course on the different currents of critical philosophy.</p> <p><i>Mar - Aug</i></p> <p>Second stage of the critical discourse analysis:</p>

	<p>paradigmatic for the post-truth problematic.</p> <p>Collecting and analyzing the material necessary for a critical discourse analysis</p>	<p>Elucidation of the relation between subjectivity and truth in a specific discourse.</p> <p>Draft of the final chapter of the dissertation</p>
Year 4	<p>Peer-review</p> <p>Completing the dissertation</p>	<p><i>Sep - Feb</i></p> <p>Presenting my findings at a relevant, preferably international, conference.</p> <p>Correspondence about the dissertation with experts on Foucault or the post-truth problematic.</p> <p>Draft of the introduction and conclusion of the dissertation</p> <p><i>Mar - Aug</i></p> <p>Implementing feedback of peers and completing the dissertation.</p>

Summary for non-specialists

The research outlined in this proposal is concerned with the state of truth today. Many people are worried about the way the truth is valued in our society because there is a noticeable distrust in scientifically proven ‘facts’ and an increase in the value of opinions, appeals to emotions and personal beliefs. In what is known as the ‘post-truth’ debate, some argue in order to defend objective facts, while others argue the importance of freedom of opinion, or a freedom of subjectivity.

In order to make sense of this debate I make use of the work of Michel Foucault, who has done extensive research into how the truth is produced, both historically and presently. He argues that the simple opposition between truth as objective and opinions as subjective is incorrect. Every truth, he shows, depends not only on rigorous scientific procedures, but also on the way our subjectivity is shaped. Something might be objectively true, if nobody believes it or incorporates it into his life, work or way of thinking, then it is no truth at all. Foucault thus considers subjectivity as a necessary aspect of what is considered to be the truth.

One can easily see how this position is interesting for the post-truth debate, which is specifically concerned with a rise of a subjective relation to the truth that seems to oppose what we conventionally understand to be true. Foucault is sometimes criticized for trying to destroy all forms of truth and rationality. However, what I aim to show is that Foucault is in fact looking for a way to think differently about the relation between subjectivity and truth.

What Foucault's work mostly shows is that we need to understand the criteria by which a subjective relation to the truth might become something other than a mere opinion.

My research is aimed at showing that the relation between subjectivity and truth is either neglected or misconceived in our current debate on truth. Furthermore, I will show that by critically reconsidering this relation, a reevaluation of the subjective relation to the truth can be developed that overcomes the problematic status that truth is in today. Objective facts are a very limited form of truth, and so are opinions. However, my research will show that these opposing ways to think about the truth are not our only options.

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