



FOUCAULT'S HERACLITISM AND THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: Deleuze states that Foucault would have created a new relationship between men and history, a relationship other than that established by the philosophers of history. In order to specify the steps Foucault took to accomplish this invention, I shall support, according to Deleuze, "Foucault's Heraclitism" as the basis for a genuine Foucaultian concept of history. After outlining the risks taken by Foucault's concept of history, I observe this concept at work through the three periods that perform his thought: Archeology, Genealogy and Aesthetics of Existence. The main characters that embody his concept of history through these periods are: a) the discontinuous profile of history; b) the denaturalization of would-be unhistorical objects; c) the historical dimension of body; d) the *eddies* of subjectivation in history. We shall focus our inspection on the turn made along Foucault's work when he takes into a new account the theme of subjectivity, mostly in the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. Thus, our attention turns to the subjectivity defined as a process, in order to investigate individual identity as the result of history.

KEYWORDS: Foucault – Heraclites – Time – History.

"There was always in Foucault a deeper Heraclitism than in Heidegger".
(DELEUZE, 1986, p. 120)

THE HERACLITEAN RIVER IN FOUCAULT'S WORKS: PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGE OF THE BECOMING

"In the same rivers we enter and do not enter, we are and are not" and "you cannot enter the same river twice"¹ are Heraclites' fragments continually recalled as a starting point to think about time and becoming. The river, like time, is what becomes, its coming-to-be never ends. The propositions presented in these fragments, which are

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¹ Diels, H.; Kranz, W. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, erster Band, sechste Auflage. Berlin: Weidmansche, 1951, p. 161 and 171, fragments n. 49a and 91

commonly repeated, are attractive, above all, because they successfully provide a concept for the becoming (theoretical expression). They also are successful because they convey, along with this concept, a certain sensation of being in time (esthetic expression). The river/time is the same, but when we are in its waters, nor the river neither those who bathe in it remain unchangeable. This concept, like any other else, affects us in some manner. The genius of Heraclites transformed such a conceptual sensation into a seminal and clear image.

Besides forging a beautiful concept, Heraclites presents maybe the most powerful ontological issue as he puts time in the center of an inquire about being: is there a being of the becoming? Being the becoming change and instability (“in the same rivers we enter and do not enter [...]”), any philosopher that might follow Heraclite’s lesson should perform an effective thought about this being of the becoming. It would be necessary that the concepts and categories of philosophy might fulfill the principle of the becoming (“you cannot enter the same river twice”).

In the history of philosophy, some powerful thinkers, having adopted the becoming as a principle in order to think over this ontological question found the challenge set off by Heraclites. They were challenged to create conceptual sensations and to risk images of time in order to solve the ontological question. Although Foucault did not consider Heraclites with regard to time, as did Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, it would be fruitful to inspect Foucault’s thesis on history, which shall help us to meet Foucault through the Heraclitean question. we argue for the hypothesis that Foucault – Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger – adapted the Heraclitean coming-to-be in order to launch their concepts of history. Michon supports that “Michel Foucault always refused to develop a definitive theory of time and preferred to produce local and non-explicit theories, adapted to each one of the objects that he was studying”². Nevertheless, I would add that applying these “local” theories of time is to exercise some Heraclitism, since Foucault develops Heraclites image of time and applies it to the historical becoming. So, Foucault creates a new Heraclitism with regard to some historical issues, so that the Heraclite’s idea of time is transformed by him into a meaningful and pragmatic concept of history.

² Michon, P. Strata, Blocks, Pieces, Spirals, Elastics and Verticals: Six figures of time in Michel Foucault. *Time & Society*, v. 11, n. 2-3: p. 163, 2002.

As a matter of fact the **Foucaultian Heraclitism** might be argued for, if we recall that Foucault's thesis on history is based on two main features: the *discontinuity* and *denaturalization* of history. Thus, Foucault's Heraclitism reveals its focus on the determination of time as history. My argument will become sound through the characteristics and examples related to the three periods in which the works of Foucault became acknowledged: Archeology, Genealogy and Aesthetics of Existence.

THE FOUCAULT'S HERICLITISM DEVELOPED THROUGH HIS WORKS ON HISTORY

a) Archeology and history

The Foucaultian Archeology is the first period in which Foucault's works have been divided and includes the books published through the 60's. What does an archeologist do? He digs out the ground in order to observe ages and periods through the layers piled up in an archeological site. The traces lead him back to the past as the depth of the site grows. The archeological work would be simpler if the layers had distinct limits, but the geological activity usually mixes them up, making it difficult to identify any period from any other else.

It was the way Foucault-archeologist tried to understand the establishment of knowledge; he applied an archeology of the knowledge. For instance, sciences arise from layers which identify a certain historical period. When Foucault studied the emergence of Biology he had meant the science dedicated to the organic life, which came out during the eighteenth century³. Before Biology there was the Natural History and it was not a science, though it also concerned life as its main object. According to its different layer it could not be ranked in the same historical period as Biology. What allowed Foucault-archeologist to detach a scientific knowledge from a non-scientific one and to divide both in two contiguous, but discontinuous, historical periods?

We should not assume that Natural History is Biology in its childhood, it means, a proto or would-be science eager to grow up into a real science in the first place. The Foucaultian Archeology despises the idea that history continuously develops from previous stages into some more complex shapes. He argued for the discontinuity of the history. In fact, Foucault's thought avoids any ontological hypothesis on history that makes it depends on a common origin, inside of which every happening would rest, expecting for its time to sprout. That is why the Foucaultian concept of history would be

³ Cf. Foucault, M. **L'archeologie du savoir**. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

closer to the chaotic river of Heraclites than to the organic image that understands time as growing systematically from a unique seed. But, how could a Foucaultian archeologist apply this lesson to the digging work?

Natural History belonged to a certain layer, while Biology belonged to another one. They are as much as traces that two different civilizations left on the same ground. According to Foucault's method, Natural History did not turn into Biology, since every period of knowledge is discontinuous with regard to any other else. The archeologist tries to disclose these points of discontinuity between different knowledge. But how could he succeed in the task of finding the limits between them?

The limits between the layer of one period and the other Foucault called *episteme*. Through his archeological works Foucault studied specially three *epistemes*: the Renaissance (from the XIV century to the XVI), the Classical Episteme (from the XVII century to the end of the XVIII) and Modern Episteme (from the end of the XVIII century to the beginning of the XX century). Going back to the previous example, we are then able to rank Natural History in the Classical Episteme, while Biology lies in the Modern one. They are archeologically distinct, though relatively close chronologically. And that makes the most important difference between time and history, it means, time is the continuous becoming that passes into history by *becoming* discontinuous; the history is time full of breaches. According to the current example, Natural history and Biology are apart because their corresponding *episteme* arrange differently their objects, concepts and methods.⁴

One of the most important and acknowledged books of the Foucaultian Archeology is **History of Madness** (1961). The title itself points out the philosophical problem about history that bounds Foucault throughout his works. He was a philosopher that wrote books with historical features, because his philosophy demanded from history a certain role. In return, a history book like this one is philosophical since it reveals that the perception we have about madness alters with history. Madness, then, acquired some historical dignity with Foucault's work, for historians started to look at it not as a natural object, as long as the Foucaultian perspective had invited us to denaturalize some objects which were supposed not to be touched by history.

⁴ Foucault, M. *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

The **History of Madness** contents are organized according to the epistemic periods assigned above. The main thesis on this book is that the knowledge about madness, in each episteme, arranges the experience of madness in certain discursive regimens, which were historically exemplified and analyzed by Foucault. There are two derived paths from this main thesis. The first one shows that there should have been two basic experiences in the history of madness: the tragic and the rationalist perception on madness. The former is the experience of the cohabitation of reason with regard to disorder and chaos; while the latter is the experience of keeping madness at a distance by the powers of reason. While the tragic experience *felt* madness as part of the ordinary world; the rationalist experience tried to control madness. Foucault supported the idea that the tragic perception had replaced gradually the rationalist one from the Renaissance to the Modern Episteme.⁵

The second derived path from the main thesis Foucault stated in his book is that the rationalist discourse about madness was not a science that would have developed from its childish form into a *grown-up* knowledge, which would be able to discover madness as an organic disease. In fact, psychiatry was a knowledge that had arisen from the Modern Episteme. According to Foucault, then, we should not expect at all that Psychiatry was the fulfillment of the rationalist experience and that, ever since, the tragic experience of madness would have been banned from history. On the contrary, the stronger the rationalist experience became with the development of Psychiatry the more a new tragic experience of madness comes up through the vanguard art, through mad people demonstrations inside the hospitals and through the resistance that they raise against their imprisonment.

Throughout **History of Madness**, Foucault tried to denaturalize madness and, thus, our perceptions about mad people, assuming that they have a historical depth. We all expect that madness has always been considered like a sickness or a disease and that mad people should be dangerous and consequently confined to hospitals. We expected that madness should have been ever taken as a psychological disorder, so that mad people would have been banned from the common living with normal people. The modern perception about madness tends to widen these feelings as everlasting attitudes towards mad people. Nevertheless, when reading Foucault's book, we are taken by surprise, for

⁵ Foucault, M. **Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique**. Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 30-42.

he went back in history to the declining Middle Ages and searched for the places reserved for proscription. Foucault only found lepers' cities built outside the walls of the European medieval cities, so that there was nothing similar concerning madness. In fact, mad people were not confined at any special place. So, Foucault's findings concerning the history of madness outrages our common sense: at the end of Middle Ages, mad people did not exist or they weren't confined as it might be expected.

According to our main goal in this paper, it means, arguing Foucault's Heraclitism, it would be enough to halt at this point of Archeology. The way Foucault analyzed madness shows that the river of time also flows for this kind of objects apparently outside of history. But we must go on and prove that his Heraclitean inquiry on history continues in his works of the 70's. Definitely, **The History of Madness** makes it evident that knowledge and perceptions might shift thoroughly along the Epistemes, so as to put as odd what is ordinary to us, in our times.

Though, interwoven through the history of madness elapses a more continuous history related to the mechanisms whose function was to control human body. As to this history of the controls over human body, Foucault started another phase in his 70's works. When this new theme comes up to the scene, a new period began in the route of Foucault, so he was able to add to his Archeology a new historical method through which we shall meet the widening of the Heraclitean task related to the *discontinuity* and *denaturalization* of time in history.

b) Genealogy and history

From this period on, Foucault started to argue, in addition to his Archeology, *how* the knowledge is formed, instead of analyzing its discursive and epistemic composition. What makes any knowledge historically peculiar and discontinuous? At last, what makes the knowledge change along the history?

From the 60 to the 70's, Genealogy's starting questions emphasize a subject which was not directly approached through the Archeology works. That is, *power*. From the genealogical point of view, power is productive with regard to discourse; it means that it gives rise to knowledge. All the knowledge forms hold some power relation; the former can not exist without the latter. Knowledge-power is close together as a binomial function; this is maybe the most known statement about Foucault's Genealogy.

Thereby, we might think that applying the genealogical method would be simple. The power would develop itself, for instance, in the doctor's right to put the madman in a hospital, in the strength of the State that punishes the citizen, in the prerogative of the boss that dismisses the worker, etc. But, it is not so plain as these examples seems to be. Though power in the sense Foucault assigned to it might acquire these massive forms, such as the State, the strength, the repression, the School, etc., the Genealogy does not concern this kind of power. As a matter of fact, the practices of power develop and establish themselves as microphysical relations, in a strategic or genetic position with regard to knowledge. As to this feature of the Genealogical method, we shall inspect a little deeper what Foucault means by power in order to emphasize his alleged heraclitism.

The Foucaultian concept of power is far from both the common-sense and its regular versions in the history of philosophy. Foucault steadily warned that we must do away with the juridical concept of power, by which it is conceived as the force by which either someone or an institution causes an object to bend under his/its will or determination. According to Foucault, power is not repressive at the start, it accomplishes the very reality to which it applies to, instead; it is a microphysical relation.⁶

The power relation assigns to any happening its historical singularity, breaking all the identitarian games that tries to forge any deceitful continuity in history. Besides, the idea of the becoming through history related to the Foucaultian concept of history supports the denaturalization of those objects supposed to fall outside the range of history, such as feelings, love, consciousness, etc. We have the habit of thinking that things are in their very origin untouched by history and thus remain in a state of perfection, but the Genealogy shows that the origin is dissension and disparate. At the bottom of history there is no lost identity which was cheated or degenerated through time time.

Power produces knowledge, it creates reality of the objects upon which it acts, instead of doing like a censor who states what is to be forbidden or allowed. Foucault

⁶ Cf. Foucault, M. **L'herméneutique du sujet**, cours au Collège de France (1981-1982), édition établie sous la direction de François Ewald et Alessandro Fontana, par Frédéric Gross. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001.

argued this productive feature of power in his **Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison** (1971/1999a). The genealogical method, then, has as its main object the happenings, it means, the new reality continuously produced by the power relations. In fact, Foucault's hypothesis is that, during the XVII and XVIII centuries the productivity of power was released to such an extent that it became a major happening in history. Some apparatus were assembled in order to allow the unbroken and individualized circulation of the power effects over the whole society. The main argument developed in this book is that the individuals' body had become the object whose strength might be molded according to several functions within the machinery of power. So, Foucault's Heraclitism appears in his genealogical research as the element that brings history to dissolve even the most unsuspecting subjects in terms of relations. In fact, Foucault's Heraclitism discloses the historical dimension of body.

According to Foucault, the prison, the central subject in **Discipline and Punish**, is a "figure of punishment" that emerged at the end of the XVIII century. Aiming at tracing its emergence, he stepped backward to the XVI century, in order to observe different figures of punishment. Everywhere, their historical differences were due to the productivity and to the machinery of power. Men had been ever punished along history before the XVIII century, but what changed was the function by which they were punished in the prisons built in the XVIII century.

The first figure of punishment taken into account in this book is "torture", as the power apparatus of Absolutism, while the second is the humanitarian reform in the Classical Age. The third one is Foucault's analysis of the normalizing punishment and vigilance, which embodied the "disciplinary power". Foucault claimed that the prison machinery of power had accomplished a complete change in the knowledge which concerns the judging and the confining of people in view of their restoration. Besides, Foucault told us that the very architecture strongly testifies these historical shifts in the power relations. So, the Genealogical method tries to distinguish the different "technologies of power" or their multicolored productivity, according to the diverse historical periods. The object of any technology of power is body. Nevertheless, the functions these techniques extract from it accordingly alter with history, as far as the power relations produce different kinds of knowledge.

Every society requires some control over human body, but this control varies historically. In a disciplinary society, which are the same that created the modern

prisons, the body became an object of analysis, it was divided so that the discipline might possibly transform it in a “useful body”.⁷ Human beings are envisaged as molding objects through some techniques applied to the body. Foucault showed how military exercises, the coordination of the soldiers’ movements, seek to erase on them the subjective dimension, so that they could be interconnected by formal functions. The discipline had to do chiefly with the architecture – the disciplinary space – where the bodies are continuously molded. And, as the individual went from a certain disciplinary space to any other else, the function previously carried out over the body should enact promptly the function applied inside the new space he might step in.

So, the disciplinary society was organized according to many contiguous spaces, through which functions, though different in regard to their objectives, are interconnected as long as they obey to the same power diagram or organization. Thereby, the ideal of the disciplinary society was to improve to the greatest extent the function improvement in each space, so that the various disciplinary functions might gather together forging a continuous chain. This society must also replicate the disciplinary spaces, in order to follow the individuals’ itinerancy without breaking the continuous work of power.

In a certain sense, we are allowed to state that discipline controls bodies in order to produce individuals. Indeed, the concrete expression to the productivity of disciplinary power is that it creates individuality through the modeling of bodies inside the disciplinary spaces. As the function is learning, the material are the students; while it is punishment, then prisoners are the material, and so on. The disciplinary specific procedure is the exam. It is based on the rule that the individuals could be supervised through their constant visibility within the disciplinary spaces, so that the disciplinary techniques accomplishes the formal equality among individuals. That is why Foucault calls Panoptic the architectural figure of power, for it is the “diagram of a power mechanism” and sums up its “general model”, being a “way of defining the meeting between power relations and people’s everyday life”, which is freed from “any political use” since it became a real “figure of the political technology”⁸.

⁷ Foucault, M. **Em defesa da Sociedade** – Curso no Collège de France (1975-1976). São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999b, p. 287.

⁸ Foucault, M. FOUCAULT, M. **Vigiar e Punir**: a história da violência nas prisões. 19 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1971/1999a, p. 181.

The effects of this diagram are diverse: correcting prisoners, healing sick people, teaching pupils, caring for mad people, supervising workmen, etc. The Panopticon is effective as it applies any task or behavior to a small multiplicity of individuals and while their bodies are confined to closed spaces. But, the disciplinary functions do not apply to a multitude wandering through open spaces and that is why the development of the alleged Foucault's Heraclitism discloses another character of the Foucaultian concept of history.

c) Aesthetics of Existence and history

When Foucault presented the course **The Hermeneutics of the Subject**⁹ in 1981 and 1982, whose subject turned into the two final volumes of a **History of Sexuality**¹⁰, a change became evident in his route. When enquiring the practices through which individuals become subjects within moral systems was added to the previous genealogical method on knowledge and power, Foucault launched the Aesthetic of Existence. As asserted Deleuze¹¹, such shift was not only thematic, for it also involved an investigation which opened a new ontological domain in the Foucaultian thought. In fact, this new domain required different chronological marks to Foucault's historical research, that is, instead of the secular investigation range - two or three centuries - which had limited the *epistemes* of knowledge or the mechanisms of power in his earlier books, he then went back to the Ancient Greece. Foucault was struck by the long run processes which perform our subjectivity, so that these ones have a longer history than those involved in the discursive formations of modern episteme and in the panoptical mechanism of disciplinary society. But what is subjectivity, if it might be involved in history?

According to Foucault, any subjectivity implies a process of subjectivation. Then, added Deleuze¹², subjectivity is a "massive effect" which comes out from singular processes. Knowledge and powers of all ages seek to capture the singular

⁹ Foucault, M. **L'herméneutique du sujet, cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)**, édition établie sous la direction de François Ewald et Alessandro Fontana, par Frédéric Gross. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001.

¹⁰ Foucault, M. **Histoire de la sexualité II (le souci de soi)**. Paris: Gallimard, 1984a.

Foucault, M. **Histoire de la sexualité III (l'usage des plaisirs)**. Paris: Gallimard, 1984b.

¹¹ Deleuze G. **Foucault**. Paris: Minuit, 1986, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

processes of subjectivation, but these ones tend to escape from them, performing a history of resistance related to life, because “the most intense point of lives, where they concentrate their energy, remains exactly where they are most confronted by power, they fight it, they try to use their forces in order to escape from its traps”¹³. Foucault had discovered these points of resistance to the power network in the book “The Will to Know”¹⁴, but he needed to argue after that on how these diffuse resistances were created, on what was their source¹⁵

To be precise, this enquire could be summed up in a deductive proposition, as follows: if subjectivities offer resistance to powers-knowledge traps, as far as they are involved in the processes of subjectivation which go beyond the subjective form, then the subject have some flexibility or plasticity that develops a historical or transformational dimension. Such issue impelled Foucault through the two following volumes of **The History of Sexuality** and puts forward the problem of history in a special and original way.

So, the problem of subjectivity in Foucault might be faithfully endorsed by the following principles: a) all subjectivity is a form, but this form is simultaneously undone by the processes of subjectivation; and b) while the form-subject is under knowledge and power range, the subjectivation is an excess by which the subjectivity maintains a resistance strength or a line of flight instead of being captive under some form. These two principles allow us to turn back to the problem about the alleged Heraclitism concerning a Foucaultian concept of history. In fact, I am able from this point on to determine his idea of history, whose most general features – specially, discontinuity and denaturalization of history – were extracted from the three periods in Foucault’s works.

Our question now is: how does Foucault’s concept of history manage Heraclite’s river hydrodynamics?

THE BACKWATERS OF HISTORY AS SUBJECTIVATION

¹³ Foucault, M. *La vie des hommes infâmes. Dits et écrits*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994a, p. 241, vol. 3.

¹⁴ Foucault, M. *Histoire de la sexualité I* (la volonté de savoir). Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1215-1216.

According to what I have underlined through the lines above, we might go ahead with the hypothesis that the Foucaultian concept of history is the backbone of subjectivity. Deleuze helps us to explain that my hypothesis is fruitful, when he asserted that “Foucault is a philosopher who created a relationship to history completely different from that created by the philosophers of history”¹⁶. Foucault, by his turn, pointed out in what sense he understood the new relation to history, since throughout his works he had emphasized a fluid way of thinking. We have the habit of thinking either from a steady starting point or in search for a rock-hard port, for “in the western imagination, the reason belonged for a long time to the firm earth. Island or continent, it avoids the water with solid obstinacy: reason only consents to the western imagination its sand”¹⁷.

Time is like a river, said Heraclites: “in the same rivers we enter and do not enter, we are and are not”, “you cannot enter the same river twice”¹⁸. The paradox of time is perfect within the river of Heraclites: the river is the same, but it does not stop running, so that neither is the river nor are the people who bathe in it the same. Foucault is a philosopher who advanced the study of the hydrodynamics of Heraclites’ river. He tried to explain what happens in the relation between history and human subjectivity. By the way, we remember with Deleuze that “there was always in Foucault a deeper Heraclitism than in Heidegger”.¹⁹

In order to put the Foucaultian Heraclitism in the terms of the Foucault’s concept of history, I would say that the processes of subjectivation are with respect to time as much as backwaters are with regard to the running of a river of Heraclites. These calm backwaters are like eddies that whirl along the river, so that these backwaters have their own stream as they run like small rivers inside the wider river, mostly they usually reverse the direction of the main stream. They merge into small turbulences which describe a certain trajectory within the river, approaching its margins to dissipate in silence. We are also allowed to say that these calm waters are excesses of the river - eddies formed as a function of the main current. But they are recesses of the

¹⁶ Deleuze, G. **Pourparlers**. Paris: Minuit, 1990, p. 130.

¹⁷ Foucault, M. *L'eau et la folie*. **Dits et écrits**, Paris: Gallimard, 1994b, p. 268, vol. 2.

¹⁸ Diels, H. & Kranz, W. **Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker**, erster Band, sechste Auflag. Berlin: Weidmansche, 1951, p. 161 and 171, fragments n. 49a and 91

¹⁹ Deleuze G. **Foucault**. Paris: Minuit, 1986, p. 120.

river all the same, because their warms whirlpools relatively protects from the faster stream. The backwaters of subjectivation turn like doors through which new waters enter in or are lost for the larger river. Then, Foucault determined the relation between time and history.

The idea of backwaters of a river to describe the processes of subjectivation evokes the famous passage of Heraclites about time, according to which a man cannot enter the same river twice. Now, a process of subjectivation is almost its contrary, since, in order to apply the Heraclitean image of time to support a Foucaultian concept of history, we might mend Heraclites' maxim as follows: a river never passes through the same man twice. Nevertheless, a subjectivation is not exactly the opposite of the Heraclitean image, because it is a small river within a larger one, but it is diverse, for it is also a recess, a place where the waters come to rest. We must avoid replacing the restless river for an endless process of subjectivation. The greater river (time) has the strength to erode, but the subjectivity eddies (history) are able to hold and hush the waters, it means, they are a rest in the middle of the movement. Subjectivation is open to the river, but equally offers protection against the corrosive streams. History is the only place where a subject, an "I", an identity could develop.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: TAKING INTO ACCOUNT HERACLITEAN-FOUCAULTIAN POINT OF VIEW AS TO THE CONTEMPORARY SUBJECTIVITIES

Subjectivity is an expression of what in us, in our subjectivity, involves a relation with history. In view of this compromise, we could define an appropriate formula for the Foucault's concept of history. Stating that subjectivity is articulated with history is, without a doubt, a way of leaving behind the idea that subjectivity is fixed, just like the Cartesian ego or the idea of a subjectivity connected to a timeless unconscious. Foucault emptied the notion of subjectivity of its old contents and filled it with innovative ones. The modes of subjectivation vary in history because their relation with time never remains the same.

But, in order to verify the Foucaultian concept of history, one last question could be thrown to the heart of our times: if subjectivation holds relation with history, how *fast* is the hydrodynamics of the river for contemporary subjectivities?

In an article about Nietzsche, Orlandi²⁰ demonstrated that the processes of subjectivation abandon the old disciplinary reference to identity which characterized the individuals under the disciplinary functions. If one strives to conquer an identity, he/she has no longer to fight for it. Otherwise, if one has any doubt about his/her true identity, one must not suppose it is hidden and might be encountered with some digging, neither are people impelled to begin a suffering pursuit for it. Subject nowadays undoes itself in a series of processes that multiply the subjectivities that are more or less constructible. A sort of “neo narcissism” arises, notes Orlandi, in which the dangerous contemplation of self - which Narcissus practiced in the water mirrors - is replaced by a series of expositions whose control appears to escape the self owner. The power to alter the self lies outside the subject, which can only be accessed through an “apparatus” – a new power mechanism? – standing in between the subject and history. The subject no longer suffers from a loss of identity; it even intensifies losses and gains in order to speed up its expositions. In short, a kind of narcissism of difference arises, whereby the subjectivity finds itself captured by a mechanism that seems to have assaulted the heart of the subjectivation processes.

In fact, subjectivity in its relation to history is increasingly a synonym for differentiation, but it seems that we live in such a time in which the process of subjectivation has been captured by a new apparatus, diverse from that effective in the disciplinary society. That’s why these Foucaultian questions remain pregnant: What have we been doing of ourselves? And could anyone resist the new device in the river of time? How do our subjectivities feel within the eddies of time?

These questions testify the systematic coherence of the work of Foucault, considering that the theme of subjectivity renews and replaces the continuous issue of the relation with history throughout his works. We do not find history anywhere, but in the concrete acts of subjects according to different processes of subjectivation. This coherence also assures that a concept of history remains as a brute gem in his writings. I have tried to provide some clues to show that the so-called Foucault’s Heraclitism is one of the ways to dig out access to it. Precisely, I have put in evidence four constituents that sum up Foucault’s concept of history: a) the discontinuous profile of history; b) the

²⁰ Orlandi, L. B. L. **Marginating the delezian reading on Nietzsche’s tragic**. Text not published, kindly offered by the author, 2001.

denaturalization of would-be unhistorical objects; c) the historical dimension of body;
d) and the eddies of subjectivation in history.



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