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Truth, Subjectivity, and the Aesthetic Experience: A Study of Michel Foucault's History of Madness

Clay Graham

Western Kentucky University, Clayton.Graham947@topper.wku.edu

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TRUTH, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: A STUDY OF MICHEL
FOUCAULT'S *HISTORY OF MADNESS*

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Clay Graham

Western Kentucky University
2013

CE/T Committee:

Professor Adrian Switzer, Advisory

Professor Michael J. Seidler

Professor Wolfgang Brauner

Approved by

Advisor

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

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ABSTRACT

One of the fundamental issues in 20th century philosophy is of the nature of individual subjective experience. I seek to show how this “nature” is revealed *and* hidden by a historical process outlined in *History of Madness* by Michel Foucault. Foucault’s philosophical and anthropological engagement with the experience of madness in The Modern Age functions as a useful tool towards this end. The psychologisation and medicalization of madness in the 19th century allowed for an endless discourse on madness. This in turn permitted the language of the mad to burst open from its silence, historically present since the Great Confinement. This language of madness expressed itself poetically and artistically, thus revealing the paradoxical essence of the nature of human subjectivity as well as the particularity of its expression in the Modern Period. This particularity is elucidated from a genealogical account of the births of subjectivity and objectivity. I proceed to use this genealogy in conjunction with the language of madness to posit a prescriptive theory for aesthetic engagement. The essay seeks to show how the aesthetic experience can aid in the affirmation of the individual’s modern subjective reality. Thusly, the “goal” of the essay is to reveal affirmation, i.e., *amor fati*, the love of fate.

Keywords: Foucault, subjectivity, madness, aesthetics, genealogy, Nietzsche, Bataille

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VITA

October 16 th , 1990.....	Born—Elizabethtown, Kentucky
2009.....	Elizabethtown High Elizabethtown, Kentucky
2009 - 2013.....	Award of Excellence
2011.....	Larry D. Mayhew Book Scholarship
2012.....	Excellence in Philosophy Scholarship
2013.....	Presentation at WKU Student Research Conf.
2012-2013.....	Peer Tutor/PASS Leader
2013.....	Graduated Summa Cum Laude, WKU Honor's College

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Philosophy

Minor Field: Economics

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INTRODUCTION

Over the brief course of my career as an undergraduate I've come to learn a great deal about myself, and effectively create myself, through my study of philosophy. When I reflect upon the classes I've chosen to take, the papers I have written, and the books I bother to annotate, I'm able to glimpse a loose association of themes to which I am consistently drawn. This reflection has lent me the ability to view the shadows of my own will, and thusly I have been able to consciously apply this will to particular projects, however so slightly. Over the past three years I've noticed my rising interest in the affective and subjective growth of the individual and, to a lesser extent, the community. I am interested in how one might be able to experience one's life, how that experience is shaped by the experience of others, and what one is capable of being within the context one is granted. How is it that one can lead a more meaningful human life, not in the sense of productivity, moral rectitude, or social utility but simply in one's fundamental sensational/affective/subjective experience? It is not so much a question of living "the good life" so much as it is a question of "feeling alive." Though I certainly understand the importance of questions on morality, such questions are tangential to my primary concern: how one experiences one's life, what it might mean *to be what one is*, and how one might be able to robustly and vigorously embrace/affirm life.

My introduction to the philosophy of Michel Foucault was in the spring of 2011. In his work, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, I read of a hidden guilt within each person's

body, that is, an internalized repression of one's sexual expression, thusly limiting a "fulfilled" sexual experience. I began to wonder how such limitations on a subject's lived experiences could be manifested in ways other than sexuality. It was not shocking to find that Foucault, a man of great erudition and scholarship, had written on many manifestations of this issue. Combined with my ceaseless interest in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, this sparked my continual interest to write about the experiential, affective life, and a quest to find that which is "life-affirming." I believe that Foucault, in his historical description/interpretation of that which is repressive and "life-denying," provides the negative which may let me glimpse, however so slightly, the positive, i.e., the life-affirming. In other words, through engagement with Foucault's text, I believed I would be able to extract answers, however so inadequate, to help tackle the questions outlined above.

Since I have a particular fascination with the limits of subjective experience, the madmen trapped at the edge of society in Foucault's earliest masterwork, *History of Madness*, seemed like a wonderful place to begin. *History of Madness* is an expansive book loaded with a wealth of different philosophical ideas and themes. The majority of the present essay functions as an exegesis of *History of Madness*. However, in an attempt to limit my focus, I concern myself largely with questions of human subjectivity as they arise in the later chapters. I've sought to use this book, and Foucault's early philosophy, as well as the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and George Bataille, to make a case for a particular understanding of modern subjectivity, how that compares to human subjectivity generally, and what the possible implications of these findings might be.

Certainly, more general questions of human nature have concerned philosophers for centuries. Precisely what is “human nature?” What does it mean to be a human being? I have found these to be very difficult questions to which no one has yet provided any adequate responses. While general, universal answers might be impossible, and perhaps even tyrannical, it should not be assumed that there are not particular circumstances in which part of “the truth” is exposed. Foucault believed, and I think rightly so, that through a close study of madness, particularly its development in The Classical Age and through the 19th century, one could give some answers to questions of subjectivity, at least as they pertain to the modern human being.

I believe that much of this can be answered by “the objectification of liberty.” Foucault uses this phrase to refer to the concept of liberty as it has been perceived from The Classical Age onward. To “objectify” means to make an object, to make definite, to make understandable and knowable. On such a definition “the objectification of liberty” seems like a strange and paradoxical concept. Liberty, meaning the allowance of freedom, appears as something essentially nonessential. In other words, there is not a “somethingness” to liberty. How might one then decide what freedom is? Though it would seem impossible, this did not stop the “objectification” of the concept in The Classical Age. With the advancement of liberalism in The Enlightenment, liberty began to be perceived as having particular moral qualities.

A walk down this line of reasoning leads us to Foucault’s *History of Madness*. According to Foucault, the mad in the societies of 17th and 18th century Europe were considered responsible for exercising their liberty to its extreme. There were no rules to madness; it functioned according to its own whims. In being so completely indulgent and

unreasonable, madness had exercised its liberty to the point at which “rational” decisions were no longer made, though the truth of this analysis will be considered in the coming chapters. Thusly, in being so free, the mad were determined/enslaved by basic, irrational drives. In fact, during the Classical Age the mad were literally in chains, due to The Great Confinement, in which the mad, the criminals, and the beggars were all thrown into confinement cells together, silenced to the outside world. Madness, in its literal and figurative chains, showed the bounds of liberty, and thusly revealed the chains of “normalized/rational” liberty. If society put restrictions and rules on freedom, then this is not radical/true freedom, but rather limited freedom. Limited freedom seems contrary to the “nature” of freedom, as freedom is itself limitless, i.e., *free*. To objectify liberty is to define the infinite/indefinable, an impossible task that can do no more than alienate liberty from itself. One might then conclude that in order to live in civil society we must limit our own freedom and therefore overcome the truth of our nature.

But what exactly is the truth of our nature? As Foucault continues his narration of the history of madness, society progresses into the 19th century and the mad were freed from the literal chains of The Great Confinement and put into asylums; here they were to receive more specific care and specialized treatment. Physicians and psychologists had more control over the happenings of the mad and were able to advance the science on mental illness. Foucault hints that this is because the mad were no longer *silenced*, though this is only in a literal sense of the word. Ideas regarding silence, voice, and language will be expounded upon in later chapters.

Perhaps the most astounding discovery/creation of Foucault’s history is that the madness of the mad reflected nothing other than the madness in us all. The

psychologisation and medicalization of madness in the 19th century allowed for an endless discourse on madness. Thusly, the mad were once more given the chance to tell their story, and in doing so they revealed an underlying subjectivity hidden, for lack of a better word, in “human nature.” This in turn permitted the language of the mad to burst open from its silence, historically present since The Great Confinement. This language of madness expressed itself poetically and artistically in innumerable forms with endless chatter. Foucault concludes that there is a deep-seated unreason that underlies all reason. The non-objectivity and the subjectivity at root in the human being, thusly reveal the paradoxical essence of human subjectivity as well as the particularity of its expression in The Modern Period.

As this thesis progresses I provide a brief overview of different genealogies as they pertain to subjective experience, namely George Bataille’s *The Cradle of Humanity*, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, and, as previously stated, Foucault’s *History of Madness*. Before diving into the specifics of the genealogy, it is important to give a very general definition of the way in which the terms “subjectivity” and “objectivity” are used in this account. Subjectivity, specifically as it applies to subjective experience, is encountered in that which cannot be fully comprehended, scientified, or universalized. Subjective experience varies amongst particular individuals at particular times. Objectivity, on the other hand, as one might expect, expresses that which is definable, definite, scientific, and understandable. If something is objective, then there can exist definite knowledge of it, i.e., it has a truth. While the only truth to subjectivity is that there isn’t one, anything objective can be comprehended. Consequently, for a human being to be experienced as object is for the human being to have a truth. That truth, as

Foucault puts it, is “the truth of man.” The human being, necessarily subjective, also becomes objective, and thusly an object.

In Bataille’s writings on prehistoric people it is the creation of art that originally lent itself to, and saw itself in, the formation of the subject. In the Greek Tragedy, Nietzsche sees a robust form of art, one allowing a vigorous, drunken, aesthetic, subjective experience. However, as we will see in chapter two, this tragedy will be eclipsed. For Foucault, it is the language of madness, whether that is in the rich painting of Van Gogh, the bombastic writings of Nietzsche, or the plays of Artaud, which exposes the subjectivity of the mad to the “objective” gaze. The mad became the locus of objectification and scientific discourse. What the language of the mad revealed to the scientific, theoretical person is the limits of reason and the bounds of truth.

Objectification and the extreme alienation of a particular class of people (the mad) through this objectification, revealed the subjectivity of the human being, exposed and unhinged. Objective gaze thus exposes the anti-natural nature (the chaos) of the human being, thereby undermining its own implicit reason for existence. The search for the truth of humanity revealed to itself only its inanity. Paradoxically, the objectification of the human being fulfilled its own teleology in the revelation that there is no telos. In other words, objectively, the human being is subjective.

This essay concludes with a study of the relationship between the aesthetic experience and individual subjectivity. Each of these philosophical genealogies concludes with some form of embracement of *art*. I use this to posit art as the human act of subjective, unconscious creation which might be granted prescriptive value in the search for, and creation of, one’s “self.” Art, in its many forms and functions, has the power to

robustly express subjective experience. If humanity wishes to learn more about itself, then it must engage itself with art; specifically, its creation, its critique, and its autonomy. Art with objective purpose could mask the subjectivity that art reveals, thereby hiding humanity even further from itself. *The suggestion, then, is for us to create, ceaselessly engage ourselves with that which we create, and refuse the finality of any objective answer to a human act of artistic creation.* My hope is that this thesis will further the possibility of our insight into artistic creation and as a result allow for a reduction in self-alienation, however so slight. If this thesis achieves nothing more than the continuation of this endless discourse, then I will consider it a success. The true tragedy ensues when the tragedy is eclipsed, and we are once more cast into the shadows.

CHAPTER 1

MADNESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO TRUTH: A STUDY OF FOUCAULT'S "THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CIRCLE"

In one of his earliest and most influential works, *History of Madness*, Michel Foucault narrates a story about the historical circumstances from which arose *the truth of man*; that is, Foucault, through a detailed discussion of the history of madness in the West (specifically between its repression in The Classical Age and its 19th century psychologisation), attempts to describe what it might mean to be a human being in a modern context. As it is exposed through madness and the accompanying science surrounding madness in the 19th century, the individual human condition is evinced as one of constant self-estrangement. In the movement from the dualism of the classical era to "the truth of madness" in the 19th century, arises the disconcerting and alienating truth of the human condition. This truth makes itself visible for the first time, and yet this visibility shows something untapped endlessly looming beneath it, i.e., something invisible. *It is a paradoxical truth that shows the impossibility of the truth.*

Such a paradox may lead to an endless influx of questions. For starters, can one ever be acquainted with one's own truth, and if so, in what sense? Does this "truth of the impossibility of the truth" require a degree of self-estrangement within the experience of the modern individual? If so, in what sense is an individual *that individual*, and in what sense is an individual concurrently something other than him/herself? Are we what we are not? And what sense can possibly be made of such a statement? If one is, in some

sense, something beyond/beneath one's "self," then what does it mean to assert one's identity, to assert oneself as having particular characteristics? What might be missed by such an assertion?

In this essay it is my goal to elucidate some clues, answers, and new questions that may arise from several of the former questions and perhaps some that have been overlooked. This undertaking uses a study of Foucault's "Anthropological Circle," as its focus, a brilliant essay on the "nature" of reason and unreason. I will start only with the general Foucaultian hypothesis that *we are what we are not* and that this is only a *seemingly* paradoxical statement, the paradox arising from a play on language or a particular, nonsensical interpretation.¹ However, there are real ramifications that result from this form of self-creation and its relationship to the other.

In order to understand this alienating truth, it may be necessary to look at the conditions under which this truth came about. Perhaps the importance of this historical contingency is the very reason Foucault decided to write a *history* of madness rather than merely a study on the present science of the pathological; the place of madness in the social sphere and its impact on truth is not historically static. Before the work of Pinel and Tuke and the rise of 19th century psychologisation,² to speak of the truth of madness, and therefore the truth of the human being, would be to speak an anachronism and therefore an unreal truth; it would be empty. It is only once madness is given the *liberty* to be itself (as explained in "The Birth of the Asylum," the chapter preceding "The Anthropological Circle") that the truth of madness is revealed. Comprehending the

¹ It might be an all too necessary play because it helps draw attention to the strange fact of self-assertion and therefore "self" limitation.

² Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke are the two major figures referenced by Foucault. He repetitively associates each with the early 19th century psychologisation of madness.

difference between classical madness and the 19th century experience will reveal certain conditions under which knowledge of the truth is made possible and therefore other conditions under which it is inaccessible. It is at this point in the *History of Madness* that knowledge of the modern human condition can be glimpsed for the first time. However, as Foucault mysteriously and paradoxically writes, this glimpse coincides with its elusion (512). It reveals itself, but in this revelation it proclaims its invisibility as a “stubborn presence that never allowed itself to be entirely grasped” (Foucault 512).³

Speculatively, could it then be the case that other historical circumstances/conditions might render the truth entirely visible? Might there be the hopeful possibility of building a bridge over the abyss to an “un-alienated” land, by which I mean a new type of human experience presently unknown, or a new engagement with experience? Might one also search for a base to this abyss, that is, a base to the human condition of madness and the non-natural? If this is the case, that is, if there is a point at which the self-estrangement opens back up into self-fulfillment, then one could claim that the correct course of action might be for scientists/psychologists to submerge themselves in their studies and make their technical discourse as pronounced, intense, and dispersed as possible. However, if this is not the case, then there may always be an important role left up to the philosopher. There might not be a bottom to the well, and in fact we may safely assume this to be the case, but what harm is done in diving further into that dark pool? There might not be an “ocean floor” to the “endless abyss.”

³ The relationship Foucault implicitly makes between the visible and invisible, though rarely using such language, is open to a straightforward comparison with Jacques Derrida’s *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, an essay on blindness in painting and drawing. Derrida’s *Memoirs of the Blind* is an investigation into artwork of which blindness is the subject matter, and subsequently an investigation into the invisible made visible, a representation of that which is lacking, i.e., a manifestation of non-being. There are several instances over the course of the *History of Madness* in which Foucault draws parallels between blindness and madness.

However, such an undertaking might grant access to greater instrumental knowledge, that is, “useful knowledge,” applicable to both philosophical investigation and scientific theory. Therefore, while psychoanalysis/psychology may never reduce us to our “primary being” and uncover the essence/nature of humanity, it might meaningfully aid in human experience.⁴ Though the endlessness of scientific investigation and its reductivism opens the door to a problem of infinite regress, it closes the door on completion, safety, and unwieldy ennui. As a result of the nature of the infinite, that is, the abyss/the eternal, 1 is greater than 0 and concurrently no closer to reaching a destination, no closer to infinity, or a mysterious (and impossible) final number. This mathematical idea of infinity functions analogously to the modern subjective experience. The Foucaultian must sacrifice the *idea* of a destination and the embracement of the infinite. Progression is toward nothing; the longstanding tradition of teleology, as it is applied in the sciences, is lost through the methods employed in its name. These conclusions make themselves more apparent after further investigation into the history of madness.

The movement from the classical conception of madness to that of the 19th century is key to understanding the conditions under which the truth makes itself known, or more precisely, glimpsed. One can pick up this history with a look at the structure of the classical era in the 17th and 18th centuries. The two primary classical physicians that Foucault uses (perhaps unfairly) to represent this period are Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke. Both are known for instituting a form of moral therapy that supposedly allowed for the mad to regain their liberty/freedom. The dialectic of The Classical Age exposes itself in the praise heaped on these two figures. This dialectic seems to be one that pertains to

⁴ This is in reference to a particular sense of the word “meaningful.” In another sense it might better uncover the meaninglessness of the human experience.

the classical conception of liberty. As Foucault describes it, this dialectic is rooted in a *paradox* of liberty. The classical conception of liberty is one grounded on a belief of liberty in which liberty must not be itself. Foucault argues that although Pinel and Tuke claim to have restored liberty to those they have “re-normalized,” liberty was at all times already within the mad. It is an experience of liberty that uses itself to destroy itself: “The liberty of the madman is only ever in that instant, that imperceptible distance that makes a man free to abandon his liberty and chain himself to his madness” (513). Liberty, conceived as such, is, by necessity, that which must require the possibility of enslavement; it becomes reliant upon the other. “The instant” of which Foucault speaks is one in which a decision is made, a decision to allow oneself to be overtaken by one’s emotions or desires and, essentially, to make oneself mad. In this instant, the moral responsibility placed on the mad, within The Classical Age, becomes illuminated. One is not free unless one has the choice to constitute oneself as that which is not free, i.e., the mad person. “Madness, at bottom,” writes Foucault, “was only possible in so far as it had that latitude around it, the leeway that allowed the subject to speak the language of his own madness, and constitute himself as mad” (512 – 513). Freedom defines itself through the possibility of enslavement. If one is not free to enslave oneself, then one has not reached the limits of that freedom. According to Foucault, the operations of Pinel and Tuke lie well within the classical experience of madness, an experience that has a contradictory structure embedded within it. For these physicians to assert that they give a person back her freedom by holding her accountable for limiting that freedom, is for them to admit that they have limited another’s freedom. They are therefore claiming that to enslave is to free; to limit freedom is to obtain freedom. We are not yet in a position to

assert or condemn such a questionable claim, but the novelty of it is astounding. Claiming that one has a moral responsibility not to enslave oneself, as Pinel and Tuke do, *is* to claim that one ought to enslave oneself, albeit in a different manner. *It is the removal of a choice by the reinstatement of choice.*

Freedom, in its absolute sense, is shown as being that which must not be. When it is looked for in those that are totally free, i.e., the mad, it makes a mockery of itself. In other words, it is impossible for freedom to exist as the classical conception of the term would have one believe because *there cannot be freedom in absolute freedom*. If it did exist, it would be what it is not; therefore, it would not *be* even when it *is*. It would be constituted by nothingness. Foucault writes: “the freedom which made classical madness possible was suffocated inside this madness itself, and collapses in that which manifested its contradictions most cruelly.” (513-514). To restate: liberty allows one to constitute oneself as mad,⁵ and madness is that in which one has become savagely enslaved to such as desire, passions, etc. The freedom of the era that gave rise to classical madness becomes bondage in the madness to which it gives rise. “Freedom” for some must mean restriction for others. Therefore it must be that liberty, as defined in the Classical Age, is inherently repressive. Seen in this light classical liberty is not liberty “in itself,” but rather the objectification of a concept. “What the late eighteenth century witnessed was not the liberation of the mad but an *objectification of the concept of their liberty*” (515).

This objectification of liberty by the late classical age is an important cause of the end of that era and the beginning of the next, in which the scientific search became more precise and determined. This pathway was opened because of the *ambiguity* of the

⁵ Foucault writes: “...in the classical experience, madness can at the same time be *slightly* criminal, *slightly* faked, *slightly* immoral and *slightly* reasonable too” (514). Each of these shows a way in which the individual could be held responsible for his/her madness.

classical conception of the mad. The objectification of the concept is one in which the destruction of ambiguity must be sought, and thus the destruction of that era of ambiguity. The movement toward science is the logical progression of this thought. There is little objective about that which is ambiguous.⁶ In order to satisfy the condition of objectification, ambiguity must be destroyed. Thusly one era ends as another begins with a more pronounced order.

This is the objectification of liberty: the reification and capture of freedom. This objectification must also objectify the people embodying that freedom, i.e., the mad, as the mad are the most literal reified form of freedom. It alienates the mad from their humanity, which is, decidedly, free.⁷ This ambiguous conception of the classical era was one that would open a door for the mad to be treated as simultaneously free and determined, that is, concurrently responsible *and* irresponsible. If the mad are treated as those that are enslaved to their own savage will, as Foucault puts it, then it follows that those physicians at work with the mad are going to start searching for causes and breaking points at which one becomes mad in order to maintain freedom *and* control (515). They might look at those places at which people are using their liberty too extensively and without restraint. They might deem some quantitative excessive exercise of liberty as liberty's end, not a teleological end, but rather a limit, a threshold. This is the process of objectification. How can such an objectifying look at liberty take place objectively? How can such a construction of liberty be made scientific? Since it cannot be

⁶ It could be the case that this is a wide-ranging "rule" that extends beyond the sciences. In other words, ambiguity regarding any concept seems to spark a need to objectify that concept and clarify that which is distorted. Objectification, then, might be that which is sparked by a fear of the unknown, or a will to know. Ironically, at least in the case explored in this paper, that need to know reveals the impossibility of knowledge.

⁷ This will later play out in Foucault's writing as a rivalry between science and art, as representatives of restraint and freedom.

scientifically quantified or qualativized, liberty can only be made a scientific concept if it lets itself be grounded in the morality from which it grew. The scientific grounding for freedom has moral underpinnings. One finds scientific conventions based upon the moral conventions of the era. It is, once more, science grounded in moral judgment. Science, more generally, in order to function as a science, links itself with the deterministic nature of cause and effect as they result from physically understood principles. Morality and liberty, on the other hand, are founded on the exercise of free will. Liberty presupposes the self as the causal agent, i.e., that one is the executor of one's own actions.

Here one can see a confusing pair, one that results in an entangled study which imposes a paradoxical structure on its subject, i.e., the mad. The mad became the loci of extreme freedom (due to their lack of restraint when granted liberty) and extreme determinism (due to their being objects of scientific research) together as if they are at the limits and totality of both. Foucault writes, "The mad of the nineteenth century were to be both subject to determinism and guilty: their non-freedom was more infused with guilt than the freedom in which the mad of the classical age were able to escape themselves" (515). As this freedom was objectified in the classical age, so the era gave birth to a new one, that is, one of stricter science through psychologisation. Within the conundrum between determinism and free will outlined above, a philosophical anthropology arose in psychology. The search for human essence took a turn, one rooted in science and objectification. The doors opened by psychology show just how tightly locked the following set of doors will always be to scientific investigation. The more revealed by science, the clearer it becomes that it requires something other. It is in this era of

psychology that the truth becomes known, and therefore unknowable, and *that* truth is because of “*the truth of this truth*” (516).

Now let madness speak endlessly and alienate itself. Let it speak its own truth. Let it make itself as visible as possible so that we can see just how invisible it makes its own truth. In the 19th century, the confinement and silence of madness was lifted (at least partially) and given back its voice. The search for scientific liberty led to the upswing in the discourse on madness. According to Foucault, or, at the very least, a particular interpretation of his work, it is the objectification of liberty that reignited the *language* of madness, a language that was hidden in the ambiguity and non-being the mad represented in The Classical Age. Before this objectification the mad person was “the void of non-being and the paradoxical manifestation of that void” (516). The mad, as those more or less enslaved during The Great Confinement,⁸ were instantiations of nothingness trapped inside of a physical body. In a sense, the mad were thought to have lost their humanity when they lost their free will; they were both slaves to their own passions and slaves within the system of confinement. In The Classical Age the mad were human beings without humanity. This is the paradoxical manifestation of the void underlying this epoch. On what grounds could one be considered simultaneously human and inhuman? One might safely draw the conclusion that it must have been free will, i.e., liberty, which made a human being a human being in classical reasoning. Liberty defined a particularly human condition. When this is lost, humanity is lost, and the person who loses it is no longer a person but rather an embodied nothingness. Most people with liberty, selfhood, and humanity would feel an unyielding fear at the thought of its absence and the life of

⁸ In the 16th and 17th centuries houses of confinement were built across Europe. These houses confined the mad along with the unemployed and the criminal class in many instances. Perhaps the most famous chapter of *The History of Madness*, “The Great Confinement,” is written on this subject.

slavery or death. How might such a fear of loss and death effect interactions with the mad? Might it be that an intolerable fear of *becoming nothing* arises with the sight of these walking, fleshy bodies of void?

If being a human being necessarily means being free, then maintenance of this freedom becomes a paradigm for all science involved in philosophical anthropology. To maintain freedom one must know what it takes to lose that freedom, and therefore madness becomes a necessary part of reality. As was stated above, Foucault believes that the mad were considered *both* guilty and determined in the 19th century (515). They are guilty for having extinguished their own freedom. However, is it the case that one can remain guilty when one is no longer oneself? Nothingness cannot be guilty because nothingness cannot *be* anything, and yet we have seen that the mad are guilty, even in their innocence. Thusly, it must be the case that the mad could no longer be considered walking voids, or embodied, silent nothingness. It is much more important for the mad to remain guilty than for the mad to remain embodied nothingness. This is because guilt is the result of the moral code that drives the objectification of liberty. As one attempts to correct the paradox of liberty (to stop something from birthing nothingness, to stop humanity from destroying itself) by objectifying it, then one also realizes the necessity of the objectified, i.e., the mad. The mad must be granted the status of being; they must have a “somethingness,” or, in other words, a truth, an essence. The mad are granted their own truths. If science is to objectify a moral concept, then it must have an object to objectify. The mad must become that object precisely because they are the locus of guilt; they are the reason the concept of liberty needs resolving. What is it of which they are the guilty party? Specifically, *they are guilty of becoming nothing. They are guilty of shunning*

liberty. How does one objectify nothingness? It is here that the inanity and unreason of the entire era exposes itself at the ends of its reason: *the mad must have truth because they have none*.

Does not this formulation show the limits of the classical notion of liberty? Though a critique of such liberty is not stated outright in the Foucault, it resides therein. Firstly, it is a form of liberty that requires the loss of liberty *at a certain point*. Too great an exercise of this liberty leads to enslavement through the loss of free will. It is a conception of liberty that is already foiled by its self-restraint; it is freedom in bondage without the awareness of such bondage. Secondly, liberty objectified/reified as such is variable and unequal in two senses: 1.) the extent to which free will can be practiced without slippage into nothingness may depend on the individual and 2.) the extent to which an exposure of a deeper level of human subjectivity reveals the truth of nothingness is variable dependent upon social and historical context. The former might arise most clearly within problems of objectifying liberty as it arises in science and the scientific method. The latter will do the same but on a more macroscopic level. Perhaps both may show the way in which “the truth of humanity” is variable and infinite. There is a unique, individual truth, subject to change at all times, but there is also a greater, underlying truth that unites all humanity across time; this is revealed in the infinite. However, knowledge of the infinite truth only comes to light once those who can expose it are free and able to do so.

This brings the discussion back to the language of madness. In order to discover what makes the mad into the mad, one must *talk* to the mad, and more importantly, one

must *listen*. As the mad return to language they also return to truth.⁹ Nothingness cannot speak. The confinement of The Classical Age must end and the discourse must ignite; this is precisely what Foucault writes of when he references the psychologisation of madness. Foucault suggests that we “listen to its first utterances” born from the objectification of liberty (516). How beautiful this revelation is, exposed by this objectification, and how humorous the failure of an “adequate” objectification, whatever that might mean. The science is endlessly self-perpetuating and growing. Foucault realizes this and smartly titles the chapter accordingly.

The language of madness as described by Foucault is one that announces “poetry of the heart” (517). He references the 19th century poets Friedrich Hölderlin and Gérard de Nerval, along with philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, in order to make his point. All three figures led lives that one would most likely consider mentally unstable and tragic. However, these madmen were bursting with a language of poetry. Foucault writes:

This language of madness was reborn, but as a lyrical explosion: the discovery that in man, the interior was also the exterior, that the extremity of subjectivity blended into the immediate fascination of the object, and that any ending was the promise of an obstinate return. A language in which what transpired were no longer the invisible figures of the world, but the secret truths of man. (518)

⁹ There is an essential tie between the use of language and the application of truth. The truth found within language must stand over the abyss that the mad expose. This will become clear in the later investigation of Nietzsche and post-structuralist theory as it is applied to language.

Madness, says Foucault, came “announcing man’s senseless secret” (518). Its lyricism and poetry open up an exploration at the end of the day and into an eternal night. One of the most objective things we can know about ourselves is revealed in the language of the mad: our own deep, unreasonable subjectivity. The objective and the subjective are shown not to be at odds with one another. Rather they are partners in human truth. Foucault believes that this interplay led the mad of the 19th century to be *simultaneously* treated with a greater neutrality and passion (518). Greater scientific neutrality arose in part because of medical advancement and the destruction of *apparent* social and moral factors. The mad made visible a darker truth in a way similar to the world of dreams. Studying these two realms led to greater knowledge of the truth of the human condition. A greater passion was placed on the mad for a similar reason: it is in the mad that we see ourselves reflected. General human truth is revealed through madness and aligns itself with the truth of madness, the truth of nothingness. Foucault, quoting a character from a Hoffman novel, writes “I firmly believe that through abnormal phenomena, Nature allows us to peer into the most fearsome abysses” (519).

Foucault does not make explicit why it is that one can “feel the same forces, hear the same voices and see the same strange lights rise up within” when one engages with the mad. Yet it is clear that this passionate connection can only be felt in a context in which the mad are given voice (519). In The Classical Age no such connection could be made. The mad were segregated in their confinement and conceived as non-beings. Only once the mad were given back their voice, a gorgeous and Romantic voice, were the “normal” able to see themselves reflected in the mad. Reading the poetry of a madman is like listening to an eruption of violence, passion, and excess rising out of the darker

recesses of the human experience. One sees one's own hidden gems and nightmares reflected in the shameless and brilliant writings of the mad. The literature grips and acts as a force that primitively creates a sensation in the reader. The reader, i.e., the gazer or spectator sees himself reflected in this madness. He sees the way in which he shares this passion.¹⁰ "This gaze," writes Foucault, "...could promise itself the spectacle of a naked truth of man" (519). The mad had their own truth restored in the objectification of liberty. Now, in the literature and voice to which this objectification needed to give birth, madness held the truth of all humanity. As Foucault will outline more clearly in the final pages of *History of Madness*, he believes it is art that holds the world responsible for madness. The language of madness, the oeuvre produced by the madman or on the madman, is infused with guilt.¹¹

Madness is given "the virtues of a mirror" in which all of humanity sees itself reflected in this exposed subjectivity, and yet what this reflection shows is merely a primal and mechanical truth about humanity (519). The "elementary truth" that madness revealed was the abyss in the human, that is, the deep subjectivity that always underlies the layered objectivity (519). In it, one sees a substance at once wholly unreasonable and basic. The elementary truth that Foucault describes is one of desire, primal urge and mechanical reaction. Life is not guided by reason in this reduction. The human being is reduced to a biological sack of flesh and stripped of all pretension. Madness has exposed a dark secret: we are not inherently moral beings. Nor are we perfected sons and daughters of a benevolent creator. Most radically, we are not even primarily rational

¹⁰ Now the relationship that Foucault needs between the mad and the normal is set for an egalitarian politics. This point connects with his analysis of Velazquez's "Las Meninas" as the spectator is in that which she spectates. When one looks at the mad one sees the truth of oneself in her.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the oeuvre refer to chapter three.

beings, even if, as Aristotle writes, this feature remains a distinguishing characteristic of the species.

Though Foucault does not travel down this route, one might find in his writing the way in which scientific objectification and the language of art, as they are combined in the truth exposed by the mad, *is a truth of our animality*. It is a truth of drives and urges. However, as the spectator sees this reduction of human truth in madness, that is, the founding unreason, the spectator's reaction reveals a level of humanity that is beyond animality and yet within it. It is an animalistic desire to be other than the animal. It is a fear of our own truth. It is a fear of the bottomless abyss, a fear of being what one *must be*: an animal. Here is the torment of humanity: the inescapability of being what one wishes to be beyond. The sickest part of all, that by which we shake ourselves to sleep: the realization that our want to be more than what we are *is caused by what we are in conjunction with the realization that, elementarily, we will never be more than what we are*. We want what cannot be had, and when we desire to be gods instead of animals we doom ourselves to misery. Our nature allows for the capacity of self-hatred. If, as Foucault states, "the madness of an action was precisely determined by the fact that no reason could ever exhaust it," then all see their own truths reflected in the mad (520). Madness exposes the unreasonableness, as well as the problem of infinite regression, inherent within all action. One sees one's own truth reflected in madness. *The truth of the mad is the truth of humanity*, and therefore humanity's truth is one of madness.

If such is the case, and "there is a madness in us all," then the mad can, at least partially, be freed of their responsibility for their own madness. Throughout The Classical Age the mad were a guilty party, in the sense that they were morally responsible; guilty

of enslaving themselves and destroying liberty. Now, in the truth that the mad reveal, it is the world that is made guilty in the face of madness. It could be the case that it is the push to be more than what we are that forces us to sink into something so deeply below that which we are. An unmanageable subjectivity, i.e., pure subjectivity might be birthed from a rigorous devotion to objectivity. It is “pure subjectivity” that stands at the threshold between the sane and insane.

Along with Foucault we have discussed the *elementary truth* of humanity as it is exposed by madness, but this elementary truth gives rise to a further truth: *the terminal truth*. The terminal truth expresses the fact of a limit, or boundary, to subjectivity. The terminal truth shows *how far* one “could be pushed by the passions, life in society and everything that distanced him from a primitive nature that knew no madness” (520). Madness is something that arises within a society as it distances itself from the primitive and “uncivilized” life. If the natural and primitive exposed by madness is, as we have stated, one based on elementary desires and urges, then madness is seen to arise in a social context in which the repression of these desires is great. Madness is not something that arises independent of historical context. It might therefore be considered something apart from mental disease, though mental disease itself is still something only determined as such within certain societal contexts. Foucault, quoting Matthey, writes, “According to reports from travelers, savages are not subject to disorders of the intellectual functions” (520). The philosophical point continues to loom independently of the factual accuracy of these traveler’s reports. The relevance lies in Matthey’s *experience* of these “savages.” It seems evident that in a society judged as “savage” there could not be “madness” because primitive drives are not so thoroughly repressed. The repression of

these drives, and hence the manifestation of madness, would almost certainly be more prevalent in a societal context that morally condemns other societies by slamming the inhabitants of those other societies with such derogatory titles such as “savage” or “barbarian.” This contextualizing of the existence of madness places the responsibility for the creation of madness on the society. As was the case during The Classical Age, that society which blamed/guilted the mad into taking responsibility for their own madness was itself the guilty party. This seems particularly sinister as such a society seeks to hide its own responsibility within that which is its victim. The terminal truth holds society accountable for the discovery of this truth’s existence. Society is responsible for pushing its outliers to the cliff’s edge, watching them fall, and ridiculing them for losing their balance. Madness shows the limits of the forces of passion, and becomes an issue when passion is strangled within a society that does not permit its fruition. In its hopeless resistance to society’s power, repressed passions are forced to their limit and erupt in wild abandonment, i.e., madness. “Madness began when the world began to age,” writes Foucault, “and every face that madness took over the course of times spoke of the shape and truth of that corruption” (520).

Why might Foucault write that the world “began to age,” as though there is an origin to aging, as if there were a time before aging? Certainly he does not mean that the world has always been “aging;” if he did, there would be no social critique since the essence of the world would bear madness within it. If madness originates at the same point at which “aging” originates, then perhaps if one found the cause of aging, one could find the cause of madness, i.e., the reason for unreason. Perhaps there was always a truth (the truth of non-truth) as it is exposed by madness, but this does not mean that the world

ages before that truth manifests itself. The metaphor of aging is meant to capture the way in which society has grown advanced and civilized while simultaneously losing its vigor and lust. When was it that this shift occurs?¹²

Foucault does not pursue this idea of aging at much length, but his closing pages, and their remarks on artwork, might hold the key. It might be possible that madness results in a context in which we distance ourselves from the creation of art. As I will discuss later, for Foucault, art is that which contains no madness and yet is closest to it. Art is the exhibition of excess, but rather than being a slippage, it is an exaltation of humanity. Perhaps it is at this moment, a time of art, that the world began to age. If madness began as the world began to grow old, it does not necessarily mean that this “aging” had yet been manifested in the human body. It only means that repression, objectification, and the pursuit of knowledge/truth began to unfold in a broad, macroscopic, universal, and arrogant manner. This could at root be tied to the philosophical need for “knowledge of the good life,” and a life in accordance with “truth” which, accordingly, treats lives that do not meet this criterion as objectively bad. If a history of guilt could be traced, then perhaps it would mark the point in time at which certain lives were posited as evil, just as Nietzsche outlined in his *Genealogy of Morals*. Repression, in a sense, begins with philosophy. The truth of madness lies in the non-truth birthed from this pursuit of truth.

However, I do not wish to argue too greatly that there must be some sort of transcendent and paradoxical eternal truth. To claim that Foucault believes such a thing

¹² In later pages we will investigate the “aging” process, and coincidentally the birth of madness, through a look at early art, both prehistoric and ancient Greek as George Bataille and Friedrich Nietzsche interpret them respectively. Foucault discusses a relationship between art and madness that exposes closeness in status but also an unbridgeable gulf which forever distances them.

would be to claim that he undermines his own project. The search for truth is the search to repress that which is non-truth, i.e., that which is false in light of the discovered truth. And yet perhaps this is Foucault's goal. If the truth of humanity, and hence its non-truth, is glimpsed in the eyes of the mad, and all truth seeks to repress that which is not true, then it seems Foucault is pushing an agenda which makes him just as suspect as the very thing he seems to be criticizing. If Foucault is stating that there *is* a truth, and that it is not the truth that is sought by the objectification of liberty, along with the simultaneous neutrality and passion with which the mad are treated, then that lends itself to a criticism of the current state. If truth represses that which is non-truth, then it would seem that Foucault is hoping to overturn the current state of objectification with his own truth. However, this must not of necessity be the case. If human truth *is* non-truth, perhaps more accurately, unreason, then it cannot posit any reasonable truth in place of that which it condemns. In a sense, Foucault *condemns guilt*, and must therefore rest his work on a paradox. Foucault writes:

...the human truth that madness reveals is the immediate contradiction of the moral and social truth of man. The initial moment of any treatment is thus repression of the inadmissible truth, the abolition of the evil that reigns there, and the forgetting of this violence and these desires...Man will thus not speak the truth of his truth other than in the cure that will lead him from his alienated truth to the truth of man. (521)

Above, Foucault seems to be aware of the tight predicament his analysis created. The human truth that madness reveals is shown through madness, but it is not necessarily

in madness. It reveals itself not only in madness, but in the repression of madness and “the inadmissible truth” (520). What *is* admissible is that part of truth that seeks to repress the rest of the truth. Foucault’s project, then, is not aimed at displacing one truth with another, but at revealing a contradictory attitude in the modern and contemporary view of truth. That inadmissible truth, i.e., the truth of our violence and desire, is not of necessity the whole of human truth. Better put, it *is* the whole of human truth, but there is a part of that truth which wishes to be more than what it is and thereby seeks to make invisible the part of itself that does not share this wish. This total truth therefore alienates itself. In the passage above, Foucault distinguishes between the alienated truth and the truth of man. The truth of man, i.e., the human truth, is the result of the cure for the alienated truth. However, it is the search for a cure that originally caused the alienated truth to exist. It is the dissatisfaction of truth with itself that causes its self-alienation. It is a truth that is trying to rid itself *of itself*. It *cannot not* be alienating. Even if that part of the truth which is currently alienated can be set free, this in turn alienates the part of the truth that wishes to be something more than bestial violence and desire. Perhaps all that can be desired on such a model is a swing back to the center in which neither part of the whole of truth (the desiring/violent and the wish to be something more) alienates the other to its limit. Humanity seeks to be both God and an animal, but never itself, thereby alienating itself. Such extremity in alienation is responsible for the mad.

Although it is hard to speak of anything else, it is worrisome to continue using such a model of truth in which there must be constant self-alienation. Perhaps truth conceived as such, and the search for truth generally, can only serve a climate of alienation. The necessity of self-alienation seems to imply the lack of the ability for one

to achieve one's truth and therefore self-fulfillment. Human truth implies the impossibility of fulfilling that truth. The search for such a truth could only further the present idea of truth as a point to be realized, and yet it cannot be realized. This search for truth would only further the power of institutions designed to help one obtain the unobtainable, see the invisible, and *be that which cannot be according to its own model*. One must drop the search for truth, not in order to find it, but in order to free oneself from the self-imposed baggage of alienation, dissatisfaction, and guilt. Such seems to be the implicit, anti-metaphysical argument hidden in the pages of Foucault's descriptive account of madness.

CHAPTER TWO

ORIGINS OF SUBJECTIVITY, OBJECTIVITY, AND THEIR SIMULTANEITY IN THE MODERN HUMAN EXPERIENCE: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NIETZSCHE, BATAILLE, AND FOUCAULT

Throughout *The History of Madness* Foucault often makes note of the “language of madness,” a language whose form remains vague and unrefined to the reader until the latest pages of the book. This language of the mad was long suppressed (and therefore not extrapolated upon by Foucault) by the Great Confinement and subsequently the absolute silence of madness in the 19th century asylum. The historical time period of which Foucault’s writing is primarily concerned, that is, the Classical Age of Enlightenment, took great pains to blot out madness and silence it to the dungeons of confinement. Thusly its language, and the experience of madness *by the mad* of the Classical Age, will remain, in large part, forever a mystery.

However, as I have attempted to outline in the preceding chapter, the “freedom” of the mad that resulted from the activity of Pinel and Tuke at the end of the 18th century opened the door for a new experience of madness in the 19th century, one grounded not only on a certain medical morality, but also of an experience of madness *by the mad* in which they became the objects of their own gaze. As the mad were freed from their physical chains they were forced to confront their own madness from the objective gaze of a particular bourgeois morality presented as if it were objective reason. In doing so, according to Foucault, the mad were separated from their own madness and gazed upon

the truth of their madness from “the truth of man” (Foucault 516). “Madness was no longer to speak of non-being, but of the being of man” (516). There is a split that occurs in this new experience of madness. The mad, freed from their chains, are able to speak for the first time in centuries, but in two separate ways, both of which reaffirm the truth of man born through madness:

1.) Madness as that which silences itself when it reflects upon its own madness *as madness*, thereby reinforcing the domination of this morality through an internalized enslavement. Though the mad are freed from their chains and straightjackets, the mad, in this instance, are imbued with an internalized guilt that reflects the reason/morality of the age. Their liberty and language serve only to annihilate themselves, as does that of all of humanity under the weight of the public consciousness.

2.) Madness as that which chatters without end, never exhausting its own limit in the lyricism that its language breeds. Here, madness finds itself once more expressed in poetry, literature, art, and, for the first time, in philosophy. “...the mad,” writes Foucault, “were examined with both more neutrality and more passion” (518). The language of madness is either that of absolute silence in the object (being) or the inane endless chattering of the subject (nothingness).

In both instances, in the new freedom attained by madness, it finds itself estranged and self-alienated from this freedom. In the first case, madness makes itself an object, and thusly eliminates itself and its subjectivity in this objectification. The mad, though free from their metallic shackles, are now shackled in the objectivity of

Enlightenment morality, morality that instills a sense of guilt in the mad for their madness. One is made guilty by society for being what one is and must internalize the norms of the society, perhaps for the maintenance of the state and public order. As is the case in Rousseau, the human being is alienated from herself in the civil state. This objectification of liberty was expounded upon in the previous chapter and will not be extrapolated upon here.

Rather, this chapter will concern itself with the second case outlined above, that is, the lyricism that was birthed from the madness experienced in the 19th century. It will seek to view this alienation and the lyrical power of its expression as the culmination of a long, historical trend. Madness in the 19th century is experienced as the limits of human subjectivity and simultaneously the absolute objectification of man. It may then be useful, and exciting, to reflect on theories of the origins of human subjectivity and objectivity as they are expressed by two very creative and intellectual figures, namely Friedrich Nietzsche and George Bataille. Bataille's studies of prehistoric cave art, as exemplified in his collection of essays, *The Cradle of Humanity*, function in part as a study of the origins of human subjectivity. On the other hand, part of Nietzsche's project in the *Birth of Tragedy* reveals a possible origin of human *objectivity*, even if such a revelation is not central to Nietzsche's main project.¹³ Whether either of these philosophers is correct as to the exact historical moment of these origins is not the issue at hand.¹⁴ Rather, we are

¹³ Nietzsche's "main project" in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as the title suggests, is a study of the rise of Greek tragedy. For Nietzsche the Greek tragedy represented the heights of artistic achievement thus attained.

¹⁴ It could also be debated as to whether there is an exact moment at which either subjectivity or objectivity was birthed. One could easily make the case that they have been building over long, historical epochs and that there is no one moment at which one can point to the formation of either. However, it might certainly be the case that there are important turning points in history where these concepts take on a new face, perhaps more visible. The Modern Age, the prehistoric era described by Bataille, and the rise of Socratic thought in Ancient Greece might also be particular "moments" of relevance to this dialectic.

concerned with *the conditions* under which these historic accomplishments took place, and the human experience they led to and resulted from. Seen together, the origins of subjectivity and objectivity might aid in a more totalized understanding of the language of madness in the Modern Age, as this language functions as a culmination of both. This paper seeks to show the possibility of the following hypothesis: *that the human being is necessarily both subject and object, that the status of this experience has changed across history, and that the modern human subject is situated in such a milieu as to feel the brute strength of both her objectivity and subjectivity.*

The contemporary situation, as elucidated through the inane chattering of the mad, may signal a return to a long repressed subjective experience. Foucault may have implicitly understood the language of madness as something simultaneously new and specific to its milieu, but also as a return to an unfathomably deep subjectivity. Foucault writes:

Madness speaks the language of the great return: not the epic return from long odysseys, in the undefined path traced out by the myriad roads of the real, but a lyrical return in one lightning instant, which matures at a stroke the tempest of completeness, illuminating and pacifying it in a rediscovered origin. (518)

This strike of lightning, this moment of return, is a momentary relapse, a return that occurs right at the death of that of which it is the limit. The phrase “tempest of completeness” shows that the moment of return, while occurring in “one lightning

instant” is the instant of *completeness*, a moment of fulfillment, but still the product of a complicated series of socio-historical structures. This completeness is born as a storm, a tempest. Madness, then, is the complete return to the experience of unabashed, unrestrained subjectivity. The language of madness speaks of a rebirth, or more specifically, eruption, of human subjectivity.

In the eyes of philosopher, anthropologist, and literary figure, George Bataille, the original birth of the human subject also occurred in a moment, albeit after an enormous period of incubation. Bataille, an early 20th century thinker, wrote numerous essays on the culture and art of prehistoric peoples. In part, his reason for doing so was to uncover a piece of what it is that makes a human being *a human being*, in a robust, philosophic, and mystical sense. In his writing he explores the similarities and vast differences between many prehistoric people and the modern human subject. Perhaps in our analysis of Bataille’s birth of subjectivity and Foucault’s “rebirth” we will be able to uncover part of what it means to be a human most fundamentally as well as how this plays out more specifically in modern times. For Bataille, subjectivity is an inherent trait of the human being, but for Foucault subjective experience is much more specific to the particular milieu. Therefore a synthesis might allow one to provide a metaphysical *and* anthropological account of the human being.

The “birth” of humanity, as Bataille investigates it throughout several essays in *The Cradle of Humanity*, occurs in stages, but also in a particular moment. For Bataille, that which makes a human being into a human being must specifically be that which distinguishes him from all other species. At the least, the traits that are distinctly human seem to be those qualities which are of the greatest interest to Bataille. Working with the

limited anthropological data of the time, Bataille chooses to compare the prehistoric Homo sapien to the Neanderthals (as well as to “monkeys”) in order to elicit fundamental differences between them; he uses the Neanderthals as a link between Homo sapiens and “monkeys” to show a gradual progression toward self-awareness and majesty. These Neanderthals resemble modern man but not enough to “make soldiers out of them” or to “march in a straight line,” making note of the physical distinctions between the two species (Bataille 88). Besides their basic physical differences, the important distinction between the Homo sapien and the Neanderthal does not lie in the ability to create a useful tool or conceptually perceive life and death. In fact, the Neanderthal was perfectly capable of both and, according to Bataille, “might in fact have offered a burial for his dead fellow creature” (89). Rather, the distinction lies on the level of comportment. The Neanderthal differs from the Homo sapien in that he/she/it never made *works of art*.¹⁵ “The human species,” remarks Bataille, “in the strict sense of the word made works of art” (89). This distinguishing feature of the human being holds interesting implications for the more existential questions Bataille is drawn to investigate. It is this impulse, that is, the impulse to art, and not one of rationality or intellect, which separates the human being from the other creatures of Earth.

¹⁵ Evidence that has come to light in recent years suggests the possibility of cave art that could have been produced by Neanderthals in parts of Spain. According to Ker Than with National Geographic News, much of this evidence is still controversial and whether or not the art can be attributed to Neanderthals is still debatable. The art is said to be slightly over 40,000 years old, a time when Neanderthals and Homo sapiens were known to concurrently inhabit the area. Than writes that this has led some scientists to believe that Neanderthals are not a distinct species, but rather a specific European race of Homo sapiens. The possible incorrectness of Bataille’s anthropological claim does not endanger our project. The philosophical question posed as to what it means to be a human subject remains unhindered. Interestingly though, this alleged Neanderthal art does not depict the animalistic figures of the Lascaux caves. To the contrary, these cave paintings are merely of hand stencils and geometric figures. If the Neanderthals are indeed a distinct species, then a comparative analysis of Neanderthal art to that of Homo sapien art might add to Bataille’s endeavor.

This separation of human being from animal lies in their respective relations to subjective experience. Although Bataille rarely uses the term “subject” directly, it is easy to draw such a term out of his work, as does his editor/translator, Stuart Kendall. In the editor’s introduction, “The Sediment of the Possible,” Kendall writes “The passage from animal to man [for Bataille] announces the birth of the subject” (Kendall 16). This passage out of animality and into humanity is one that is founded on the explosion of art, of which the Lascaux paintings are an exemplary instance. For Bataille’s project, as well as the current one, it is key that Bataille be interpreted thusly. The production and creation of artwork is that which separates the human being from the rest of the animal kingdom. The ability to create artwork is the reflection of a particular experience that was beginning to flesh itself out in the prehistoric human being. Kendall writes that Bataille’s prehistory “is the beginning of a history that includes us; it is, [Bataille] believes, our history, our culture. Prehistory is the key to history because it ‘announces the subject, the ‘I,’ it announces ‘us’” (16). Prehistory is the moment, a moment that lasted several millennia, in which the wealth, depth, and subjectivity of the modern human experience began to take root. Prehistoric art is the reflection of this experience, an integral part of the experience itself, and that which separates the Homo sapien from the animal. Art separates the human from the animal even when the animal is the figurative subject of the artist.¹⁶

¹⁶ Later this point will be expanded upon in relation to the modern experience of madness. Throughout the Renaissance and in the early part of The Classical Age, Foucault writes that the mad were often feared for having recourse to their fundamental animality. Much later, in the 19th century as the mad produced the work of art, and madness once more becomes the subject of the work of art, the mad must show themselves as something other than the animal and become reflective of the truth of man. If Foucault’s work and Bataille’s work are to be reconciled, then the madman and the work of art he produces are either: 1.) necessary sides of a coin, and clearly such a coin can never land on both sides at once. 2.) simultaneously existent/co-dependent, but separated by status, with madness as the subject of art and art as the object of madness. This may then reveal a dialectic between the subject/object.

In artwork, the human rises to a plain of being and reflects a mode of existence that is seemingly beyond that of any animal. It is not hard to understand, then, the sense of pride that the human being, as the maker of art, i.e., as the conscious, creative subject, had in his own work and subsequently in his ability to know and create. In one of Bataille's most overtly Nietzschean passages he praises the greatness of prehistoric man and his excess in art:

The first step when humanity emerged from the interminable winter of the earliest times was the most confident, the most worthy of admiration. In the hands of these men, who created art, who strayed from an empty past, there was a virtue comparable to the most accomplished hands of today.
(158)

Bataille's high praise of the fairly rudimentary cave artwork may seem excessive at first, especially when put on par with some of The Classical Age's technically astounding works of art. However, when contextualized in both its space within the darkness of its cave, as well as its position at the dawn of humanity, one is hard pressed to find more awe-inspiring works of art than those present at the Lascaux cave. One must also note the stunning representation of the animal in the artwork, or more specifically, the importance placed on *that which is close to the human, but simultaneously clearly distinguishable from the human*, that is, the animal. This attachment to the representation of the animal shows the formation of the human subject in a way that is more specific than the simple production of artwork. Self-awareness, the formation of the collective, and the formation

of the individual subject, rise to new levels when one is able to create a negative definition of oneself in such a manner. Whether or not the reinforcement and establishment of subjectivity in the human being was the purpose of the cave painting for prehistoric man is irrelevant.¹⁷ It was the fulfillment of a need as well as that which (perhaps unintentionally) led to the development of consciousness and the subject. The subject was that which was formed and established in congruence with art, whether or not this was considered as such at the time.

In fact, one could interpret Bataille in a way that shows the subjective experience as that which is available and vague *before* the work of art, and also as that which becomes definite and rigorous *after* the work of art. Bataille writes at length upon various theories on the use of the cave paintings to the ancient people, and for Bataille these paintings are tied to a religious instinct and wild passion. The cave paintings were used for the apparition of the animal spirit, to conjure up something greater, that is, something beyond the apparent world. Through the cave painting the prehistoric human was able to create something spiritual, otherworldly, and magical, essentially something religious. Cave art, especially in its figuration of animals, served a religious function, and is thereby the embodiment of a deep human subjective experience: the impulse to religion and magic. Bataille writes that “At the very heart of existence, we find a kind of chaos, a gaping void perhaps, which conceals a chaotic delirium. At the heart of existence, we find art, and we find poetry, and we find a multitude of religions” (121). Thus religion, in its association with “gaping voids” and “chaotic delirium” shows itself to be extremely subjective, as does the very nature of chaos, a chaos rooted at the “very heart of

¹⁷ Bataille writes that these paintings may have not even been considered “works of art” by early Homo sapiens and that they quite possibly were believed to hold magical and religious powers that could summon the animal.

existence” (121). Homo sapiens therefore had some sort of subjective experience brought to them through the impulse to religion, but this does not yet mean the human subject is itself established. Though subjectivity might be at the heart of existence, that does not yet prove the existence of the individual subject. As Nietzsche promptly put it, “There were eternities during which [the human intellect] did not exist,” and yet this does not mean that the chaos of the universe wasn’t already within every embodied being (Nietzsche 114).

This internal chaos, already known to the human being, might cause a deep discomfort and fear. There is nothing of which to grab hold, no stability or truth to partake in. This discomfort/fear might be the reason Bataille finds poetry, art, and religion present alongside chaos in the human experience. These reflect this chaos, but also show the attempt of the human being to establish herself as a subject, and therefore in opposition to the chaos that is being. Through making the animal the object of one’s art, then one establishes oneself in opposition to the animal, creating a separation between human and animal that was previously unknown. The human being is therefore negatively created. Human experience is emptiness/void/nothingness constituted by that which it is not. In order for that subjectivity to become the individual subject, then that subject *must* define himself by that which he is in opposition to. He must look upon the other *as* other, forging his own subjective experience through the objectification of that which he is distinguishable from.¹⁸ For the pre-historic people, this was the animal.

¹⁸ As we will soon see, Bataille does not believe that the original religious “conjuring” of the animal had anything to do with objectification, but rather spiritual apparition. However, this does not mean that objectification was not an unintended consequence the artwork. Though the art may have had a religious function, it also functions independently as a representation of the animal and therefore reflects the conscious awareness in the human of the animal as something other. Bataille sees the extreme

Perhaps in the Classical Age this was the madman. In the creation of art/religion, the nothingness that is the human being takes pride in its ability to make itself into a something, i.e., a subject.

Before cave art, the human being felt the power of the chaotic subjectivity of the universe within herself (in the impulse to magic), but *after* such art, she found within herself a power that was distinctly her own, that is, the ability to make apparitions appear. It is in the moment of artistic endeavor, or perhaps more specifically, the conjuring of spirits, that the transformation from animal (general participant in the subjective world) to human (specific/individual subject) occurs, and is birthed from *power and pride in power*.¹⁹ Bataille writes the following:

Specifically, the apparition of the animal was not, to the man who astonished himself by making it appear, the apparition of a definable object, like the apparition of a definable object... That which appeared had at first a significance that was scarcely accessible, beyond what could have been defined. Precisely this equivocal, indefinable meaning was religious.

(135)

objectification of the animal by the modern man, to a degree that far surpasses whatever could have been the case for the mystic/religious prehistoric man: "Modern man's gaze in regard to animals, his gaze in general, distinct from individual reactions, the gaze with which we see them, is an empty stare: it is the same gaze that sees useful things and any other random object" (75).

¹⁹ Perhaps it is needless to say that this power, and the pride that results from such power, is the result of the physiognomy and dexterity of the Homo sapiens. Bipedalism allowed for the greater use and development of the hands, the primary instrument used in the creation of the cave paintings.

Firstly, this passage shows the possible strength of the religious intuitions of the ancient person, but secondly, and perhaps more importantly for our project, it shows the way in which man was astonished *by himself*, i.e., man was amazed by his own power to conjure up an inaccessible “beyond.” Humanity realized in this affect its own capacity to create spirit, and thus we imbue ourselves with the spirit of creation. “Man had the power to make them [animals] appear *at will* and to make them appear *for fun*” (135).²⁰ This enters the human being into a distinctly powerful position among the creatures of Earth. The human being is religious, the only religious creature, and he is so “to the extent that he understands that he is” (138). For Bataille, the human being is religious only through understanding, but this does not mean that religiosity is derived from understanding/intelligence. Perhaps it is human understanding that births the drive for religion and magic because the human is the creature that feels the chaos of the world. Religion and magic are in themselves the *negation* of understanding/intelligence, since they are necessarily un-interpretable and ungraspable. However, they are also only available in a creature that *can* understand. This magical feeling grows as the understanding grows, even if it is the negation of the understanding. Bataille proposes a definition of religion, but it is one that is essentially negative, as religion itself is undefinable. In defining religion one contradicts oneself because religion is undefinable. One attempts to objectify an essentially subjective experience and thusly alienates oneself from that experience, and yet the greater one understands the world, the more susceptible one will be to the religious experience. This will be of great importance in the coming discussions of Nietzsche, a man at the end of the intellectual rope and simultaneously stretched to an affective, prophetic grandiosity.

²⁰ The emphasis on “*at will*” is my own.

In the artwork of the earliest human beings much light is shed about the earliest human experiences: 1.) the impulse to religion 2.) the understanding of the chaos 3.) the negation of understanding through religion 4.) artwork as a site for the simultaneity of religion and understanding 5.) the birth of the subject in this simultaneous experience 6.) the pride taken in the understanding of the religious/artistic experience, that is, the pride of the subject.

Nietzsche and the Ancient Greeks will take us to the limits of this pride and uncover the beginnings of the human as *object*, which, one could claim, is already present in the birth of Bataille's human subject, albeit negatively. However, in Ancient Greek culture, objectification reaches a new height, one which might be considered a decisive turning point in the history of human experience, a point at which humanity becomes "mad for logic" (Nietzsche 9).

Over the course of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche describes the rise and fall of an art form he considered of the utmost greatness, i.e., the Greek tragedy. The tragedy combined the "Dionysiac" and "Apollonian" aspects of Greek culture/experience to create a performance reflective of the power of illusion, as well as the depth of a cultivated subjective experience as it is paired with a joyful acceptance of life.²¹ As we discussed above, in Bataille's case, religion/mysticism functioned only in relation to understanding, but simultaneously as the negation of that understand. This reaffirms the notion that understanding/knowledge can only be obtained through a negative relationship. In this discussion of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* we will see the way in

²¹ The Dionysiac elements reflect a universal, eternal, musical, invisible connection that unites all collectively, while the Apollonian elements are plastic, visible, definite, individual/particular, and reflect the apparent nature of things. While the depth of this experience/distinction is fascinating in its own right, it is tangential to the object at hand, that is, the conflict between the Socratic and Dionysiac Greek natures.

which the end of the Greek tragedy, that is, its suicide, is reflective of the understanding's attempt to constitute itself in a more rigorous, objective sense. The rise of Socrates and Post-Socratic Greek philosophy marks an era in which knowledge/understanding becomes the only true/absolute virtue. The subjective experience is thusly diminished insofar as it becomes the object of philosophy's gaze. It is no longer experienced as the phenomenon/sensation that it is in itself. Philosophy conquers the tragedy, the artist, and reconstitutes society in favor of the wise.

Nietzsche believes that the Greek tragedy, unlike previous art forms, died by suicide. This suicide at the hands of the famed playwright, Euripides, transformed much of the Dionysiac elements of the tragedy into more reasonable, understandable Socratic elements. Euripides, writes Nietzsche, was a "troubled spectator" (Nietzsche 75). He did not understand the works of his great precursors, Aeschylus and Sophocles. For Nietzsche's Euripides, the Dionysiac tragedies, filled with mystery, pomp, inane misfortunes, and ambiguous moral outcomes, were puzzles to be solved (75). Euripides was concerned with his spectators and wanted to present a work of clarity, truth, and reason. There were two spectators specifically that Nietzsche claims Euripides concerned himself with, and it was the specificity of these concerns that led him to turn the Greek tragedy on its head. The first of these two spectators was Euripides himself, "the thinker Euripides, not the poet" (74). Euripides the thinker "looked upon reason as the fountainhead of all doing and enjoying" (75). For this reason, the inanity and ambiguity of the former Greek playwrights must have been very upsetting, a fault to overcome for future playwrights like himself. When one pairs this attitude of concern for the spectator with such an obsession for reason, one allows the audience to judge the action occurring

on the stage and forces said action into an agreement with that which the audience finds sensible and understandable. The spectator cannot spurn the tragedy that he/she understands. Euripides intention is now revealed: “it is to eliminate from tragedy the primitive and pervasive Dionysiac element, and to rebuild drama on a foundation of non-Dionysiac art, custom and philosophy” (76).

For Euripides, then, it is important to find a worthy, reasonable spectator beyond himself. The second spectator, according to Nietzsche, is the one “who did not understand tragedy and therefore spurned it” (75). The one that spurns tragedy because it is not understandable must then assume that that which is good, useful, or likable must also be that which is understandable, i.e., rational. Anything that is otherwise ought to be corrected or cast aside. Euripides needed to convert this spectator to tragedy, and in this process he had to apply some essential changes to the tragedy. The name Nietzsche gives to this second spectator, this lord of reason, should ring familiar: Socrates. It is in Socrates and the heights of human wisdom, in the great virtue of knowledge, to which Euripides looks for his second spectator. Socrates becomes the reason for Euripides’ dramas, and, as Nietzsche puts it, Euripides becomes the first practitioner of “esthetic Socratism” (79). In fact, Nietzsche reports that “Socrates, being a sworn enemy of the tragic arts, is said never to have attended the theater except when a new play of Euripides was mounted” (83).

Socrates appreciated that which was understandable, moral, and clear. These two spectators, Euripides and Socrates, are the ones who actively reflect on the tragedy but end their viewing without any understanding of said tragedy. The pomp of Euripides’ predecessors was something that Euripides could not understand. All that was showy and

musical wasn't understood, couldn't be understood, and therefore spurned by Euripides, as evinced by its absence from his own tragedies. His tragedies thus lost the Dionysian spirit that was the father of the tragedy. They sought to understand that which could not be understood, therefore misunderstanding and losing Dionysus. Thusly the tragedy dies in its own self-reflection, lost as the object of its own gaze. In other words, it suffered suicide by objectification. This is objectification brought on by the rise of philosophy, specifically by the wisdom of Socrates.

Before moving from a discussion of the death of Greek tragedy to a more general discussion of the rise of objectification and philosophy in Ancient Greece, it is important to note the way in which this transition in Greek theater impacts the subjective human experience, especially as it is portrayed through art. Bataille saw cave paintings and the objectification of the animal in a work of art as a reflection of the foundations of human subjectivity, an unconscious process towards greater human experience. Nietzsche sees the heights of the Greek tragedy as the greatest accomplishment and reflection of human subjectivity thus far. One could hypothesize that human subjective rose throughout the ages, from the Lascaux caves until the height of Dionysian experience in the Ancient Greek tragedy.²²

Nietzsche stresses that the works made by Euripides' precursor, Aeschylus, were *unconscious* works of art, thus reflecting the great Dionysian spirit and the essential irrationality underlying the human experience. Nietzsche writes:

²² As was noted earlier, Nietzsche believes that the Greek tragedy died at its own hands, in an attempt to make that which was unconscious and artistic about the tragedy part of a conscious awakening. Essentially, this could be read as the moment at which subjectivity, in its greatest excess, reaches its limits and is eclipsed by objectivity. We will see later that objectivity dies by its own sword as well at the end of the Age of Enlightenment and on into the 19th century. The deaths of both subjectivity and objectivity, along with their resurrections in the death of the other, are key ingredients to an understanding of the modern human experience, forever at the limits of both, constantly alienated.

Euripides would never have endorsed Sophocles statement about Aeschylus: that he was doing the right thing but unconsciously; instead he would have claimed that since Aeschylus created unconsciously he couldn't help doing the wrong thing...his esthetic axiom 'whatever is to be beautiful must be conscious' is strictly parallel to the Socratic 'whatever is to be good must be conscious.' (81)

The eclipse of the artistic, Dionysian, and unconscious in the Greek tragedy coincides with the rise of Greek philosophy and the Socratic way of thinking. The values of society shifted and "true" knowledge (objective understanding) was posited as an ultimate good. Knowledge resided in *transparency*, clarity, and consciousness. Socrates, according to Nietzsche, was not deemed the wisest man by the Delphic oracle because of his wealth of knowledge, but because of his *awareness*, that is, specifically, his awareness of his lack of knowledge (83).²³ Socrates is wise, not in virtue of knowledge itself, but in his understanding of his own knowledge, in his self-reflection. The sophists, politicians, and poets of the day couldn't compete with Socrates in this regard. They were full of false knowledge and pretensions, led by their instincts rather than reason. Socrates, on the other hand, was born of a different grain. He was to usher in a new era, one ready for philosophy, science, truth, and wisdom. These new values would essentially eclipse

²³ Interestingly, Nietzsche notes that Euripides was pronounced the second wisest. "The third place went to Sophocles, who had boasted that, in contrast to Aeschylus, he not only *did* the right thing but knew *why*. Evidently it was the *transparency* of their knowledge that earned for these three men the reputation of true wisdom in their day" (83). This reflects the close ties between Socrates and Euripides as well as the importance placed on conscious understanding.

the artistic, unconscious experience of the Greek tragedy. According to Nietzsche, Socrates was to be the first of a new breed, the first *theoretical man*.²⁴

The theoretical person is the one whom revels in the knowledge of the revealed and thusly distinguishes herself from the artistic person. Both the artistic person and the theoretical person take “infinite pleasure in all that exists” and are thereby saved from pessimism/nihilism, a disillusion with life, a destructive tendency against existence (92). However, there is an essential difference in the affections of the theoretical person and the artistic person. The theoretical person takes her pleasure in the endless uncovering of new objects as they are exposed through artistic revelation. She derives her pleasure from the understanding, observation, and interrogation of that which has already been revealed, as well as the process of revelation itself. The artistic person, on the other hand, is the one through whom the revelation is made. This person is not concerned with the act of revelation but rather the act of creation through the navigation of, and submergence in, unconscious waters. In other words, the artistic person functions as a discoverer and searcher of unconscious depths while the theoretical person focuses her gaze upon the revealed, taking an interest in the mechanistic functioning of the object. The artistic person reveals more of the unconscious for conscious pondering, which the theoretical person quickly engages in. Viewed as such a process, it must necessarily be the unconscious, artistic, subjective drive/desire that rises first in human history. The theoretical person works with the tools given to her by the artistic person. This unconscious, artistic drive may have been at work from the time of the pre-historics until

²⁴ As is the case with Bataille’s cave art, (esp. the Lascaux Cave) nothing hinges upon Socrates the man being the first instance of this new mode of being. Rather he should be thought of as the figurehead which functions as the symbolic representation of a general trend toward a new mode of being.

its climactic suicide in Greek tragedy. It is only under such conditions that a sober disposition such as that of Socrates is able to arise.

Nietzsche explains the distinction between the theoretical and artistic persons in more elegant terms: “while the artist, having unveiled the truth garment by garment, remains with his gaze fixed on what is still hidden, theoretical man takes delight in the cast garments” (92). The theoretical person explains, i.e., objectifies, what the artistic person has revealed and created. One reveals the nature of the human experience while the other explains this experience. In this explanation and scientific obsession, we are able to view the Socratic/theoretical person as much more than the negation of the Dionysian/artistic person. They become sides of a coin, negating/hiding one another but always secretly dependent upon the other, though the Socratic may be more dependent on the Dionysian than vice versa.²⁵ The judge must be given something upon which to gaze, but the object of the gaze need not necessarily be gazed upon.

Now, in the grander scheme of this essay, it becomes necessary to elucidate the objectifying powers of the theoretical person. Nietzsche writes that “...we must now ask, ‘Toward what does a figure like Socrates point?’ Faced with the evidence of the Platonic dialogues, we are certainly not entitled to see in Socrates merely an agent of disintegration” (89). Though, as we have seen, Socrates was the destroyer of the Greek tragedy, we have also seen that, as the theoretical man, he represents an endless love for the revealed mechanisms of the world. In this optimistic obsession with that which has been revealed, with the science of things, the theoretical person acts as a human logic

²⁵ The theoretical/Socratic person is absolutely dependent upon the artistic because it need the artistic in order to have something unveiled for it to gaze upon. While the artistic might be able to explore the unconscious in a more robust fashion due to the product of theoretical labor and technical ability, it remains autonomous in its ability to create of its own accord.

machine, forming patterns and creating order from out of the chaos, a chaos revealed by the artist. Nietzsche repeats Anaxagoras, stating, “In the beginning all things were mixed together; then reason came and introduced order” (81).²⁶ In other words, the theoretical man takes the chaotic mess given to him by the artistic man and attempts to apply structure to it, organizing systems of knowledge in philosophies and sciences. The positive, perhaps “creative,” power of the Socratic person is in this organizing, system-building tendency. The scientist forms models/paradigms to explain the processes of the nature world, while the philosopher establishes cohesive systems of thought. Scientific paradigms are often tossed aside as new data suggests a more, robust/powerful paradigm. Western philosophy has progressed in the same manner, albeit in a less linear fashion, as philosophers reject and advance upon the ideas of their predecessors and contemporaries.

So, in answer to the question, “towards what does greater strength in theoretical thinking, i.e., in the Socratic spirit, point?” we may say a more intensive, robust, scientifically verifiable, objective, paradigmatic worldview. Objective, rational knowledge of “the world” continually increases as science advances/progresses. The next question one may ask is as follows: what happens to the subjective/artistic/creative/irrational side of humanity when objectivity/rationality increases, dominating the spirit of the human race? In other words, what comes of our affective situation and propensity for subjective experience? Nietzsche writes “only by forgetting that he himself is an artistically creating subject, does man live with any repose, security, and consistency” (119). Is it the case, then, that subjective experience

²⁶ Anaxagoras (5th century B.C.E.) was a Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher famous for stating that *nous*, that is, the mind /the intellect, is the cause of the universe.

must suffer at the hands of objective, deceptive rationality?²⁷ Nietzsche's primary concern in *The Birth of Tragedy* seems to be the reclamation of the Dionysian spirit, a spirit that lives without repose, security, or consistency, as the Socratic spirit does. Therefore, the question as to whether Dionysus can exist in a Socratic world becomes a pressing one:

What concerns us here is the question whether those powers to whose influence Greek tragedy succumbed will maintain their ascendancy permanently, thereby blocking for good the renaissance of tragedy and the tragic world view. The fact that the dialectical drive toward knowledge and scientific optimism has succeeded in turning tragedy from its course suggests that there may be an eternal conflict between the theoretical and the tragic world view, in which case tragedy could be reborn only when science had at last been pushed to its limits and, faced with those limits, been forced to renounce its claim to universal validity. For the new hypothetical tragedy the music-practicing Socrates might be a fitting symbol. (Nietzsche 104-105)

²⁷ I use the term "deceptive" here for its correspondence to Nietzsche's "forgetting." Nietzsche believes that it is only by deceiving ourselves, i.e., lying to ourselves, that we are capable of functioning and forming conceptual/abstract frameworks. Much of this comes through the "forgetting" of the deep subjectivity that underlies human experience, a subjectivity of which the Greek Tragedians were so aware. The Socratic/theoretical person has forgotten his/her subjectivity (at least, in part), and it is only through this that he/she is able to build paradigms/systems in sciences and philosophies. Nietzsche elaborates on this point in his essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense," a work that I will refer to more extensively in the next chapter.

The key points in this selection that will be useful for a wider analysis include firstly, the identification of the limit and secondly, the musical Socrates. The limits of theoretical and scientific man, that is, the limits of the Socratic spirit, are the boundaries within which that spirit can exist without collapsing upon itself. By this Nietzsche means that there are extents to which science, theory and reason can exist before reaching a turning point. At this point the Socratic practitioner of science/philosophy realizes that there is a deep unreason that underlies all their reason. This is already evident in Kant (something that Nietzsche makes note of in *The Birth of Tragedy*) in his claim that there are things that are beyond human reason. He reaches this conclusion through the absolute application of reason and thereby shows the extent, that is, the limit, of such reason. The Socratic man thereby collapses in on itself. In order for this limit to be reached, it is clear that the Socratic man must be pushed to this limit. This should not be a problem due to the inherent investigative nature of the Socratic spirit. The theoretical person will always be pushing the limits and extending his/her knowledge, gazing deeper into the nature of things.

The “great” theoretical person expresses what Foucault calls “*the will to knowledge*,” a concept he employs directly in his later work, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. The will to knowledge, as the name suggests, is a drive to know, understand, and establish truth, precisely the qualities within the theoretical person. Strengthening the will to knowledge will push the Socratic/theoretical person to her limits and open the door to the abyss. In a sense, this means that the Socratic person reaches a cliff, i.e., a breaking point. She overlooks this aforementioned cliff and sees nothing but the senseless, endless, eternal, universal abyss that is already realized, however naively or unconsciously, by the

tragic/Dionysian spirit. Nietzsche's assumption is that, at some point, the Socratic spirit will recognize its own limit *instead* of pressing onward. Instead of remaining with a fixed gaze on forms and concepts, the philosopher will find that "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" and nothing more (Nietzsche 117).²⁸

The second important point, which reflects Nietzsche's paradoxical optimism toward the coming/reawakening of tragedy, is the possibility of a spirit that is simultaneously theoretical/scientific and tragic/Dionysian, i.e., "the music-practicing Socrates" (105). This appears as though it could only be the case if there is not an "eternal conflict between the theoretical and tragic world view" (104). There is the possibility of a completely new worldview, one both theoretical and tragic, one of both the will to knowledge (along with the recognition of the fallibility *of* knowledge in the face of the universal (Socrates)), as well as one that wishes to artistically create, drunk on the excess of life (Dionysus). This new end of the theoretical person would be one that embraces the illusion of knowledge, i.e., the appearance of things (Apollo). Nietzsche sees the potential for a new tragedy after the limits of Socratism have been reached, tragedy that combines the Socratic with the Apollonian and the Dionysian spirit. It holds a conscious embracement of the unconscious, and a delight in the illusion of knowledge. This delight is in both the illusion of knowledge *and* knowledge of illusion. It embraces the Apollonian world of appearance and Dionysian world beyond. It can achieve this through an understanding of the illusion as well as comprehending the illusion *as* illusion.

²⁸ It could be argued that the Socratic philosophers, e.g., Kant and Schopenhauer, recognized this limit, but that the Socratic scientists have not yet done so. There is, therefore, a gap between the new tragic spirit in philosophy and a growing Socratism outside of this realm. The disparity between wisdom and scientific knowledge may be much wider than it ever has been. While in ancient times philosophic and scientific pursuits were often of the same ends, and carried out by the same people, in modern times the rigor of specialization has forced a divide in the Socratic spirit.

This optimism in the individual realized as object and subject, as Socrates and Dionysus, lent to us by Nietzsche, might be the very key to analyzing Friedrich Nietzsche himself, the writer and the madman. The convergence of the Socratic and Dionysian worldviews, of philosopher and artist, is expressed in Nietzsche's work. He is the philosopher (theoretical/scientific) whom embraces the limits of philosophy, explored those limits and exposed them *as limits*. To better understand the "limits" that Nietzsche reflects, and the historical specificity of the milieu in which his philosophy/art was birthed, we must turn to Foucault. In his analysis of madness in the 19th century we will find the simultaneity of the subjective and objective sides of the human experience as they encounter the cliff.

The objectifying process might have taken historical flight with the advent of the Socratic man and a new philosophical form of thought in Ancient Greece, but it is not until the 19th century that the brute strength of objectivity turned its gaze on the human being, especially in the mad. Foucault, in his description of the perception of general paralysis, details this objectifying force as one that coincides with the increased scientific rigor of the age. By the 19th century, medicine had, in large part, become a dominant avenue for the treatment of the mad, thereby "hiding its moral accusations behind the objectivity of observations" (523). The treatment of the mad, their repression, their separation/seclusion from the rest of society, could no longer be viewed from the more apparent moral condemnation of madness. It now became an objective, scientific imperative. The seclusion in the asylum was interpreted as an objective necessity, not a debatable moral requirement. As a result of this medical objectification, the guilt infused in the mad became the guilt of an *object*, guilt more liberal/forgiving in *appearance and*

intention, but all the more sinister in consequence.²⁹ While the guilt in madness was lifted off the subject, it was simultaneously infused onto the object. Troublingly, and paradoxically, the subject and object occupy the same space, and are then necessarily the same. Therefore any objectification of the human being is also a subjectification, one in which the subject becomes the hidden shadow of the object. From the objective medical gaze, responsibility was taken off the human being and placed on the physical organism, that is, the object. The distinction between human being and Homo sapien, which we briefly tackled in the study of Bataille (outlined above), once again becomes useful.

The movement in Foucault's 19th century is in distinct opposition to Bataille's birth of humanity with the creation of prehistoric art. While Bataille saw (in the instance of artistic representation) the human being birthed from the artistic/religious impulse of the Homo sapien, Foucault found the reemergence of the human being as object, i.e., as Homo sapien, in the scientific will to knowledge with its objective gaze turned upon itself. The human being looked upon itself, in the depths of its subjectivity in madness, and studied itself as object. The science of psychology and the attempt to "know thyself" (through the negative process of understanding the other, i.e., the madman) alienated the person from herself, making her both the gazer (the scientist/objectifier) *and* the gazed (the object/subject). The unfortunate result was to be nothing other than the perception of the madman as an object, completely stripped of subjectivity and forced into the role of a

²⁹ Though tangential to the focus of this essay, it is important to recognize that in Foucault's writing one can find historical systems/structures of thought/practice that had the best of intentions (or at the least appealed to a more liberal human disposition), but resulted in unfortunate consequences. Foucault never makes such normative statements in his work, but lets the consequence speak for itself. In this case, an attempt to rectify the "problem of madness," that is, return the victim to health and preserve the safety of society through the victim's quarantine, resulted in the objectification of the victim/madman and the alienation of this person from his/her experience. The subjective experience was compromised/martyred for the safety of the norm.

medical/psychiatric tool. For Foucault, the modern human being is the first human being to be *subject*. One becomes subject (and object) through the objectifying force of the will to knowledge. In becoming the subject, one's individual subjectivity is analyzed through an objective lens. In other words, there is an objective nature to the subject and that subject's self-expression, that is, her subjectivity. This is distinguishable from the general subjective experience outlined by both Nietzsche and Bataille, an experience of metaphysical solace with one's position in a subjective, intoxicated world. Foucault finds no such metaphysical solace for the self-alienated, modern human being. Thusly, Foucault does not concern himself with metaphysical questions. Instead he focuses on the particular human experience at a particular time in a particular milieu. This method is employed in order to gain an understanding of the type of experiences bred from different manifestations of society and its institutions/structures.

Thusly, this movement from the responsibility of the subject to that of the object (discussed above) is a reflection of a reversal in the human being's relation to the world as a function of the milieu. Foucault finds that in the 19th century the scientific culture/institution resulted in *the destruction of a distinction between the internal and the external* in the human experience. Foucault writes:

Now all madness, and madness in its entirety, were to have an external equivalent; or rather, the very essence of madness was to turn men into objects, chasing them to the outside of themselves, ultimately reducing them to the level of a nature pure and simple, to the level of things.³⁰ (524)

³⁰ A more detailed discussion of the resulting sense of alienation that is captured by this objectification can be found in Ch. 1. As the mad are chased "outside of themselves" they are then, separated from

One of the many striking things about this passage is the pairing of “pure nature” with a new relationship to the external. If one is to be “reduced” to nature, *and* one’s internality is powered by the external, then one could suppose that one’s nature is anti-natural, blank, empty, void, etc. In other words, one’s “nature,” one’s internal being, is a chasm. One becomes what one is only through interaction with that which one isn’t, that is, the other. This, as is investigated more thoroughly in Ch. 1, reveals the way in which the truth of madness, as it is shown through its objectification, exposes the general truth of the human being, i.e., the lack of truth, our fundamental exteriority. One’s subjectivity *is* one’s objectivity. One’s interiority and nature is constituted only through the objectifying gaze with which one forms truths in the world. When this gaze holds the same position as the object gazed upon, i.e., the human being, the truth of man is uncovered. The anti-natural nature is brought to light.

Foucault makes evident in “The Anthropological Circle” that this “essential moment of objectification” is revealed only in that which is *other* to the normal gaze, that is, in madness (525). It is madness that portrays the human subjective experience as objective. It only proves said experience by being gazed upon by that which it constitutes and by its *other-ness*. For instance, Foucault discusses a specific type of madness prevalent in the 19th century discourse known as moral insanity. The victims of moral insanity had a “disorder in their action” (524). “Moral insanity” corresponded with a spontaneous action for which no reason could be given. The morally insane manifested their illness only in action, not in substance. There was no interior cause or motive behind

themselves, i.e., alienated. This shows that the subjective experience is not destroyed in objectification; rather, it is repressed and hidden.

the action. The insanity was only manifest in its exterior manifestation. This was the closest form of mental illness to the root “truth” Foucault extracts from the 19th century experience of madness. Insanity proper, “the spontaneous psychologization of man,” was exemplified through the morally insane. The spontaneity, or suddenness of which Foucault speaks, is of the moment in which the inner subjectivity is expressed external as objective. Inner subjectivity becomes visible and realizable only through its outward expression. The truth of human subjectivity in the modern period is, then, revealed by objectification, by the mechanistic, goal-oriented, objectivity of will.

Moral insanity showed the necessity of madness *as other* for the perception of the truth of human subjectivity in the 19th century:

...It (moral insanity) showed at a perceptible level, bodies, modes of behavior, mechanisms and objects, the inaccessible moment of subjectivity, and just as that subjective moment could only have a concrete existence for knowledge in objectivity, that objectivity could only be acceptable and have meaning through what it expressed of the subject.
(525)

In other words, the only way that the search for the truth of subjectivity could be expressed is through objective knowledge. However, this objective knowledge could only be expressed through the subject. On both sides of this dialectic one must be made other to oneself only to reaffirm oneself. The spontaneity of moral insanity is relevant in this discussion because it reflects the sudden transference from subjective, interior experience

to objective, exterior reality. *It is in this instant, and its reversal in the psychologisation of this instant, that the modern human subject/object is formed.*

The human being, as subject and object, only comes into being in the modern era as the object of its own gaze. Here it is important to note that this does not necessarily dispute the accounts given by George Bataille and Friedrich Nietzsche, though nothing necessarily hinges on a reconciliation amongst these genealogists. The human subjective experience could be in existence since the time of the Lascaux cave paintings and prehistoric religion without there yet being a human subject. Similarly, the radical objectivity of the scientific/Socratic man may have sparked to life in Ancient Greece without there yet being a conception of the human as object. It is only once this objective gaze is turned back upon the human being, i.e., his/her subjectivity, that the human being becomes subject/object. This element did not come to fruition until the rising psychologisation of the human being in the 19th century. In fact, it is necessary for subjectivity and objectivity to exist in order for the subject/object to exist. The objective gaze looks upon the subjective experience, thereby making it an object and that objective truth the subject.

As has been noted above, and at length in the preceding chapter, this simultaneity of subjective/objective experience in the modern human being has caused a degree of self-alienation. In becoming the self-reflective object of one's own gaze one becomes other to one's self. This internal alienation, revealed in the terror of madness, the end of liberty in its objectification, and the chaos of the madman's language, could be the cause of great internal strife. The politics of the self and the investigation into this internal alienation in the modern period were of the highest importance to Michel Foucault.

Though he rarely offers any normative statements or prescriptive remarks in his writing, there are moments, brief passages, and sparks of light that hint at his passionate underlying idealism. The final pages of “The Anthropological Circle” may provide some insight into how one may cope with, and affirm, the self-alienation of the modern human subject. In the following chapter we will foray into a possible prescription for, and affirmation of, self-alienation. Insight into the deep, subjective human experience can manifest itself in innumerable folds. One avenue of discovery (and darkness) that all three philosophers embrace and reflect is that of artistic creation. Perhaps there is a way in which one’s aesthetic experience, critically engaged, can strengthen, and affirm, one’s status in the modern age as subject/object.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD THE INFINITE, AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: IMPLICATIONS OF MADNESS AND THE OUEVRE

Foucault's hostility towards stagnant views of human nature and subjective experience is well documented throughout his corpus. The anti-natural nature of human experience, as it is elucidated by the internal/external dialectic and the subsequent formation of the subject/object, spells the death of nature. Human nature is its absence; its truth lies in its nothingness. It is through the ever intruding scientific gaze upon the mad that this truth is realized, however obliquely. The modern human subject is established negatively, through insight into that which is other to it, thus positing an exterior that is distinct and separate from the interior. For Foucault's 19th century, the mad inhabit the space that is this exterior, exterior to human nature, a revocation of humanity. However, awareness of the madman's experience as yet another form of human experience, and "normal" human experience as established in relation to the madman/other, leads to the realization that there is no inherent or essential difference between the madman and the normal modern subject. They are established as distinct entities only in relation to one another. Ironically, it is the scientific psychologisation of the mad, alongside the pursuit of wisdom in the theoretical/Socratic philosopher (namely, Foucault), which reveal the lack of scientific ground upon which the entire construct stands. Madness, unlike mental

illness, is exposed as no more than a social edifice, without any scientific foundation.³¹

Perhaps it is the case that madness will close in upon itself as the destruction of its truth becomes evident. In other words, the experience of madness and the enormity of self-alienation which it breeds might one day vanish from the collective experience.

In the first appendix to *The History of Madness*, that is, “Madness, the Absence of an Oeuvre,” Foucault exposes his own hopefulness for this more idealistic future. He imagines the West’s posterity inquisitively studying The Modern Age’s human experience: “What, they will wonder, was that strange delimitation that was in force from the early middle ages until the twentieth century, and perhaps beyond? Why did Western culture expel to its extremities the very thing in which it might just have equally recognized itself...?” (Foucault 542). For the first time in all of *History of Madness* Foucault writes speculatively on the future, a future in which the normal do not expel the outlier. Foucault is reaching for a future in which the individual recognizes his/herself as that which is other to oneself and *embraces* this fact. Why expel the extremity, and hence oneself (now destined for self-alienation), especially if a negative definition of oneself (in relation to the other) is the necessary mode in which one’s modern subjective experience is established? In short, why marginalize that which constitutes the self?

Foucault opens the appendix with the idealistic hope that “One day, perhaps, we will no longer know what madness was. Its forms will have closed up on itself” (541). It is important to make note of “perhaps” in the above quotation. There is no certainty of

³¹ “Mental illness and madness—two different configurations, which came together and became confused from the seventeenth century onwards, and which are now moving apart before our eyes, or rather inside our language” (544). Mental illness is a scientific and physiological construct. Madness, an experience of a particular category of people and their language implied both “psychiatric knowledge and a kind of anthropological reflection” (544). Foucault hints that Freud’s psychoanalysis at the end of the 19th century may have been the end of the psychologisation of the subject. Freud worked on madness. Modern psychology works on mental illness.

such a future, for even if madness is removed from the experience of future generations, the underlying societal structure upon which it rested might remain. Foucault believes that it is possible for future, as yet unknown, technological advancements in medicine to wipe mental illness from the face of society. However, this does not mean that the modern person's relationship to madness (in the abstract) will change:

...that medical progress might one day cause mental illness to disappear, like leprosy and tuberculosis; but that one thing will remain, which is the relationship between man and his fantasies, his impossible, his non-corporeal pain, his carcass of the night...that that which is most precarious, far more than the constancies of the pathological, is in fact unalterable: the relationship of a culture to the very thing that it excludes, and more precisely the relationship between our own culture and that truth about itself which, distant and inverted, it uncovers and covers up in madness. (542-543)

Though pathological behavior and mental illness could one day be "cured" by medicine, the underlying relationship between modern culture and that which it excludes may remain. In fact, in the deathly, future silence in which madness is not confined, but rather completely destroyed/cured, what hope remains for a society seeking its own truth? If the other has been so far condemned as to exist only in abstraction, where will society turn to listen to its own truth? Where is one left to look for reconciliation and acceptance/affirmation of one's self-alienation?

These sorts of questions might lead one to an understanding of why Foucault focuses so heavily on the discourse on madness in the 19th century. This discourse opened up the language of madness, a language that had been silenced during the Great Confinement of the Classical Age. It is only in the language of madness that society can listen to its outliers and hence see itself reflected. Therefore it is important to study the proliferation of this discourse, as well as the moment of its greatest abundance, before medicine becomes so rigorous as to forever silence the madness of the mentally ill. Society is constituted in relation to the mad and can only know its own truth in relation to the truth of the mad. Studying the language of madness is, then, studying the truth of the modern human subject. Greater knowledge of one's own subjective experience lessens the burden of alienation and allows one a greater ability/propensity to roam the depths of one's own subjectivity. It is therefore the case that *the language of madness holds the key to a greater subjective experience*. One must then embrace madness, embrace the discourse on madness, and engage in the proliferation of this discourse. If such an undertaking is not pursued, then the window that opened with 19th psychologisation and psychoanalysis will slowly close as technological advances in medicine cure mental illness.

If one seeks to undertake a greater/richer subjective experience in the 21st century, in the waning light of madness, then certain prescriptive questions arise; how does one engage in the discourse on madness? How does one use this language to better express one's own subjective experience? *I posit that an engagement with art/artistic creation, as*

*it relates to the infinity of becoming, is one possible mode of proliferating the discourse, and hence a path towards greater subjective experience.*³²

The final pages of “The Anthropological Circle” briefly explore the relationship between madness and the artist’s body of work, or oeuvre. To spare future confusion, it is important to note that there is no necessary connection between madness and the oeuvre. A prolific body of work and artistic creation can exist quite independently of madness. The relationship between madness and the oeuvre is not one in which they coincide, but one of a qualitative nature at the limit of the oeuvre before the plunge into madness. In fact, absolute madness is opposed to the oeuvre, exposing its “outer limit” (536). Foucault writes, “Madness is an absolute rupture of the oeuvre: it is the constitutive moment of an abolition, which founds the truth of the oeuvre in time; it delineates the outer limit, the line of its collapse” (536). The oeuvre with which one must engage is not strictly the oeuvre of the mad, as no such oeuvre exists, but rather the oeuvre of the one on the verge of madness, the immanently mad. The oeuvre may “explode into madness” but is never contemporaneous with it. Foucault consistently sites three prolific, mentally ill artists in order to make his point: Friedrich Nietzsche, Vincent Van Gogh, and Antonin Artaud. Each of these artists had a mental illness, produced a rich oeuvre, and had his life/work cut short by the tragedy of his madness.

When one looks at the oeuvre of any of these three exemplars, or one of an innumerable host of others, one must inquire into the truth of this oeuvre, i.e., whether or not it reflects anything about the “nature” of the modern subjective experience. Foucault

³² This is not a claim that Foucault makes or endorses anywhere in *History of Madness*. This is, however, a possible prescription, and its origin may not have been possible without my engagement with this specific text. This thesis is evidence of its own claim. My awareness of a particular mode of becoming is only accessible through an engagement with Foucault’s artwork, *History of Madness*.

takes this task upon himself, writing on the truth of the oeuvre in question: “was it madness or art? Inspiration or fantasy? The spontaneous chattering of words, or the pure origin of a language?” (535). The oeuvre, occurring at its limits, before the abyss of madness, rests at a precarious position between the inspired genius of the artwork, and the fantastical, empty babble of the mad. Is Nietzsche’s body of work the prophetic ring of an insight only experienced as an exterior, or is it the nonsensical, hyperbolic poetry of the insane? The oeuvre critiqued at the interstice between inspiration and fantasy opens upon itself a question of truth. Madness’s total opposition to the oeuvre is that which establishes the oeuvre, and gives it its truth. “*Where there is an oeuvre, there is no madness*: and yet madness is contemporaneous with the oeuvre, as it is the harbinger of the time of its truth” (537). The truth of the oeuvre is established by a limit, a relationship to that which it is not, namely madness. This follows the same structure as that of the identity of the modern subject in his/her relation to madness. In both cases madness represents the extremity, the limit. If one crosses over into madness, then one delves into a void, losing the oeuvre, losing oneself.

However, this “limit” implies a moment at which madness and the oeuvre converge. For an instant madness and the oeuvre meet if only in order to delineate the point at which they expel the other, thus revealing their opposition and interdependence. In order for the oeuvre, that is, the artistic body, to be given meaning, it must be established against the endless void of the meaningless. Meaning, then, definite and concrete, can only be realized in its opposition to the indefinite and endless. The meaning of an artwork, its reflection and objectification of the subjective experience, is only a reality through its relationship to the meaninglessness that it borders. This is precisely

why inspiration and fantasy are simultaneously in close proximity and mutually exclusive. In order for a work to be inspired it must be posited against that which is fantastical. The inspiration and definitive greatness of an oeuvre reveals itself in the infinite. The coincidence of Nietzsche's oeuvre and life portray an excess of meaning against the void of meaninglessness, e.g., the richness of *The Will To Power* against the hollow silence of Nietzsche's subsequent breakdown.

What does this mean for our project of subjective experience in the modern age? How might the coincidence of meaning and meaninglessness, as it is expressed in the artwork, work toward a broader, more "liberated" modern subject?

If it is the case that meaning is established against the meaningless, then it would also seem to be the case that meaning is endlessly flexible. In other words, meaning is opened to its own plurality in its establishment *as* meaning (itself) *against* the meaningless, i.e., the infinite. The origin of meaning is in its absence. Thusly, the particular meaning with which one is constituted is arbitrary and meaningless. There is no truth to self-identity except that truth which one attributes to oneself against the nothingness of infinity. In other words, the interstice of madness and the oeuvre, as a boundary between meaning and the meaningless, reveals the *choice* that establishes meaning. There is nothing upon which meaning is founded except for meaninglessness. How then does meaning establish itself in the particular form it takes? There is no precedent for any specific form in the meaningless. *Meaning* therefore seems to arise out of the blue, a big bang, a point of light against an infinite darkness. *Meaning*, with no precedent, can be the result of nothing other than *will*, faced with the void, the nothingness that is our anti-natural nature. The will, with an unhindered, uncaused

movement, creates meaning against a negative backdrop. The will, in an unfathomable act, creates something from nothing.

This, at minimum, establishes two facts: firstly, that something is established in opposition to nothingness, and thereby holds no truth at its foundation. This was observed above in relation to the modern subjective experience and will not be revisited at any length. Secondly, *the essence of human existence is creative*. If the human being has an anti-natural nature, i.e., is void of nature, embodied nothingness, then it must of necessity create nature for itself. In order to be, the human being must create, and thusly is of necessity an inventive, meaningful, artistic/aesthetic being. At the base of every word, scientific principle, and ego lies an artistic moment of creation, propelled to movement by will, without cause or meaning. There is no meaning *to* meaning, no great teleology to which our knowledge lays claim. There is only the decision, or rather, the impulse, toward self-creation. It is this impulse, and the ability to reconstitute oneself through strength of will, that acts as the instant of human becoming.

Meaning, truth, and self-identity are all established in relation to the void that is madness. *They exist because they reject nothingness*. Since it is the case that the oeuvre functions in the same manner, i.e., as a rejection of madness, one might be able to sense an important way in which the meaning of the oeuvre relates to the formation of truth, self-identity, etc.

The oeuvre, by its very nature as that which is other to madness, is meaningful, i.e., an object infused with meaning/truth. As an object infused with meaning, and also as the expression of an aesthetic experience, the artwork holds a special place in the discovery of new subjective terrain. It is the artwork, perhaps amongst other things, that

permits one to reanalyze and reconstitute one's subjective experience. With a critical engagement towards that which embodies human subjective experience, one can acquire a more insightful understanding into the possibilities of that subjective experience. We will return to this point, but first we must note why the artwork and oeuvre are closer to our subjective reality than anything else, and hence why they are useful for this project.

The artwork has often been purposeless, without function or use, but simultaneously infused with meaning. This is especially true of The Modern Age in which many of the traditional roles undertaken by the artwork have been usurped/supplanted due to a technological innovations and/or ideological alterations. This grants the oeuvre an odd place in the social sphere, one that invests within it a high degree of meaning without making it useful. There is no necessary objective to the artwork, no reason for its existence, no political or tangible purpose that could not be undertaken by some other class of object. This makes the oeuvre especially troublesome. What reason can be given to an excess of artistic work? This superfluous nature of the artwork could reflect the excess of subjective experience, an excess that itself reflects the endless chattering of madness at its outer limit. The artwork's tie to madness, then, is in its excessiveness. The artwork is granted meaning, but this is *the excess of meaning*. The oeuvre is meaningful in a way that natural objects are not: the oeuvre is the creation of the human being in the richest of forms. If, as we have stated above, it is true that the "essence" of the human being is creativity via will, and that creativity comes in the establishment of meaning, then the artwork is bound with a meaningfulness that gives it a close relationship to the "essence" of humanity. The relationship between the artwork and an existential truth of the human condition is inseparable. There is, of necessity, an

excess. The outpouring of robust subjectivity is captured in the moment of artistic creation, and that moment, beyond necessity, is fundamental.³³

A particular experience with art could be an experience that is absolutely essential to human nature, but such a claim would be in opposition to Foucault's work, which implies an emptiness where "nature" ought to reside. If such a claim were to be made, then it would have to radically redefine art, i.e., make art inclusive of all creative endeavors. Since all that is meaningful for the human being is the result of a necessarily creative will, redefining art as such would open it up to an endless plurality, causing the definition to collapse in upon itself. If everything is art, then art loses its meaning, and ergo nothing is art.³⁴ Art in the Modern Age must be infused with meaning, even if that is of its meaninglessness. Such a reconceptualization of subjective experience in its coincidence with an absolutely aesthetic experience does not suffice as a prescriptive answer for the modern human subject. Aesthetic experience cannot be absolute because the modern subject is necessarily also an object, the object of one's own scientific gaze. Once more, subjectivity as absolutely aesthetic paradoxically makes everything meaningless through the complete extension of meaning.³⁵ The modern subject must restrain meaning in order to maintain meaning, and therefore he/she must objectify art as a concrete definition with boundaries/limitations.

³³ It should be noted here that artistic creation itself is not fundamental for the expression of each individual subject. There simply must be art, or at the least, an aesthetic experience of the world, with which one can engage with one's subjectivity. One could also open up the concept of "artistic creation." A deeply aesthetic experience is itself creative, though it might not directly involve painterly, literary, or musical talents.

³⁴ This is not necessarily a re-conception that ought to be discouraged, as it would limit the alienation one feels from the rest of the world. In fact, one might feel a greater connectivity with the world since it is the meaningful object of one's creation. Since one is created by that which one isn't, and one creates the outer world, the dialectic between the interior and exterior will collapse, resulting in a unity. This unity might breed an experience that frees one from alienation.

³⁵ This follows a structure that parallels the objectification of liberty, elaborated upon in chapter one.

However, it is also not the case that one ought to abandon aesthetic experience altogether in favor of the scientific/theoretical approach. The objectifying forces of science and reason limit the subjective experience in an entirely different manner. While the absolutely aesthetic experience caves in upon itself in its excess, creating meaninglessness, the objective/scientific experience hones itself in on a particular, without regard for excess. The scientific experience seeks to establish and understand meaning, i.e., learn the “truth.” Thusly, the scientific mode, in its objectivity, suffocates creativity, that is, it smothers that which makes meaning. In restraining that which makes meaning in its pursuit of meaning/truth, it undermines its own goal and cuts itself off from any establishment of new meaning. There is only the possibility of opposition to the paradigm once the paradigm has recognized its own end *in its other*. This occurred, according to Foucault, in the window of 19th century psychologisation. The scientific experience only sees the truth of the object as that which is lacking.

The modern experience is that of the subject/object. In their dialectic and necessary interplay they reveal themselves *in the other*, preventing the absolutism of either. Therefore there should be no call for a total re-conceptualization of subjectivity; accordingly, Foucault does not offer one. However, awareness of one’s position as subject/object can amount to a new, active engagement with that experience of alienation. How exactly such an engagement would manifest itself can be speculated upon using the revelation of humanity’s anti-natural nature, as it was exposed by the language of madness. This revelation is itself historically contingent and can therefore apply only to subjects who are subjects of that historical moment, i.e., the Modern Age.

Since it is the creativity of the will, which manifests itself out of humanity's essential nothingness, i.e., the anti-natural nature, it is the aesthetic experience that precedes the scientific. The will must predate the truth because it is the will that invents the truth. There is no truth until the will wills it into existence. This creative, anti-essentialist origin of truth exposes a moment that precedes objective/scientific thinking, precedes even causality. It exposes the unreason at the heart of human existence and it is only against this void that objectivity can constitute itself. The void does not constitute itself against the truth; the void is the original position. In other terms, the meaningless exists before meaning. There is nothing meaningful before the rise of the human intellect. It is only once meaning is ascribed to the meaningless from which it was birthed that objective/scientific experience ensues. The founding abyss, the creative impulse, is a reflection of the aesthetic experience, and it is this experience that must manifest itself in a foundational capacity. It must be recalled as the basis for the specific experience of the modern subject/object.

Thusly it must be acknowledged that the aesthetic experience informs our scientific/objective pursuits. More importantly, it must also be recalled in the arts, a domain that can be more fully separated from objectivist tendencies. Art is not of necessity infused with a vigorous aesthetic experience, but it is the domain in which this experience is most robust and frequent. Art is therefore the place one ought to most commonly look to for the aesthetic experience. However, as was noted above, objective/scientific experience can, and will, limit the truth of an object or concept. If objectivity seeps its fingers into an artistic domain, then it has the ability to stifle the aesthetic experience as it pertains to art. The aesthetic experience, as that which gives rise

to objectivity through its creative force, could be silenced by its own child. This would thereby severally limit both scientific and objective experience, making the human experience frighteningly more limited. It then becomes necessary to keep said objectivity away from the artwork and the artwork safe from the dictatorship of reason. The oeuvre needs a space apart from scientific observation, or at the least, one in which aesthetic experience is the primary reaction, not a need for truth. This is a possible step toward a more robust modern subject.

Aesthetic experience, in its primacy over objectivity (especially within the domain of art), puts the truth at a distance from the physical, sensational, phenomenological experience of the artwork *in itself*. It allows for a plurality of responses to an artwork. These responses are not judged on “correctness” but rather their reality; thusly the embracement of the aesthetic sensation is the affirmation of the lived subjective experience. The interaction with the artwork is *lived through the aesthetic sensation* rather than understood through a scientific distance. At least such is the case at the most basic level.

The oeuvre’s separation from dominating, primary objectivity opens the possibility for a greater understanding of one’s modern subjectivity. Before any objective or critical insight into the artwork, one must first embrace the sensation that occurs concurrently with the physical interaction with said artwork. The awareness and openness to sensation allows for a more intuitive interaction with the artwork. Intuition can then subsequently interact with the scientific/theoretical faculty of reason in order to establish a more objective meaning. It should be noted, however, that the objectivity of the artwork has its basis on that which is subjective, i.e., the subject’s intuition/sensation, that is, a

creation of the will. “The strength and power of the sense—this is the essential thing in a well-constituted and complete man: the splendid ‘animal’ must be given first—what could any ‘humanization’ matter otherwise!” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 538). The more “human” matter to which Nietzsche alludes is one that creates truth, an objective matter of reason. This can never come to fruition if the “animal” and sensational are not well-formed. Therefore, if one’s goal is to see the Enlightenment project through to its darkest end, it is firstly necessary to *live*, to experience the sensation before one objectifies.³⁶

If objectification/interpretation seeks to predate the aesthetic sensation not only will it fail, but more importantly it will *mask that which is most fundamental* to the subjective engagement with artwork, that is, the sensation. The sensation, and therefore the aesthetic experience, must be liberated from the oppression of objectivity. If art is infused with objective purpose, then it has the potential to hide the subjective experience art is capable of revealing. This thereby hides one even further from oneself. The possibility of being other is crushed in a pseudo-confinement of subjectivity. If subjectivity is hidden in that which has the most direct potential as an expression of subjectivity, i.e., the artwork, then the human experience is thusly diminished.

If this is the case, and we assume (not without some danger) that a heightening of human experience is to be highly valued, then art must be liberated from its infusion with objectivity, purpose, meaning, function, etc. Art must function as the functionless, i.e., it should be treated as *autonomous*. It is only by allowing art to constitute its own meaning

³⁶ This might reflect the way in which, according to Foucault, the 19th century experience of madness was expressed with greater passion *and* neutrality than it had been in previous centuries. The concurrence of investment and disinterest parallels the heightening of subjective experience with the attainment of greater objectivity.

that it has the potential to engage critically with the aesthetic experience and thereby our modern subjectivity. The aesthetic sensation must be affirmed as that which is good/desirable in and of itself. This would therefore create a play between an autonomous subjectivity and an autonomous artwork. Together they have the potential to heighten the meaning/experience of the other in a positively dialectical relationship. This autonomy coincides with a liberation that allows for the possibility of consistent self-reconstitution and a general playfulness with one's world. This autonomy is the reflection of the strongest and freest of wills. The theoretical/intellectual emerges from the autonomous will as a superfluity, albeit an incredible one:

The free intellect copies human life, but it considers this life to be something good and seems to be quite satisfied with it. That immense framework and planking of concepts to which the needy man clings his whole life long in order to preserve himself is nothing but a scaffolding and toy for the most audacious feats of the liberated intellect. And when it smashes this framework to pieces, throws it into confusion, and puts it back together in an ironic fashion, pairing the most alien things and separating the closest, it is demonstrating that it has no need of these makeshifts of indigence and that it will now be guided by intuitions rather than by concepts. ("On Truth and Lies in the Non-moral Sense" 122)

Nietzsche's "free intellect" does not seek to establish itself as something in opposition to the form of "human life" but rather accepts itself as a copy. It does not condemn the

other, its own anti-natural nature, to madness. It does not seek to nullify the void from which it arose. On the contrary. The free intellect sees itself as that which is without framework or restriction. It arose from the meaningless and can now constitute meaning however it may see fit. In “smashing the framework” and “pairing the alien” the intellect opens to an objective plurality, perhaps infinitely.

In this continuous readjustment of meaning and pluralism of objectivity, the modern subject/object finds him/herself with a more robust subjectivity, thereby, however so slightly, easing the pain of self-alienation. In an anonymous interview,³⁷ Foucault expresses his hope for the future of artistic engagement: “I can’t help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it” (Foucault 326). Perhaps it is the case that such an engagement with the purest creation of human subjectivity, that is, the artwork, has the potential to “light fires.” The light of the raging flame grows infinitely. As a wildfire, untamed, it envelops more within itself, positing less as its other. The fire grows with the oeuvre, affirming its fundamental nothingness in creativity and affirming its historical specificity in a playful engagement with itself.

³⁷ One should note that Foucault’s decision to be interviewed anonymously on such a topic corresponds nicely with the idea that art should remain autonomous. When one reads an interview with “Foucault,” or any other known author/thinker, it is infused with a particular, inescapable meaning. This is not the case when an interview is with “Anonymous.” The anonymity of the interview allows for the ideas to speak on their own terms, outside of the influence of Foucault’s prestige. One’s interaction with the interview one is reading is then heightened by the influence of one’s own subjective experience. It can be read in a multitude of ways in which Foucault is not normally read and could acquire a plurality of meanings that are contradictory the life of Foucault.

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