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Sue Golding
Poiesis and Politics as Ecstatic Fetish:
*Foucault's Ethical Demand**

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"Seduction is *not* a passive form of incitement."
M. Foucault, History of Sexuality, *pp. 95-6*
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Toward the end of his third volume on the *History of Sexuality*, where-upon he expressly links the "art of living" with the care of oneself, Foucault invites us to think through the moral and ethical implications of such a connection. It is a troubled connection, indeed, a dangerous path, and we are forewarned of the trouble ahead. "...[A]s the arts of living and the care of the self are refined," says Foucault, "some precepts emerge that seem to be rather similar to those that will be formulated in the later moral systems.

But one should not be misled by the analogy. Those moral systems will define other modalities of the relation to self: a characterization of the ethical substance based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will for a personal god; [...] a mode of ethical fulfilment that tends toward self-renunciation. (Foucault, 1988: 239-40).

At the risk of too rapidly citing these dangers or stating their implications in too coarse a way, here is what lies at the heart of the matter: on the face of it, comparisons of apples and oranges do not – because they cannot – yield the same fruit. But why not? What is it that makes this comparison untenable?

It is not enough to point out the obvious, says Foucault; to wit: that these 'latter [judeo-christian] systems', these 'modalities' might sound like, might even appear similar to, earlier modalities touching upon body and soul and the relations therein or thereabouts ascribed – but now, given a 'different' socialized horizontal history we might call 'the Law' (whether that Law be reconstituted with a different set of markers: the singularity of God, or reason or renunciation or madness or whatever), that these comparisons must now come to an abrupt halt. Would it to be that there *could* be a transcen-

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* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the London (UK) Foucault Conference, June 25, 1994 and at the International Congress of Michel Foucault, organized by Professor Paul Bouissac, University of Toronto and the Institut Michel Foucault [Paris], on Oct. 12-16, 1994, Toronto, Canada. That version, entitled, "The Politics of Foucault's Poetics, or, better yet: the ethical demand of ecstatic fetish," was subsequently published as part of the conference proceedings in J. Squires (ed.), "J'accuse", *New Formations*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, May 1995). This is an enlarged version of the original article.

dental move or over-arching archimedean point, i.e., some kind of 'outside', however opaque or permeable or dynamic, that *would* allow us to decipher the belonging-together, the identity and, hence the comparison (or indeed, the dissimilarity), of these modalities.[1] No, this is not why they are incomparable. Nor, on the other hand, is it enough to suspend a comparative association out of some kind of (formal) onto-theo-logical disengagement from the very concept of identity/difference and the dialectical contradiction or limit therein implied or so synthesized, whilst retaining the very metaphysics of transcendence itself.

No.

These comparisons cannot be made, as such, because a something 'else' or something 'other' is at play in Foucault's work, an elsewhere or otherness that is located precisely in the very parenthesis of representation; that is, in the nomadic 'in between' of the limit; in the unchartered and multiple (but no less specific) distancings and/or journeyings required to make an identity, and therewith, a naming, a meaning – a 'some kind of' truth – possible.[2]

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[1] Though Foucault will develop the question – and the actuality – of identity along quite a different route than that of his philosophic predecessor, we could also take some cues from Heidegger on this point: "If we think of belonging *together* in the customary way," says Heidegger, "the meaning of being is determined by the word together, that is, by its unity. In that case, 'to belong' means as much as: to be assigned and placed into the order of a 'together', established in the unity of a manifold, combined into the unity of a system, mediated by the unifying center of an authoritative synthesis. Philosophy represents this belonging together as *nexus* and *connexio*, the necessary connection of the one with the other. However, belonging together can also be thought of as *belonging* together. This means: the "together" is now determined by the belonging ... That is how things look – until we take a closer look and let the matter speak for itself." (Heidegger 1969: 29).

[2] We will return to this claim shortly when discussing Foucault's notion of a *conversio ad se*, developed mainly in the *History of Sexuality*, vol. III; i.e., the transformation of the self; its creation/making/inventing of "self-hoodedness" (self-mastery of the self-to-self relation). Perhaps it is worth mentioning that this kind of distancing/spacing (which begins to produce a wholly different concept of otherness) can be found throughout his work – certainly the same themes resonate in his introduction to *Herculine Barbine* (1980); or in his work on transgression (Foucault 1977) or his imaginary dialogues with Blanchot (Foucault 1987a); or in his remarks on rationality/truth games. For further reference to his development and use of fluidity and discontinuity, and the 'distancing' this requires and exploits for these truth-identity relations, see for example, his *Death and the Labyrinth* (Foucault 1987b); "Politics and the Study of Discourse," and "The Problem Rationalities," (Burchell, et al. 1991: 53-72; esp. 79-82, respectively); "Truth and Power," (Foucault 1972). On the other hand, perhaps it is also worth mentioning that by finding these threads throughout his work, this 'find' is not meant to imply that 'he always already knew what he was trying to say' and then just went about and said it, so that his work might be interpreted as

Indeed, this something else or something other is rather more like the unnameable space or domain of knowledge, self-knowledge, captured by Foucault in reference to Plato's metaphor of the eye:

'How can the eye see itself?' [Plato asks]. The answer is apparently very simple, but in fact it is very complicated. For Plato, one cannot simply look at oneself in a mirror. One has to look into another eye, that is, one *in* oneself, however in oneself in the shape of the eye of the other. (Foucault 1984a: 367)

Here we begin to find clues for a different articulation of self-formation/self-knowledge, one which is formed, of necessity, from an 'other' relation, not quite specified. Yet rather than the supposed deep and violent cut of identity drawn from exile or negation, for Foucault it will be but a queer and superficial wound; or, perhaps better put, it will be but a metamorphosis of surface distances, whose 'other' meaning is not constituted by recourse to a mediation born of contradiction – dialectic or otherwise. Like the gaping, open mouth of a pig before slaughter (is she laughing out of ignorance; is she screaming out of knowledge – maybe she is doing both, at exactly the same time),[3] the perpetual corruption of an edge or boundary that stands neither as an 'outside' nor as an 'in' to any language-game, now quietly replaces what was once considered the absolute necessity of conceptualizing any identity – symbolic, real, or imagined; to wit, the im-mediate "/" of the either/or.

And yet, this something else or something other is not simply a 'trace' of the not-nameable representation standing before, beyond or beside the Law. Nor for that matter is it 'difference', if, by difference, we mean to say 'not-the-same'. Nor, finally, is it 'lack', if by lack we mean an incommensurable 'empty space' waiting to be filled. Apologies to Baudrillardians and Lacanians on this score, but this something else or something other is not a trace or a lack at all; nor is it an abyss, a shame, an embarrassment, an error, a negation, a castration, a sacramental rite, celebration or void. For we

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though it were one long univocal proposition or even celebration regarding sex, identity, politics – indeed, life itself. As one of the few creative intellectuals of our time – one whose intellectual work was also his artistry and, not surprisingly, his passion – Foucault had the creative nerve to deduce new propositions from his various works and, by way of example, encouraged others to do so too. "Leave it to the police and bureaucrats to see that our papers are in order"; he once chillingly threw back at the academic posers,"at least spare us their morality when we write".

[3] The image of the gaping wound as smiling pig as (morbid) metamorphosis was first brought to my attention through the wonderfully unconventional writings of Irving Massey (1976).

are not dealing with representation, as in identity, in any of its symbolic order or symbolic disarray. Nor are we dealing with a representation around which an x or y can be reproduced or deduced or induced, leaving, in its wake, a remainder *tout cout.*

Something much more excessive, or ungrateful and greasy, something much more melancholic, subtle, and in some ways, more precarious, is nagging at the skin of our so-called (and seemingly not comparable) fruit. Rather than the bold and sweeping morass of dialectical contradiction (subjectivity v. objectivity – and the transcendentalism this implies – be damned!), Foucault is insisting upon an 'other' as a 'something else', a *bios*, whose porous-like creation or invention, whose *multiple*-singularity is itself contoured by, while simultaneously contouring, the very processes (reciprocal, wandering, mannered) of tradition, custom, habit (1984a:344-51). To put this slightly differently, this strange kind of 'otherness' *refuses* the neat one-to-one singularity/identity ratio of truth (meta-narrative or otherwise), wherein the 'other' comes to mean that which does not quite 'correspond' or 'fit in'. Indeed, this 'otherness' is completely at odds with one that might imply or mean a 'not-of-the-Something' – a point Foucault stresses often enough when writing directly on sex and/or sex-as-gender. Otherness, the other, etc., cannot be reduced to or be equated with or seen as circumscribing the identity of 'those who do not fit in': the (straight) woman, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite, or all three.[4] No more is otherness meant as the negatively configured, excessive 'blip' on the screen of dialectics, than is it meant to uncover the true, point-for-point, identity of Truth, and therewith, of any identity, be that identity secret or wrong or even the norm.[5] Unlike the glib proclamation, which in days (not yet) gone by announced,

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[4] Foucault is basically attacking the widespread but no less facile tendency of those political philosophies which forward in one way or another (either for progressive reasons or not) the concept of those who 'do not fit in' (which include, also: the Jews, people of colour, travellers, etc.). In reality those theories only take as a given exactly what they are trying to prove (around oppression, who is 'the enemy' and so forth). Interestingly enough, Adorno (1966) makes a similar point in his "Critique of Positive Negation," though, unlike Foucault, Adorno tries to rescue the negative from a hegelian positivity and poorly understood freudianism, wherein for example, 'woman', becomes 'other', and, in more contemporary times, as the female 'castrated' container (as it were) always-already pitted against and subsumed in terms of the 'phallic-male' real. "Against this," says Adorno, "the seriousness of unswerving negation lies in its refusal to lend itself to *sanctioning* things as they *are*." (Adorno 1966: 159) [my emphasis]. See also my "Curiosity," (Golding: 1995), where this point is detailed more extensively.

[5] For a glimpse into Foucault's development of the concept of other in relation to the identity as one which *eo ipso* rejects 'otherness' as an 'error,' at least "as understood

"Wake up, young people from your illusory pleasures; strip off your disguises and recall that every one of you has a sex, a true sex" (Foucault 1980: x), there is no 'true sex' nor its exiled relative, the 'other'. There is simply the 'strange history' of people who insist that this is so.

If that be the case – if, that is to say, it is not the 'outside' negation of a that-which-lies-around-us – then what constitutes Foucault's handling of 'other/excess'? In one word, though many more will follow, it is *techne*; indeed, a peculiar re-invention of the term, wherein techne becomes also the strategy of techne; a strategy of compulsion (as in: to compel); a strategy of style and manners (as in: to charm not without pleasure and attention to detail, to have grace, *savoir faire*); it is a strategy of use (as in to handle and be handled; to utilize; to exercise, exhaust; to corrupt; to resist; to invoke pleasure or pain or both). In short, it is a strategy of *seduction*.[6] For let there be no mistake about it, this otherness points to a stylistics of existence, a 'being used', in the most profane and corrupting senses of the phrase: lying to hand. And yet, we are rather far away from Heidegger's *techne* as a transcendent "looking out beyond what is given at any time" (and the heterogeneous sense of time clipped out at the expense of 'space').[7] We are even further from its

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in the most traditionally philosophic sense: a manner of acting that is not adequate to reality," see his fun little introduction in *Herculine Barbin* (Foucault 1980: x).

[6] This point will be played out in greater detail momentarily. But see in particular Foucault's, "Why the Ancient World Was Not a Golden Age, But What We Can Learn From It Anyway," "The Structure of Genealogical Interpretation," and "From the Classical Self to the Modern Subject (all in 1984a: esp. pp. 348-51; 353-58; 361-68, respectively) and "The Cultivation of The Self," "Self and Others," "The Body," (1988: Parts II, III, and IV).

[7] From Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1961) as quoted in Fynsk (1993: p.120). Fynsk, in succinctly extrapolating upon Heidegger's use of techne, clearly maps out the way in which that usage leads squarely back to the negation, the disaster, the error, the wronged, and so on. He writes, in part: "'Techne' Heidegger defines as 'knowledge': the transcendent 'looking out beyond what is given at any time, by which the Being of what is is disclosed and realized – opened and held open – in the work as a being. Techne, Heidegger says, provides the basic trait of *deinon* in the sense of 'the violent'...Man is *deinon* in that he moves in the violent action of 'machination' (*mechanoen*) that Heidegger defines in terms of techne, but man is the strangest or most uncanny (to deinotation), in that in his opening of paths in all the realms of being, he is constantly 'issueless': 'he becomes the strangest of all beings because, without issue on all paths, he is cast out of every relation to the familiar and befallen by *ate*, ruin, catastrophe.' ...Man is 'without issue on all paths' because his violent and venturesome way-making must shatter against death, 'this strange and uncanny thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home.'... As man ventures to master being in techne, he constantly stands before the possibility of death. To stand before death is fundamentally to stand in the possibility

an identity is reformulated as I = I (Fichte)," concludes Joan Stambaugh in her introduction to Heidegger's *Identity and Difference*, "and by Schelling as 'more precisely the indifference of the subject to the object'," (Heidegger 1969), we can say that for Foucault, it is no more nor less than a path or field of compressed/ multiple [relative] relations informed, conformed, indeed reformed as a kind of double headed arrow of I-selfs < – > I-selfs. Foucault puts it like this:

> "In Epictetus there are 2 exercises: sophistic and ethical. The first borrowed from school: question-and-answer games. [...] The second are ambulatory exercises. In the morning you go for a walk and test your reactions to that walk. The purpose of both exercises is control of representations, not the deciphering of truth. They are reminders about conforming to the rules in the face of adversity. [...] For Epictetus, the control of representations means not deciphering but recalling principles of acting and thus seeing, through self-examination, if they govern your life. It is a kind of permanent self-examination. [But in the end] *You have to be your own censor.*" (Foucault in (Martin, et al. 1988: p. 38, my italics)).

This 'kind of permanent self-examination' and 'self-censorship' is what Foucault short-hands as 'technologies of the self'; i.e., a 'logic of the techne,' a logic of seductions (plural) of the self to the self which creates the necessary distance or path for a *conversio ad se*, a conversion of the selves into self as self. (Foucault 1988: p. 65ff; 1986: p. 29ff).[9] In Foucault's preliminary and ancient cartography of the self-to-self relation, this distance gained or accumulated amounts to (or circumscribes) nothing other than the social and constitutive self in its fluid fullness: where the other and its something come together to form a self-contained self; a self wherein finally "one 'belongs to [one]self'," says Foucault, where "one is 'his own master'; one is answerable only to oneself, one is *sui juris*; one exercises over oneself an *authority* that nothing limits or threatens; one holds the *potestas sui*." (Foucault 1988: p. 65, my emphasis).[10] Indeed, this technology of the self is but a discursive human geography, a kind of permeable civil fortress of self-hoodedness/self-mastery that not only emphasizes *control* in the sense of establishing a peculiar masterliness

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[9] In Part Two, "The Cultivation of the Self," he writes, "... one had best keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself." (1988: pp. 64-5). In the earlier referencing cited above (Foucault's second volume to the *History of Sexuality – The Use of Pleasure*), similar themes are raised though here he is speaking of a 'decipherment' of the self by oneself, rather than the relation per se.

[10] As Seneca writes: "The soul stands on unassailable grounds, if it has abandoned external things; it is independent in its own fortress; and every weapon that is hurled falls short of the mark." (Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*) as quoted in Foucault (1988: pp. 82,5).

of sorts that *can* defy limits or threats without, at the same time, incubating in its wake the hegelian predisposition of the master/slave dialectic, but also emits of itself a specific *ethics* of control; the (ethical) control of the perpetual self-creating/self-inventing self.

How different is this from the cogito of a Western metaphysics! How different is the fruit of this 'otherness' from the more contemporary attempts to which we have not only beared witness, but often assume![11]

With this different use of reason, we have before us a beheaded rational mastery of self, a multiple personality *order*, controlling and controlled at the fleeting threshold of pleasured self-uses – a metamorphosis, a *conversio ad se*, a kind of flight of fancy nothing less than 'ecstatic' – sans a teleological 'desire' or transcendental 'ought to be'.[12] And yet, its transitory momentum belies an oddly stable, though distinctly imaginative, mapping of the self, which, in this read, becomes both infinitely changeable and rigidly concrete, circumscribing an impossible arena of both self-possession (as in a juridical model of possession) and nomadic self-rule. For this is an "ecstatic flight," as Bernauer casts it; a pleasured flight, which requires an entire prepara-tion linking body with soul without referent to the Western forms of masterliness, in the name of the Father or of Desire or Lacuna or Law. (Foucault 1984c: p. xiii). One's time becomes "full time;" indeed, becomes focused, disciplined, dirty/gritty time, with the Oracle at Delphi – 'know thyself' – looming large. Indeed, in this multiple/singularity of self, unified (if this be the word) by the peculiar seductive acts of the 'being used', there is no space at all for the what will later be described by Nietzsche as "toxic time," that is, the wasted, mediocre time, of the modern self-reflexive Be-ing-as-Time.

The desiring subject is dead.

And in its wake, the pleasure/using 'other' of self-related-self re-emerges, one whose very relations invents/creates an ethics of pleasure, in the fullest sense of the phrase: to cultivate pleasure, be it raw pain, transformative, melancholic, meditative, nomadic. Foucault thus writes:

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[11] In responding to a query on 'postmodernism', and whether or not the term is worth keeping, Foucault raises the issue of how one 'reads' the different uses of reason, its historical effects, its limits and its dangers. I point this out in order to underscore that by accepting or even paying attention to the 'greek' *conversio ad se*, this is not meant to imply or demand "some cheap [nostalgia for] some imaginary past form of happiness that people did not, in fact, have at all." (Foucault 1984b: p.248). On the other hand, it is not meant to designate it as 'wrong' either. Indeed, there is no moralistic implication – though, as one might already detect, an ethical one is ready to hand.

[12] This point is made more forcefully in James Bernauer's excellent study on Foucault, especially in his chapter six, "Ecstatic Thinking" (1991: pp.171-84).

"It was against the background of this cultivation of the self, of its themes and practices, that reflection on the ethics of pleasure developed in the first centuries of our era. As for the definition of the work that must be carried out on oneself, it too under[went], in the cultivation of the self, a certain modification: through the exercises of abstinence and control that constitute the required *askesis*, the place allotted to self-knowledge becomes more important. The tasks of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – *central to the formation of the ethical subject*. Lastly, the end result of this elaboration is still and always, defined by the rule of the individual over himself. But this rule broadens into an experience in which the relation to self takes the form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance." (1988: pp.67, 68)

This "rule", which broadens into an experience forms an 'other/self (as the multiple-other-selves-of-the-that-which-lies-around-us), whose cohesiveness, in its metamorphosing seduction, presences an ethics of self-creation. An ethics, as Foucault says, "which would not be their expression in the sphere of ideology; rather, [...] would constitute an original response to them, in the form of a new stylistics of existence." (Foucault 1988: p.71)

So it is that this fleeting relation of pleasure and its uses, this metamorphosis of self to self, is captured by Foucault with the term 'stylistics of existence', an ecstatic flight of invention – and seduction – which is no less than the ethico – political art of carving out one's life, should one be willing to journey onto the surface of the risk. Its metonymic rhythms, its poetic beat-beatings – repetitive, lyrical and distinct – have no *a priori* moral agency, though its cohesive synthetics emit nothing short of an ethical demand, an ethical demand made 'real' by virtue of its having been coagulated into a multiple something, whatever this something – or for that matter, its multiplicity, may be. A politics of 'making real' at the level of otherness, if ever there was one.

All this may be very interesting for our ancient boys and girls adhering (or otherwise) to the dream spaces of an Artemedorius or a Lucilius or a Seneca; but what does it have to do with us? The 'us' of a judeo-christian-hindu-moslem worldly world? The 'us' of a capitalist and racist and sexist and homophobic and heterophobic and genderphobic world? For, as Nietzsche intones in his *The Gay Science*, and quite rightly, too:

"§152. *The greatest change.* – The illumination and the colour of all things have changed. We no longer understand altogether how the ancients experienced what was most familiar and frequent – for example, the day and waking. [...] Every wrong had a different effect on men's feel-

ings; for one feared divine retribution and not merely a civil punishment and dishonour. What was joy in ages when one believed in devils and tempters? What was passion when one saw demons lying in wait nearby? What was philosophy when doubt was experienced as a sin of the most dangerous kind – as sacrilege against eternal love, as mistrust of all that was good, high, pure, and merciful?..." (Nietzsche 1974: pp.196-7).

The first answer must include, as Gramsci would put it, this 'common place' remark: that as every philosophy brings with it layers of politics, and vice versa, it then also brings forward a specific set of questions (and 'answers,' not to put too simplistic a spin on it) about being human, of what this humanity consists, and what kind of societies should best promote whatever 'is' or 'is to become' the 'is'; whatever, that is to say, is/to become 'necessary.' If that be the case, it is entirely plausible to suggest that a self-reflexive unity (of self) has embedded in it a certain set of interests with respect to personhood, body, property, community, and the like. Conversely, it is equally plausible to suggest, then, that with quite a different concept of self – one which is inherently multiple – a whole series of 'common places' are re-mixed and re-masticated to inform yet another set of interests, a re-newed, re-packaged, resusicated set of interests time-travelled and squarely landing within the glories (or not) of an information-cybernetic age. A rather odd eternal return, one that holds out the promise of a 'something different.'

And yet, a small recourse to Nietzsche, once again, may be necessary.

"§158. *An inconvenient trait.* – To find everything profound – that is an inconvenient trait. It makes one strain one's eyes all the time, and in the end one finds more than one might have wished." (Nietzsche 1974: p.198).

Second answer, then: Let us be very careful not too strain too intently. Shall we just steal a small leaf from Foucault's 'book', nodding to the infinite quagmire of change and in attempting to do so, avoid the profound? One step backward, two steps ahead: let us link Foucault's notion of the ecstatic flight with the contemporary armour of fetishistic play to create what could be called, conceptually or otherwise in our less-than-world-historic times, 'ecstatic fetish'.

As we have seen, with this (seductive) notion of the ecstatic, a peculiar relation is formed based on the multiple singularity of otherness which disrupts, out of necessity, the convenience of 'either/or' polarities (and with it, either/or politics). For the "other" that an ecstatic self-to-self relation exposes, is at best a 'quasi-negation' that plays with, circumscribes, and dances across the surface of each and every limit. We find then, a kind of otherness/identity, say for example, in being gay, that has little to do with being 'anti'-

its supposed polar opposite (in this case, the so-called straight). Instead it elucidates a concept of self-as-other; i.e., a self no longer singular, unified and whole, but eliding multiplicities, self-as-selves-in-the-plural, based on the erupting surfaces between and amongst 'internal' and 'external' polarities.

To be clear, and to have some fun (why not?), let's move onto a queerer version of this thing called 'fetish,' and the ethics of multiplicity to which it may (or may not) speak – resurrected and now laid out across the some-what masturbatory (but in any case no longer inconspicuous) use of the phrase 'the relation of the self-to-the-self.' For it can certainly be said that fetish/fetishism, whilst including, initiating or cementing codes of behaviour and dress sense, does so in a way that neither privileges nor ignores this multiple sense of 'otherness' and with it, this multiple sense of excess whose 'negation' is no longer to be sought in the contradiction of the limit, but indeed, its rupture. By saying this, I want to disengage the concept (and/or, indeed, the reality) of fetish from being thought of as a signifier of death or of a failed mourning or of a melancholia-writ-large-and-inescapable – as one finds in contemporary remarks on the subject.[13] I do not wish to say that fetish is not at all connected to death or to grieving or to a weirdly cathected fashion sense – it is just to say it is not connected like *that*.

If one follows Foucault's general indications on the impossibility of homogeneous otherness and the like, we get a different read of the terrain. Fetish becomes a far more delicate, though like silk, rather durable, con-struction. Fetish becomes a far more raw (and explicit) bleed, though like blood, changes colour the moment its presence surfaces to air. Fetish be-comes a far more complicated joke – some say a 'compacted story', funny and alive, though precisely and at the same time, rather desperate and cling-ing, painful, stillborn, and even gut-wrenching. Laugh till she cried. (And then cried for more?) Yes, why not?

For fetish, if it is anything at all, in at least being all these contradictory and mutating 'doubles', is precisely and only the multiple singularity of itself.

One could say it entails, inscribes and delimits a kind of ripped and shared hermaphrodism (and I do not use this word lightly) which is not a metaphor 'standing in' for anything else. Neither is it an 'empty' container waiting to be filled by some endless struggle between this thing called, (for example) heterosexual desire, this thing called homosexual desire, and this

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[13] The best example of this problem can be found in Lorraine Gammon and Merja Makinen (1994); but we find it, albeit it much more complex and meaningful ways, in works as varied as Freud's initial (1905) "Three Essay on Sexuality," his "Mourning and Melancholia; and most recently in Derrida (1986), "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man," pp. 155-249.

thing called bisexual desire mutated into one pair of rubber stockings, one certain 60's hairstyle, one opened and smiling or tortured mouth. The fetishization of these creatures: male, female, transgendered beings, homo/lesbo/bisexed erotics, hairstyles and hose, cannot quite be reduced, however microscopic, to some kind of impenetrable mass, stuck together and 'understood' only in terms of their opposition, contradiction or annihilation.

For its synthesis, its moment, is not a 'something' that *can* be flung open and brought to public light, public scrutiny or even public 'liberation'. *It is far too vampiric for all that.* The meaning of the fetish both disappears *and* hovers at the very instant it seems most near to hand. There are neither truths nor secrets in a fetish; no discovery, no bringing to the surface its authentic point of departure; indeed, no 'authentic' point at all. This does not mean that it is meaningless; or that it describes no limit or can be seen as an infinite regression.

Rather, it is to say that fetish *is* the surface *and* the departure *and* the arrival; it's whole point is that it is a squished up line at the very moment of its being a dot (and/or vice versa: an elongated dot cleverly doubled as a line); a process and an end-point, endlessly processional and finitely punctuated; the very threshold of a compacted story, a narrative that could never become 'meta'; never become 'spectacle' as such. Its presence, like all presents, is simply impossible (here, there, and gone at the exact same instant); a virtual 'to be', a mastery of the coming of masterliness. A radical mastery: being a perfectly imperfect autonomous mastering, as de Sade would say, one *without* submission to a fixed and totalized Other. It is rather a *virtual* mastery, a radically impure mastery – de-sanitized over and again on the slippery slope between and amongst the relation of self to self.

An obsessional, virtual, metonymic surface. An unreal (but, on the other hand, no less real), floating, magical, pleasure seeking surface, shot through with the absurdity of the cruel, of the dead, of the wronged. Isn't life funny!? Isn't life grand?! A cyberspace of present tense passion, of perpetual movement going nowhere in particular, but going there with speed and agility and attentiveness to detail, nonetheless. *Not* a *be*coming of self, *not* an immanence as such; not a telos unfolding either to the known or unknown truth of self-awareness self; not a Law because, by definition, Law (and therewith, truth). Simply a coming without the 'be'; a coming without the identity relation of the 'to be'; a coming to the surface of the present tense presence; superficiality in all its glory, re-making and re-pres*ent*-ing the radical plurality of self without recourse to the always already signed, sealed, and delivered self-given self.

For fetish is simply, if it is anything at all, history with a Pop, the singularly self-identified-self, blown to smithereens, undone and redone in the *sacred* image of mutated selves, cyber-selves; variegated selves of the re-thought-out selves, bent and re-designed in the instant coming of its come, by self-immolation self-exhibitionism, self-abuse, all fitted neatly into corset and collage. A mutilated series of selves (any selves), a repetitive series of selves, well-rehearsed some might say (ritualised, most would say) through the mirrored multiplicity of space in between (and amongst) the snap-crackle-pop of leather, latex and lace self forming selves.

Translation: No more 'inside' v. the 'outside' of individual body selves. No more self-reflexive self. Fetish as a kind of marker, horizon, even a kind of 'skin' for the politically, emotionally liberal-impaired self; nothing more and nothing other than the infinite metamorphoses of the self into selves (or vice versa); the transformative mutations whose strange but somehow famil iar (though utterly unchartered) pluralities meld into oddly coherent, albeit risky, wholes – holographic wholes – making metamorphosis, and with it, fetish, the very staff of identity itself. An identity which is no more or less than the excessive ecstatic flights of seduction in all its varying 'other' possibilities. Indeed, one could say that fetish is precisely the 'other' of Being, in all the multiple flawed and time worn senses of the verb: to be.

In the fetish world: a world that is *not* community and *not* geared toward a 'something' (but is rather that heterogeneous sense of coded regulations and conduct spoken of earlier), we have before us then a peculiar imaginary of variegated impossibilities, an oozing excessivity of the self no longer outside the very processes of change, and therewith, no longer outside our grasp or reduced to a singular, opaque and unblemished purity. Could it not be said, without overstating the case that we have the possibility (or anyway, 'a' possibility) of routing out, if nothing else, a damning fascist logic of the fixed whole-truth-and-nothing-but-the-truth-so-help-us-god morality. And in its place? A fleeting, mutinous, fetishized, politics of existence, a peculiar form of ethics: social and multiple, mannered and refined, continuous in its rupturing of the aesthetic form (though aesthetic nonetheless); a kind of political-[aesthetic]-ethics whose integrity is graspable only at its multiple "other" crossing.

Ecstatic fetish: it is not a Profound Thought worthy of grounding any vision. It is a small, fleeting, ethical demand at the point of inventing the double joke of a multiple self: at the neither/nor threshold of a fetish gone to light; at the neither/nor pleasure of the come.

A new dance step; a borrowed dance step; an old re-packaged dance step. Is this not precisely what a constant tango with ecstatic fetish – the

conversio ad se of our day and age – invents, sweats out, [re-]presents, and plays with, over and again? One small aspect of contemporary resistance to domination and insistence on change, not to mention: fun.

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