# *MOSCOV-SELIM*: THE DYNAMICS OF THE SELF

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## ABSTRACT:

The thesis' scope is situated in the broad field of the philosophy of the self, the main focus being on the questions of human freedom and creativity. The more theoretical part is dedicated to a virtual dialogue with two visions of human subjectivity, which are opposed in many ways, but not incompatible: Michel Foucault's work and Paul Tillich's theological writings. By way of a thought-provoking illustration is proposed the analysis of a piece of literary work: Georgios Vizyenos' (1849-1896) short story *Moscov-Selim*. In this context the destabilizing gender and national identity is viewed on the one hand as a disclosing of new horizons for self-realization, and at the same time as revealing perplexing difficulties in thinking human freedom.

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# Introduction

The topic of this thesis is situated into the broad field of the philosophy of the self. The title refers to a 19th century short story written by the Greek author Georgios Vizyenos (1849-1896). This text, one of the first and most important works in Neohellenic literature in the genre of the short story, recounts the adventurous life of a Turkish man who feels very acutely the problem of self-identity. My aim is, by means of a theoretical discussion of some ideas of the human subject, as well as through the literary analysis of the above-mentioned text, to explore the possibility of human freedom seen as self-creation. The adherence to a particular gender pattern will be looked at as one of the main components of a broader cultural identity.

In the first chapter I will be analyzing the concept of power which is of crucial importance for any treatment of the questions of freedom and subjectivity. In comparing Michel Foucault's vision of the human subject with that of Paul Tillich I will argue that, far from being incompatible, their main difference is the opposite value systems which are underpinning their philosophies. The argument that I hope to develop in a convincing way is that Foucault's approach to the phenomena of power is one-sided because his analyses are always done from the optic angle of the oppressed, the one who suffers injustices and is at risk to be deprived from his freedom. I will oppose to this Tillich's much more positive vision according to which power is presented as the foundation of human creativity and freedom.

In the second chapter I will proceed to the literary text and I will be analyzing the different phases of the development of self-identity through which the main character Selim is going from his childhood until his death. Drawing on Foucault's concept of *other spaces* I will consider how Selim's personality evolved and was continuously modified thanks to the diverse

spaces he spent his life in. My claim would be that Foucault's notion of *other spaces* does not take into account an important dimension of the problem he is dealing with, namely the personally experienced space.

In the third chapter I will try to develop a legitimate interpretation of *Moscov-Selim* where in spite of the ambiguity of the character's life, a genuine personal creativeness would be discernable. Coming back to Foucault's idea of the creation of new subjectivities I will articulate my suspicion of the empowering quality of this notion. Finally, I will suggest that the idea of a centered and free self, which I am borrowing from Tillich, does provide a convincing response to the important questions raised by Foucault's seminal work concerning the phenomena of power and subjectivity.

# I. A theory of power

What I will be dealing with in this chapter is Michel Foucault's conception of power, and more specifically the way in which it comes into the articulation of his ideas about the subjectivity. In doing that, I will resort to a rather uncommon strategy: I will discuss some of the texts of the protestant theologian Paul Tillich. I will draw on those aspects of Tillich's systematic theology concerning the self and the ontological principles of love, power and justice. The reason behind this comparative reading of two apparently so discordant approaches to the phenomena of the human subject is my conjecture that the contrast might prove useful in shedding light on a major aporia raised by Foucault's texts. What I mean is the uneasy questions concerning the possibility for freedom in the conditions of an overwhelming cultural predetermination.

My main argument here would be that despite Foucault's refusal to commit himself to a theory of power, nevertheless there are some implicit ontological assumptions behind his analysis of "the modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects"[1]. It is those assumptions that I will compare to Tillich's vision of human power and freedom and identify the points where they coincide as well as those where they depart from their common character. I hope to be able to persuasively suggest that Foucault's theory of power represents, as it were, only a part of a fully developed ontology of power. An image which appears as a brutally mutilated reality, if taken as an overarching account, but which might be taken as well as an ingenious and faithful depiction of only one dimension of reality. It is exactly this one-sidedness of Foucault's theory which I want to explore.



[1] Foucault, «The Subject and Power », *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4. (Summer, 1982), 777.

## Freedom and Creativity

It is indeed very difficult to draw a clear-cut, unified and unambiguous image of Foucault's ideas. Except that he was obviously not interested in the elaboration of systems, it seems that there are some shifts in his own thought which give sometimes the impression of internal contradictions. One could look at this in two ways: either he really changed his mind over the years in an important way, without however explicitly articulating those changes, either the discrepancies between his earlier and later writings are to be attributed to a change in the perspective: maybe he simply put the emphasis on different aspects of the phenomena of power and subjectivity. And let's not forget his critique of the idea of the concept of oeuvre[2] – he did not promise to endow his overall work with any kind of organic unity. After all he claimed that he is one of those who write "in order to have no face"[3].

Nevertheless, I would opt for a reading of his "oeuvre" which is not searching for inconsistencies, and not giving much importance to them even when obvious. Not because I assume they do not exist – after all many scholars have already pointed at them – but because I prefer to see even the greater contradictions one may find as the outcome of the consecutive discoveries of partial truths. Moreover I have two extra reasons not to take those discrepancies literary, but to see them as the symptoms of a consistent underlying problem. First, towards the end of his life, Foucault himself tended to give a rather unambiguous account of the totality of his writings, which legitimizes to some extent a corresponding reinterpretation on our part. Second, even if it was not so, the agency he is according to the individual is problematic to me in both the early austere and late libertarian variants and thus is equally subject to what I mean to be my critique.

[2] I mean the "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur" (1969), *Dits et Ecrits, volume I*, 789-821.
[3] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. Smith, New York, Harper and Row, 1972, 17.

But let us start from the end. Let us have first a look at this one of Foucault's faces which presents him as an apostle of freedom. In some of his late interviews he affirms the possibility for freedom more explicitly than ever, and what is more, he presents himself as preaching the availability of unsuspected forms of freedom:

> My role - and that is too emphatic a word - is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people - that's the role of an intellectual.[4]

Indeed, he goes so far as to affirm that this was the intention behind all of his work. He claims that what he was always attacking was the deterministic thinking about human existence (a claim which I will question further on):

> All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made.[5]

One of the major themes in Foucault's work which is often seen as offering a pessimistic answer to the question of freedom is his attack on the sovereign subject. In abandoning the belief of an autonomous, self-constituting subject he seems to deny the very possibility of freedom. However, especially as far as his later work is concerned, his ideas about subjectivity might not be in real contradiction with his enthusiasm for unexplored forms of freedom, since its critique aims only at the humanist notion of human subject as autonomous, trans-historical, having the calling for authenticity and this does not equate to the notion of free agent. [6] Thus Foucault's



[4] Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault - October 25th, 1982.", Martin, L.H. et al (1988) *Technologies of the Self*: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, London: Tavistock, 9-15.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Weberman, "Are Freedom and Anti-humanism Compatible? The Case of Foucault and Butler", *Constellations*, v.7, № 2, 2000, 262-264.

vision of subjectivity, far from prohibiting the belief in freedom might be taken, on the contrary, as an appeal for grater amount of imagination in the construction of one's individuality[7].

It is exactly this aspect of Foucault's philosophy which I will take here as the basis of my speculations. That is to say, I will tentatively take for granted that even his most bitter statements attacking the sovereign subject were actually the expression of his uncompromising rejection of any form of subjection, and strife for more freedom. For even if numerous quotes could be brought supporting the claim that he was rather conceiving of individuals as of cogs in the societal machine, it is still possible to interpret them as a form of protest, as a denunciation of the self-deceptions of humanism. I will further present the two concepts which in Foucault seem to function as the guarantees of human freedom – namely the omnipresence of power and the principle of struggle.

## Omnipresence and Struggle

From a comparative reading of their works, it turns out that Foucault and Tillich do share – at least roughly - the same understanding of power as being brought into existence only when enacted in the conditions of a concrete "strategic situation" or, else, encounter of at least two forces. Further, they share the view that power is ubiquitous, that is to say, each encounter between individuals, or groups, is already a power relation. As Foucault affirms, there is no space outside power:

> … le pouvoir est coextensif au corps social; il n'y a pas, entre les mailles de son réseau, des plages de libertés élémentaires.[8]

[7] Ibid., 264.
[8] Foucault, " Pouvoirs et Stratégies", *Dits et écrits*, v. III, 425.

But power can not be exerted except if there is someone to be exerted on. And that on which power is exerted logically could not be passive, but should be able to respond with resistance. Thus power presupposes freedom and that's why Foucault insists that we should not look at the ubiquity of power relations as at a fatal trap[9], but on the contrary, as at the very confirmation of the fact that we are free to resist power. Actually freedom and power go hand in hand and each is the prerequisite for the other:

> In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination).[10]

This is how, far from being a hindrance for the realization of freedom, the omnipresence of power is rather a guarantee for it. Because if each and every human being did not have a share in the distribution of forces, so to say, then it would not be possible to have power relationships, in the way that Foucault conceives them, but only irresistible violence. This would presuppose a social network where some individuals have complete and permanent control over the rest, which according to his analysis is not the case. It turns out that for Foucault humans are not susceptible to mechanization – there is always at least a residue of freedom even in the most oppressed groups and individuals. And this is so because the dynamics of the strategic situation require that the other is always envisaged as a free agent. In genuine power relationship the it is always about the struggle between adversaries because "slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains"[11]. And this point is identical with Tillich's position. He thinks there is no way to deprive a living being of its spontaneity, without destroying it. That is to say, in a power relation, no



[9] Ibid.
[10] Foucault, "The Subject and Power",790.
[11] Foucault, Ibid.

matter how strongly one is dominated and controlled, as long as he continues to exist, he is capable to respond in an unpredictable for the other side manner:

> Spontaneity means that a reaction is elicited but not forced by a stimulus and consequently that it is not calculable.[12]

Thus, it is important to underscore that for both Foucault and Tillich the absolute limit for the exercise of power is the person of the other, which should be "thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts"[13]. Iinterestingly enough, Tillich is making a somehow simiral analysis of the methods of punishment in totalitarian regimes as Stalinism to Foucault's description of this kind of "better" punishment, which is characteristic of modern capillary power: the ultimate aim of those regimes seems to be the mechanization of people, the destruction of the very center of their personality.

## Love, Power and Justice

Some restrictive remarks concerning my dealing with Tillich's work are maybe needed. Although I am taking as basis for my critique on Foucault the theological works of Paul Tillich that does not mean that I consider it appropriate to examine them here in their overall significance and validity. I look at Tillich's theology not in its totality, because this would require from me to engage in issues which are too big for the purposes of my thesis, but I do consider it a potent supporter in my attempt to question those post-modern attitudes towards ideas of human nature which we see exemplified in Foucault's writings. The reason for that is my belief that Tillich's perseverant effort to translate the Christian message into the language of the historical and cultural situation of his time gave the fruit of an amazing panoramic interpretation of modern



[12] Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications*, New York, Oxford University Press 1960, 47.
[13] Foucault, "The Subject and Power*", 789.*

spirituality, and in this way successfully overarched the old-age gap between theology and the other branches of human knowledge. And indeed, it seems that the greatest merit of Tillich's work was not so much its conceptual originality as the synthetic force with which he managed to embrace all the expressions of life in a systematic whole. What I would like to consider here more closely is his threefold ontological conception of love, power and justice, as opposed to Foucault's rethinking of the concept of power.

In this section I will shortly present the basic ideal behind Tillich's triad of concepts. What we should bear in mind is that Tillich's language is overtly metaphorical and his system should not be looked at as a merely metaphysical one. His aim indeed was to explore life it its fullness and not to pursue purely philosophical speculations. His bold interest in existentialism shows clearly that his ontology aims at the expression, not only of the essential aspects of life, but of its existential character as well, or, in other words, of what he called "the multidimensional unity of life"[14]. That is to say that what he means by ontological principles is not at all restricted to the elaboration of metaphysical essences, but to the contrary, his work is dedicated to the study of the dialectics through which the ideal potentialities of being actualize themselves in the ambiguous conditions of actual life. Hence it would be not an easy task to accuse him in any form of dualism or supernaturalism – trends he explicitly rejected as mistaken. A last thing that one should bear in mind when considering Tillich's systematic theology is that he explicitly declares that his system is to be understood as a Christian answer to the here and now of the historical situation and hence he does not claim any absolute validity for it, but just on the contrary, is conscious of its incomplete and conditioned character.



[14] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, volume III, Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God,* The University of Chicago Press, 1967, 11-12.

The focus of my inquiry here is the concept of power, which was chosen by Tillich – following an important philosophical tradition, mainly Aristotle, Augustine and Nietzsche - to point to the fundamental character of being itself. First of all the power of being is that power which is ultimately directed towards self-affirmation, or else, towards the conquest of non-being[15]. As I mentioned already above, Tillich affirms, similarly to Foucault[16] , that power does not exist as an abstract entity but reveals itself only when put into action:

> Power is real only in its actualization, in the encounter with other bearers of power and in the ever-changing balance which is the result of these encounters.[17]

He emphasizes that power is not given *a priori* or in a concrete amount as it were. There is no means to determine what is the power of being of a concrete individual – this is revealed only in actual encounters and is a matter of test and risk. In a love relationship between two partners, in the context of a family, as well as in all kinds of engagement with broader social structures, the individual's own power of being is put to trial. Increase, decrease or even total destruction of one's power of being are all possible outcomes in each encounter and at every moment of its development as a relationship:

> One draws another power into oneself and is either strengthened or weakened by it. One throws the foreign power of being out or assimilates it completely. One transforms the resisting powers or one adapts oneself to them. One is absorbed by them and loses one's own power of being, one grows together with them and increases theirs and one's own power of being.[18]

Tillich emphasizes that power should not be confused with the notions of force (referring mostly to power as exerted in a mechanical way) and compulsion (pertinent to the realm of living beings, endowed with spontaneity; for men we speak about psychological compulsion).

[15] It seems that when using the concept of non-being Tillich has in mind Heidegger.
[16] Compare for example to Foucault's claim that "power as such does not exist" in "The Subject and Power", 786.
[17] Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 41.
[18] Tillich, Ibid., p.42.

Nevertheless he affirms that power actualizes itself through force and compulsion; it needs both of them, but it can either use them or abuse them. This framing of the question of the correlation between power on the one hand and force and compulsion, on the other, reminds Foucault's statement that even if power either resort to violence or strives for the obtaining of consents, or even does both at the same time, however it can not be identified with none of those[19].

According to Tillich, the criterion that power should respect in order to perform its essential function is contained in each concrete actual power relation. And the ultimate goal towards which each power relation is evolving is the conquest of Non-Being which equals the conquest of estrangement:

> The basic formula of power and the basic formula of love are identical: Separation and Reunion or Being taking Non-Being into itself.[20]

Thus the principle of love comes into the analysis. Tillich underscores that in order to use the term love as an ontological principle we should first get rid of its exclusively emotional everyday connotations. He sees *libido*, *eros, philia* and *agape* , not as different types of love but as different qualities of it and affirms that all of them are actually present in a genuine act of love. He conceives of love as being the foundation of power. There is no essential opposition between love and power, but they do conflict when power misuses compulsion and prevents the aim of love, as well as when love is reduced to mere surrender. Because love is possible only between fully centered and free individuals.

The third ontological principle concerns the question of dynamics and form. Justice is the concrete form in which the power of being actualizes itself. Love is the principle of justice because justice can be performed only through participation in the actual situation, which participation is not possible except through the overcoming of estrangement. Justice is always

[19] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 789.
[20] Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 49.

dynamic and can not be determined in definite terms – that's why laws can always be abusive. Here one can think of Foucault's definition of liberty as practice: he affirms that the reason why laws and institutions can always be "turned around" is not their presumed ambiguity but the fact that liberty needs to be continuously exercised[21]. I see this similarity as a point of convergence in the thought of both Tillich and Foucault – life is always highly dynamic and requires new decisions at each moment of its realization, no matter how one call this realization – liberty or overcoming of Non-Being. But while in Foucault we see the ever-renewing struggle for freedom only in terms of "*agonism*"[22], in Tillich the impetus power is ideally accompanied with uniting love and the adequacy of justice.

All three principles are active on the level of the human personality. According to Tillich the presence of a center is of primordial importance for an individual being to exist at all. The use of the word center is again metaphorical since what is meant is not some point in the self with a special content, but the point of direction of the two basic movements in life connected to the polarity of individualization and participation. He considers humans to be the most fully centered beings, the most radically separated from each other and potentially endowed with the greatest power of being. Subsequently love is also the most intense among humans since the separation to be overcome is the greatest.



## Within and without

The major problem I see in Foucault's account of the functioning of power – and which his vision of freedom ultimately unsatisfactory - is the fact that he denies that power can be owned

[21] Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power", *The Foucault Reader*, edited by P. Rabinow, Penguin Books, 1984, 245.
[22] Foucault's neologism referring to the Greek word αγών which roughly means "a combat". See the "The Subject and Power", 790.

by individuals. Even if what he calls the governmentality of the souls[23], and defines as the distinctive trait of modern power, is clearly a matter of self-government, he apparently did not mean that the individual person is the essential source of this government. Power somehow acts upon and through people, actually they do handle it in moulding themselves, but it is never their own. This, I think, could not be explained, except as the product of a thorough materialism.

When discussing the double meaning of the words "subject"[24] (sujet, assujetir) and "conduct"[25] (conduire, se conduire), Foucault "proves" the equation between the state of being a subject and being subjected, or else, unfree. He sees "the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions"[26]. This would apply equally to any kind of relationships, as well as to the relationship one has with his own self. But there is something fallacious about this conclusion, since it is true for any series of rational actions that a preceding action is structuring the field of other possible actions. That means that it is rather impossible to avoid this kind of *conduct* if we want to succeed in performing those actions which are meant to embody our freedom.

It is in the same line of thought that Foucault *explains* why people have the type of moral concerns characteristic for the humanistic ideal: it is again, nothing but a knowledge regime which controls and limits human freedom:

> …ce n'est pas tellement parce qu'on a eu un souci moral de l'être humain qu'on a eu l'idée de le connaître scientifiquement, mais c'est au contraire parce qu'on a construit l'être humain comme objet d'un savoir possible que se sont ensuite developpés tous les thèmes moraux de l'humanisme contemporain...[27]



[23] See Foucault, "La "gouvernementalité"", *Dits et Ecrits, volume III*, item 239.
[24] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 781.
[25] Foucault, *Ibid*, 789.
[26] Foucault, *Ibid.*, 791.
[27] Foucault, "L'homme est-il mort? ",*Dits et Ecrits, volume I,* 541.

While I see how Foucault's semantic preoccupation with the words *subject* and *conduct* is completely legitimate and relevant for a discussion about the nature of subjectivity, I do not think that he is giving to the problem its due. When Tillich considers the question of whether the self can exert power upon itself, he specifies that this could be only a metaphorical expression since the self could not fight against the self. He opts for the term of self-control and defines it as the power which the self need to exert over each of its components in order to preserve its own equilibrium and prevent its destruction:

> Self-control is the activity of the centered self in preserving and strengthening the established balance against disruptive tendencies. […] self-centredness implies the power which the self exercises through a stable balance of its constituent elements over each of these elements. In this sense every self is a power structure.[28]

All this puts into question the originality of Foucault's claim about the productivity of power. Because if the effects of power are always seem as something inescapable, but undesirable as well; if power is something that we need to outwit in order to preserve our contingent freedom; and if any attempt for acquiring an individuality is seen as a deceitful normalization, then it is true that "Foucault is best understood not as an opponent of the repressive hypothesis, but as one of its more subtle spokesman"[29].

In conclusion I would say that Foucault's overall work could be interpreted quite convincingly in the way he did it himself towards the end of his life – that is, as a struggle for the uncovering of the hidden mechanisms of power, with the ultimate aim of freedom. Nevertheless, even if I would concede the claim that he was preaching freedom, in his own way, I would say that the freedom he offers us has the scars of a rather deterministic thinking about human nature.



[28] Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, 52 -53.
[29] Weberman, "Foucault's Reconception of Power", *The Philosophical Forum*, v. XXVI, № 3, Spring 1995,195.

The very fact that he proposes the metaphor of the work of art as an ideal for the rise of new subjectivities he is longing for, is, I think, an expression of this fact.

There is one ultimate assumption which determines Foucault's apprehension of individuality and positions human creativity in a definitely narrow frame: humans are a species which functions for the sake of functioning[30]. Apparently this notion of human nature precludes the possibility to cross over a certain threshold.

When comparing Tillich and Foucault, it would be interesting to see how, being influenced by similar readings in contemporary philosophy – Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre – each of them take a quite different twist in elaborating an often common problematic. As far as the concept of power is concerned, I would venture the conjecture that Foucault has taken on Nietzsche's legacy in a rather pessimistic direction. Whether with Nietzsche the two principles in his philosophy of *the will to power* are clearly positive – joy and creation[31], Foucault does not give the impression that there is much place for joy in his account of power relationships. In this sense one might say that Tillich is closer to Nietzsche because what is joy in creation if not love. At least this is what I see behind Tillich's statement that love is the foundation of power. As in Nietzsche power is the desiring element in the will[32], in a similar way love is the affirmative drive in power.

In my view Tillich's theology, which I used here just as an example among others, advocates a notion of human nature as being creative in a radically different sense from what is promoted by Foucault. His theology is affirming that people are endowed with the ability to new realities, new values[33]. And this is exactly what is meant when it is said that man has the image of God in him – and thus cancels the opposition between nature and artifact. The same is valid for truth – we people do create truth, we do add to the creation of the world. In this sense truth is really the effect of power, but the effect of love and justice as well. But I will come back to the opposition between authenticity and artistic self-imagination at the end of the next chapter.



[30] See Foucault's interview with P. Caruso « Qui êtes-vous, professeur Foucault ? », *Dits et écrits, volume I*, 619.
[31] Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* , Paris, PUF 1962, 96.
[32] Ibid. : "La puissance est ce *qui* veut dans la volonté. »
[33] A comparison with Nietzsche might be relevant: Ibid. « Contre l'image d'une volonté qui rêve de se faire attribuer des valeurs *établies*, Nietzsche annonce que le vouloir, c'est *créer* les valeurs nouvelles. »

## II. The transgressive individual and his spaces

As all the main characters in Vizyenos' stories, Moscov-Selim represents a marginalized individual, conceived by the rest of society as a deviant. It is the reinterpretation of this abnormality – a reinterpretation which is accomplished by the fictional character himself, as well as by the narrator, and hence by the reader – which constitutes the major theme of the work. An important element in the conception of the text is the way in which the story is conveyed: it is Selim's face-to-face confession to the narrator, most of the time in internal focalization, which gives the possibility to see the several episodes in the character's life as distinct entities. That is to say that the reversal in the situation in each new segment of the story leads to a retrospective reinterpretation of the previous segments, thus providing for a more dynamic and polyvalent reading of the psychological reality of the characters. This technique of the unexpected drifts in the development of the narration is characteristic to the overall work of Vizyenos and has incited on the part of the literary criticism the charge with a certain yielding to the taste of the large reading public.[34] However, while the creation of false expectations really reminds in some respect the methods of writing of the criminal novels, it is clear that in this instance the goal is to undermine those preconceived ideas of the reader which refers to the socially stereotyped notions of crime and insanity. The gradual unfolding of the characters' self is thus achieved through consecutive episodes, whose meanings are both continuously canceling and completing each other.

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[34] This was the critique of K. Palamas, reevaluated by P. Moullas. See the introduction to Vizyenos' texts.

There are two major crises in Selim's sense of self-identity. The first is situated in his adolescence and is connected to his ambiguous gender, while the second is in his midlife and constitutes a breakdown of his sense of national identity. These two however are closely connected because the national identity has a wider cultural content and regards gender patterns as well. One may consider as a final crisis the collapse he suffers at the end of his life, when he feels the nostalgia for his "natural" identity and which leads to his death. I will discuss this subversion in the story in the last chapter.

Perhaps the most suitable way in which one could analyze the shifts and transformations in Selim's identity is to follow his trajectory through different places and situations. Here I will make use of Foucault's elaboration of the idea of "other spaces"[35] in his 1967 lecture, which I find relevant to the fictional text I deal with, while revealing some of the peculiarities of Foucault's thought which were discussed in the first chapter above. Thus, Foucault's vision of *heterotopology*[36] will find a possible illustration in Vizuenos' text, while at the same time Selim's story would raise new questions concerning the typological and functional description of *other spaces.*

It has already become a truism that what we are is dependent on the when and where of our existence. In other words, our identity is historically and culturally conditioned and moreover this is not done once and forever, but seems to be susceptible to the changes in our environment (be it natural, familial, cultural). Thus, even what seems our most intimate feelings and beliefs turns out to be a largely predetermined impregnation, or as Foucault would have it, our subjectivity is shaped by the actual power/knowledge regime we live in. The question however is the following: how great is the impact of this dependence on the personality, is the determination more or less

[35] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, Spring 1986, pp. 22-27
[36] Foucault, Ibid. 24.

complete or is the human subject able to actively regulate his relationship to the environment? As mentioned in the previous chapter, Foucault's texts are not univocal about this. But no matter at which period of his writings we look at, we see that the subject is hardly the moulder of his space. Foucaul envisages the existence of diverse spaces as the outcome of the ever-present power relationships. He describes the spaces we are living in as something enforcing itself on us.

> "The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and knaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another."[37]

A distinctive trait of Selim's adventures is that each time they lead him through very contradictory spaces, thus provoking the sudden and deep clashes in his sense of self-identity. Indeed we see the circumstances in which he finds himself each time being imprinted on him, and this very much reminds of Foucault's notion of the subject as the effect of power relations. However Selim's story seems much more ambiguous than that and the problem of the self-creation is deployed in a complex way, without any definitive answer on the part of the narrator.

The encounter between the narrator and Selim takes place in the countryside in eastern Thrace, the particular scenery being the abundant vegetation surrounding the spring of Kaïnardza. It is in this lonely spot that Selim has built his bizarre cottage, which together with the landscape and the evening mist creates the illusion of the Russian steppes:

> "When, having drunk from the cooling spring and washed, I let my gaze wander over that landscape, I thought that I had been suddenly transported to some small oasis on the steppes of southern Russia. A small cottage built on a small hill at a distance from the spring, and barely discernible behind the thick foliage of two tall beech trees, contributed wondrously to increasing that momentary self-deception." [p.188]

[37] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 23.

The narrator learns from his fellow-traveler that the inhabitant of the cottage is an insane Turkish man, who survived after twenty-five years of consecutive wars, and came back in Thrace, behaving in a completely incomprehensible fashion. Mockingly called Moscov-Selim, because of his paradoxical attachment to the country where he was war prisoner, this person was firstly considered a traitor. Living from his modest agricultural production, Moscov-Selim is waiting for the Russians to come. Everything in his life is now a bad imitation of what he remembers from his captivity in Russia, an agglutination of disparate elements: his cottage and its furniture, his clothes, his very gestures are a desperate attempt to reanimate the remembrance of Russia.

It is quite obvious that Selim's cottage is fitting into the larger category of heterotopias as Foucault presents it. Generally speaking, heterotopias "are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality."[38] And indeed, in the guise of an imitation of a concrete society, Selim's life could be seen as enacted utopia, as his answer to all the previous spaces he passed through in his troublesome existence. But this contestation is taking on its full value only after the narration of all of Selim's adventures.

Foucault distinguishes two categories: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation -the former being characteristic for primitive societies, while the later are to be found in contemporary western culture -noting that there are mixed cases as well. I will argue that in Selim's case the spaces he is going through are all heterotopias of *personal* crisis, in the sense that all the text is given as his very subjective experience of those spaces, which is definitely the

[38] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 24.

experience of personal growth. Even though we see several times Selim being objectified through the inquisitionary attitude of the narrator, it is manifest that the text as a whole is tending to suggest – not to unveil, this would be impossible – the wealth of meanings in Selim's intimate world.

While Foucault does a kind of sociology of the space, in Vizyenos's work we see a definitely personalistic approach. This undoubtedly has to do as well with the peculiarities of the novelistic discourse, which in this particular case has a definite affinity with romanticism. This means that the focus is not on the process of shaping of the individual by the environment, nor on his reactions – although those aspects are present as well – but on the peculiar way by which the individual reflects upon and reshapes this environment. The antithesis between those two points of view is actually given in *Moscov-Selim* by means of the aporias the narrator is experiencing in trying to establish the diagnosis, so to say, of Selim's character. Actually from what we know about the author – Vizyenos himself studied philosophy and psychology and besides that had a very personal experience of what an untypical mental constitution could bring about in one's life within society - one could infer quite reasonably that the opposition between a deterministic, positivist approach of human psychology and a more romantic, or indeed mystical vision of the soul, constituted a primary drive behind this work.

The first space that played a role in the shaping of Selim's personality was the harem. He was brought up as a girl and kept there by his mother until the age of twelve. The reason for this was that he was the last of three male children and the mother resorted to this ruse both because she wanted to have a daughter and for the more practical end to keep at least one of her children with her.[39] There Selim adopts what in society was considered a feminine sensitivity.

[39] Interestingly, the motive of child transvestitism is present in a modified form in other works of Vizuenos as well, and it seems that the etiology is itself irrelevant.

Undoubtedly the harem had a special place in the hierarchy of places in ottoman culture, and thus it fits in what Foucault mentions as the "hierarchic ensemble of places" in the Middle Ages[40]. For Selim however it functions as a heterotopia of crisis – it is a very special place from which he has the privilege to develop a distinctively critical point of view both regarding the major space of Muslim society and the feminine space he actually occupies as well, since he has the consciousness not to belong to it. In other words the singularity of Selim's position, from the very beginning of his life, is to be always on a distance from all spaces that are normally given to the members of his society. While from the point of view of the others, and especially from the point of view of his father, he is definitely situated in heterotopia of deviation. Of course Selim could not remain unaffected by this judgment which he feels upon himself as a burden. His childhood is marked by two conflicting forces: the tender and mutual love which binds him to his mother, and the strife to obtain the love of his all too virile father. His position between two contrasting value systems corresponding to the traditional gender pattern is both his "psychological wound" [p.224] the very sign of his deviation, and the wonderful chance to develop a rich individuality. And indeed, this first episode in Selim's life is of decisive importance for his subsequent overall experience of the world: since the very first space he occupied happened to be the wrong one, all the following spaces will, as it were, be displaced for him. That is to say, that even when they have a definite traditional function in the given society, Selim is experiencing them in his personal, untypical manner.

A traditionally male space which Selim will fail to experience is the customary orgies before he enters the army. It is the beginning of the Crimean war (1853–1856) and the recruited soldiers are allowed to commit whatever lawless actions they wish - thefts, rapes, murders – against the local non Turkish population. This is certainly a kind of heterotopy of crisis where the

[40] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 22.

virility of the future fighters is brought into maturity through physical and sexual violence. Selim can not participate in this heterotopia because initially he is not recruited at all: his eldest brother's lot came up. But anyway Selim was psychologically unable to understand this kind of behavior. When in the next morning after the festivities Selim hears that his brother has escaped, he decides to present himself in his place before the authorities in order to spare him being accused as a deserter. This is how Selim enters the military without being prepared for it as the rest of his fellows. While for the rest of the soldiers the combative enthusiasm is completely impersonal, mass emotion, for Selim it involves much greater amount of deliberate agency. The collective character of the soldier's emotions is expressed by Selim through the metaphor of ebriety:

> Some were drunk with wine and opium; some were drunk without having drunk anything. All however, appeared happy, even if they weren't so at all. [p.199]

Of course Selim himself is also subject to the collective ideal. He actually embraces the ottoman fanaticism more sincerely than the others, that is, the *government*[41] of his soul turns out to be a more effective one, thanks to his self-conscious behavior. While many of his fellows proved cowards, he stood always up to the greatest hardships, eager to serve the Sultan unto death. One may reasonably argue that actually the numerous deserters were freer than he was in the sense that they – out of their dread - spontaneously refused to be obedient, while on the contrary, Selim's self-control functioned without fail. As if through his feeling of being inferior and his strife to emulate his father's alluring masculinity, he unknowingly made himself subject to what Foucault defines as the modern power. It is the very strife for moral integrity, according to a received ethical prototype, but still experienced as an expression of personal freedom, which exemplifies here the interlocking between individualization and totalization. So if the other

[41] The allusion is to Foucault's governmentality. See "La "gouvernementalité"", volume III, item 239.

soldiers were behaving like drunk, he was as totally spellbound. The *other space* of the war is thus acting on him in a unique way, taking into account the rest of his compatriots, though this way is exactly the right one, if seen from the point of view of the patriotic ideology.

Selim passed seven years fighting for the Sultan, often suffering great injustices on the part of his superiors. But he was eager to endure all the hardships of the war, believing that in this way he is was meeting his utmost moral obligation and hoping that his father will feel at last proud of him. But his hopes were dashed in the most violent way: when he came back home, instead of admiration and love he found only hostility. His mother was dead, his eldest brother Hasan got killed because his father requested from the authorities to persecute him as a deserter, since he believed that the attempt to help him was first of all against the law and second ridiculous – after all Selim was not truly male. Thus Selim was punished with a year in prison for being accomplice in his brother's desertion. But he accepts the undeserved maltreatment with a sense of personal honor – the *other space* of the prison will function for him again in an unexpected way, strengthening his individuality. Instead of a space of deviation, the prison becomes for Selim the space where he develops his autonomous moral judgment.

After his release from the prison Selim, not being able to stay in his father's house enrolled again in the army which was this time going to put down the revolt in Herzegovina. Two years later he came back with a medal for bravery and he went to visit his father, hoping that with this new proof for his courage he had at last deserved the paternal love he was longing for. But there was a bad surprise waiting for him: even if this time the old bey was eager to embrace him, yet he was completely degraded from the excesses of alcohol and was now fully manipulated by his new wife. Selim could not recognize any more the masculine merits of character in his father. Thus his dream to obtain the love of his admired father came true, but its fulfillment gave to him something different from what he expected – it afforded the opportunity to undermine the one-

dimensional ideal of masculinity he still worshiped. In his disappointment, he did not find anything better than to get married with the girl who used to take care of his mother and who was considered to be his lot, since before dying the mother gave her a ring and entrusted her to take care of her son when he returns from the war. Thus Selim found himself in the space of the traditional Muslim family, which however was an *other space* for him because apparently is did not suit his sensitivity. There is a vast ellipse in the narration as far as the years of his family life are concerned. It is only mentioned by the narrator that he became a prosperous landowner and had three children. Then at some point the wars of independence get intensified again and Selim joined the troops to fight against the Russians – and this is the time of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 - he hated so much from the time of the Crimean war.

The next *other space* Selim finds himself in is his captivity in Russia. An *other space* of humiliation and total subjection to the enemy, supposedly. But again, for Selim things will work the other way around. During his captivity he is compelled to acknowledge the contrast between what he previously believed about the Russians, thanks to the fanatic hatred for the irreconcilable enemy of the Turkish nation and the Sultan, and the kind and respectful cares the Russian doctors and nurses accorded to him. But the appearances are deceptive (as always in Vizyenos' texts): the narrator emphasizes that this unbelievably nice behavior was a mere political ruse to destabilize the enemy:

> "What wasn't accomplished with the lion's skin succeeded furtively with the fox's." [p.219]

Here the question arises: how are we to evaluate Selim's reformed sensitivity, his new belief in the brotherhood of all people? Is he a victim of political manipulation, of powers acting upon him? Is he again nothing but the naïve recipient of the diverse elements constituting his subjectivity?

As far as the gender pattern is concerned, the decisive change Russia brings into Selim's consciousness is that he finally reaches the point of synthesis of both the masculine and feminine elements in his upbringing. His acquaintance with a Russian woman makes him realize the sheep-like obedience characteristic for his society and awakes in him a longing for a love relationship which would be a power relationship:

> "Pavlovska's gaze was not lowered before mine like a slave who bows his head for his master to give him an order or reprimand him. No. I felt that it entered my heart like a sweet fire, and gave it light and warmed it and thawed it and gave it wings and made it leap up to the skies from its joy and happiness… [p.220]

Because that is what was lacking in Selim's union with his wife Meléïka. It was not a power relationship in the sense that he could not feel her as an independent and free individuality:

> "Meléïka, my wife, was beautiful, beautiful and good, but – what can I tell you? In our houses the best women are like sheep. [p.220]

This is the moment where the traditional gender pattern with a nurturing but passive femininity and sovereign but cruel masculinity looses all justification for Selim:

> "Many's the time I lay in bed sleepless at night and reflect and wept like a small child because God hadn't also made my Meléïka like this, since he'd given her such beauty and such goodness. [p.220]

That is how Selim sees that the delimitation between feminine and masculine merits of character was not natural, nor needed, and new light is shed on the family institution, which was so unappealing for him in its traditional form. He sees that courage of heart and love are not incompatible and acknowledges the arbitrary nature of those divisions which constitutes the basis for traditional spaces – the male and the female, the powerful and the weak, the lawful and the criminal. In this sense Russia's space – this is, by the way, in a great extent a utopia – functions for Selim as a mirror: it gives him the possibility to look at his national identity from the

prospective of a nowhere[42], as it were, or rather the possibility to break the narrow limits of his former mentality. It is maybe not without importance that when Foucault discusses the experience of the mirror as common to both utopia and heterotopia, he analyses it in terms of real and unreal, of discovering one's own absence[43]. Although this amounts maybe to the same thing as what we would call self-reflexiveness, still it is curious that Foucault gives in his analysis this rather impersonal shade: it is not that I dissociate myself from what is totalizing and undifferentiated in me and become more individualized, but it seems rather as the discovery of the futility of any individuality. Of course, this is rather a matter of vocabulary, but it might attest certain distrust in the powers of human subject as well. Because then we might suspect that Selim's reevaluation of values concerning the nation and the gender patterns was not a matter of an autonomous moral judgment, but an inevitable conclusion, a mere calculations of differences.

Then when he goes back and finds everything destroyed and his family dead, Selim definitively renounces his national identity. He is disappointed because he sees that while he offered his whole life as a sacrifice for his nation, he did not obtain in return even the safety of his wife and children. That is how he takes the decision to cloister himself in his cottage and to ally himself with the Russian army when the opportunity arises.

Among the six principles of the heterotopias Foucault distinguishes, the discussion of two of them would be of special interest here. First, the principle that the function of a given heterotopia depends on the historical moment and that one and the same form may convey a different meaning depending on the specific cultural context:



[42] See Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 24: Foucault draws on the etymology of the word in defining utopia as "sites with no real place". Literary the word means "no place" which leads us to the idea of a position, a point of view raised above any kind of cultural predetermination.
[43] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 24.

> … each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another. [44]

In the text we see how the different spaces function as heterotopias for Selim in a twofold manner. His case is peculiar because from the very start of his life he is occupying a highly inappropriate space: he grows up in the harem as a girl, while being a boy. This makes it impossible for him to participate in the traditional scheme of places for the ottoman culture. Thus all spaces he passes through are spaces of deviation if looked from the standpoint of his father for example: his presence in the harem is considered revolting because contradicting his natural sex; further, his recruitment in the army is denounced as insulting, since his behavior is girlish: the war which was meant to contribute the his becoming a mature male is actually placing him outside the law and making him criminal. The two par excellence spaces of deviation – the prison and his captivity – turn out to be the spaces of his emancipation from the oppressive character of his national values. The captivity is of course a humiliating condition, but Selim himself considers that it opened his eyes to the truth. And lastly, his isolation in the countryside in his self-made "Russian" cottage is considered by everybody as the utmost proof for his insanity, while in his proper eyes this is the most sensible decision he could ever take. Actually, looking at it retrospectively, Selim considers exactly the years he spent in the war as a soldier faithful to the Sultan, as of a space of deviation, as an abnormality in his personal development, although at the time he was seeing it as the space to prove his virility. Thus, we see that how a heterotopia is defined is ultimately a matter of point of view, be it cultural or personal. Of course Foucault is right to say that we are not living in a void, but in a space densely populated with power relations. Still he does not pay the due attention to all the possible aspects of those power relations, because

[44] This is the second principle. See Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" , 25.

after all one and the same space could function in a completely individual way for the different persons involved in it.

According to the last out of his six principles, Foucault distinguishes heterotopias of illusion and of compensation, giving as respective examples the brothels and the colonies:

> The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the site inside which human life is partitioned, as still more illusionary […]. Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation…[45]

This definition particularly well describes the kind of heterotopia represented by the "Russian" cottage: it challenges the existing real space, exposing its defectiveness. However the polarity Foucault is talking about is difficult to be found in in Selim's case: in this instance there is no clear difference between illusion and compensation. Actually the cottage is both – with its construction and emplacement it does create the illusion of some unreal world, but it is also meant to be a really better space. Or rather it is the anticipation of *the* real. Selim is conscious of its illusionary character – he is for example continuously boiling tea "in the Russian way", without having Russian tea, just for consolation, as he says. Nevertheless this illusion stands for a suspended better reality.

This last characteristic of heterotopias expresses maybe to the fullest extent the inherent strife for sanctity whenever there is a process of establishing new spaces. In the beginning of his lecture Foucault speaks of the desanctification of spaces[46] as of an ongoing development in our



[45] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 27.
[46] Foucault, Ibid., 22: "… despite all the techniques for appropriating space, despite the whole network of knowledge that enables us to delimit or to formalize it, contemporary space is perhaps still not entirely desanctified (apparently unlike time, it would seem, which was detached from the sacred in the nineteenth century). To be sure a certain theoretical desanctification of space (the one signaled by Galileo's work) has occurred, but we may still not have

culture, not yet completed but apparently desirable. But this last trait of heterotopias – their quality to be always a replica to all other spaces, to contest them as deficient or deceitful in their pretension to reality – isn't it the expression of the longing for a really real space? And if the distinctive trait of human being is the ability to create a world of his own, as Tillich has it, then maybe the contestation of the old spaces and their desanctification if just the other side of the process of creation of new spaces. Holy spaces like the space of the garden, which Foucault mentions as the supposedly oldest type of heterotopia[47] , holy because of their wholeness, of their capacity to represent – be it only in the form of anticipation - a new cosmos. And after all maybe the difference between the heterotopia of the brothel and that of the colony does not refer at all to the antinomy real vs. illusionary[48].

But the question we have here, as far as Selim's final heterotopia is concerned is this: is there something truly personal in it, or is it just the outcome of the competing forces which moulded his subjectivity? Is his transgressivity *nothing but* the happy effect of his initial displaced position? And also: if it is an individual creation, how should one call it - reality or artifact?



reached the point of a practical desanctification of space. And perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down."

[47] Foucault, Ibid, 25.

[48] I mean that it might be a difference of values, of founding principles: the brothel might very well represent the holiness of a Dionysiac type.

## III. The dynamics of the self

As we saw in the last chapter, in his text on *other spaces*, Foucault does not analyze the personal dimension of heterotopias. He actually does not even mention the possibility for the creation of personal *other spaces*. Even when in other writings he envisages the creation of new subjectivities he does not seem to mean that this would be possible as an autonomous achievement. And such a position would be justified by Selim's story as well, if taking into account the collapse of his solitary subjectivity which closes the text. Actually one may well say that Selim's trajectory is an eloquent illustration for Foucault's theory: he appears as a product of the diverse power relations he is caught in, through his alternant movement of conformity vs. resistance to the stereotypes he meets with. Even what seems as his most personal achievement – the construction of a world of his own – is maybe only the final product of the struggle between competing power regimes. Moreover his enterprise to convert himself to a new cultural identity seems to be aborted, probably exactly because he attempted to do that in a sort of void. Without the necessary social network of power relations his new subjectivity – this *empty synthesis*[49] – blew away. And yet, what I will argue for in this chapter is that Selim's story says more that this.

The end of *Moscov-Selim* is indeed disturbing. It seems to invalidate everything that the narrator inferred about Selim's character, and to put into question the admiration he had for him. Only two months before Selim's death, that is few paragraphs before the end of the text, the narrator, deeply intrigued by this extraordinary life story, has finally built up in his mind a convincing psychological profile of Selim. He has found the explanation for his uniqueness, the

[49] See "Hietzsche, Genealogy, History", *The Foucault Reader*, 81.

reason for his uncommon behavior. He sees in him the product of a harmonious combination between the merits of character of his parents:

> Selim united in himself all that was fair and good in his parent's separate temperaments. The fearless and brave in his character, his sense of honor and pride – what were they if not his father's virtues? But while these virtues were corrupted in the old man's soul by the brutality of his spirit and his inhumanly harsh, unnecessarily strict nature, Selim, inheriting in addition to those virtues a mild nature, an innate understanding, patience, and goodness of heart, had become a person who compelled respect and admiration.

This is a fairly scientific explanation which takes the principle of heredity as its foundation. When leaving Eastern Thrace and during his trip to Athens, the narrator puts together the pieces of Selim's life and reaches the conclusion that the components constituting his character can be traced in the characters of his sensitive and loving mother and of his brave and proud father:

> In this way I spent the entire length of the road discovering in Selim's character its individual psychological components, components that had already preexisted separately in the opposed natures of his parents.

He even ascribes the creation of his individual world to the lively imagination inherited from his mother. In order to satisfy to the needs of his sensitivity, Selim created his illusionary Russian life, in the same way that his mother used to make him up as a girl:

> It seemed to me a comic quirk of nature that the warlike, magnanimous Selim had inherited from his gentle and peaceable mother not only a heart extraordinarily vulnerable in some respects, but also an unusually lively imagination that served that vulnerable heart. Selim had created for himself a Russian life in that Hellenic land because his lively imagination, perverted for his passion for Russian things, filled in the gaps in that life so that what for the rest of us was comic and ridiculous disappeared from before his eyes in exactly the same way that that good *hanoumissa* had created through her own imagining a girl child by dressing and making up the extremely manly Selim as a daughter.

But this preliminary psychological diagnosis the narrator makes for Selim will prove inadequate and rather simplistic. Because when he comes back from Athens and wants to visit his

friend, he learns that during his short absence Selim suffered a stroke and is very sick. The local doctor explains him that Selim heard the rumor that the Russian army is approaching and rejoiced so much that his heart could not bear it. But it turns out, that it was not out of joy, quite on the contrary. Actually the idea that the Russians are coming and his dream will finally come true appeared too frightening to Selim:

> I wish it were joy! … For me, God wrote that I'll die from my sorrow! … In fact I, too, thought I'd rejoice … but it cannot be." [p.228]

He thinks out anew his position and finds it impossible to imagine the possibility to betray his blood:

> "My father and my mother were Islam … I and all the Osmanlis are the Sultan's property …. Does blood ever become water? …. How can I deny my blood? … Betray my master? … Go with the Russians? … This frightful idea tormented me one night, all night long … One night, all night long my mind wrestled with my heart. … At daybreak … out of my grief, out of my pondering, it came to me …" [p. 228.]

At the end, wanting to spare this pain to his friend, the narrator assures him that there is no way that the Russians come and it was only a rumor. Then Selim gets excited again, and dies from a second stroke, seemingly out of his joy:

> … and the Turk remained a Turk to the last. [p. 229]

This unexpected drift blows up the narrator's conjectures. It seems that his psychological amateurism was either too romantic – he believed a lot in the autonomy of Selim's soul – or else, too positivistic – he thought that two and two makes necessarily four in the realm of the human psyche as well as in positive sciences. If we consider the first vision and take the end of the story literary, we could say that it comes to support the existence of psychological laws as outlined in C.G. Jung's psychoanalysis for example. He repeatedly affirms, when analyzing his empirical material, that if one endeavors tremendous changes in one's life without taking into account the

unconscious parts of the self, it is quite probable that the leap will be a failure[50]. What Selim calls his blood expresses the strength of those inherited psychological contents which come to us from our immediate environment and its historical development. It is connected with what Jung called the collective unconscious. It is thus closely related to the anima/animus archetypes which would explain why after all gender patterns are so persistent[51]. Jung does not say that the collective unconscious makes impossible human freedom; he only observes that if the unconscious contents do not become conscious, they can not be changed. To perform the partial integration of the unconscious contents into the conscious mind is a hard task and Jung expressly warned his readers that he is not giving any conclusive statement as to the extent to which this could or should be achieved[52]. Such an approach would provide arguments against Foucault creation of new subjectivities. Because if after all there are laws in psychic life, which can not be overridden, then Foucault's claim that we should not struggle to uncover the depths of our selves might prove naïve.

In my view the truth is somewhere in the middle, as always. Actually Jung is not taking psychological laws to be a sort of predetermination nor does he think that they limit I any way human freedom. In the manner that he outlines it, it seems very much compatible with Tillich's idea of justice. It is not that one can not transcend what one is in the present moment, it is not that one is bound to some mysterious essential nature to which he ought to remain faithful, but only that if one is to change he first should know well what he is in order to be able to destruct what is deemed undesirable.

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[50] See his descriptions of psychotherapy in *The Collected Works, volume XVII, The Development of Personality, The Collected Works, volume XVII.*
[51] See Jung, *The Collected Works, volume IX, part2, Aion : researches into phenomenology of the self*'.
[52] See for example his discussion of the anima/animus archetypes.

There are two competing approaches to Selim's character on the part of the narrator. One of them is rather positivistic, while the other is more respectful for what could be called the mystery of the soul. From the very beginning of their acquaintance there was an inexplicable mutual attraction between the two men. When they meet for the first time close to the spring of Kainartza and before he had heard the story of his life, the narrator gets so fascinated by Selim's personality that after that he passes a sleepless night thinking about him:

> He captivated my affection and interest by frontal attack, so to speak, in spite of the absurdity of his outfit. [p.191]

The next morning before down he visits his cottage and Selim confesses him that he felt the same emotion and that the thought that if they could speak this would alleviate his tormented soul:

> "And yet, after you'd left, a feeling of regret came over me because I couldn't detain you; a desire to see you came over me, to talk with you – a great wonder! As soon as you passed with your horse I fell in behind you like a hunting dog" [p.195]

This is another persistent motive in Vizuenos' texts – the mysterious relation between two souls. It is present in all his stories and always in juxtaposition with the impossibility to really understand the other. It is not without reason that Greek literary criticism has drawn a parallel between Vizyenos and Dostoyevsky[53]. A common trait to their otherwise hardly comparable work is the passion for the human soul. Even if we can formally recognize an end in the story, it remains essentially open, as far as the character's personality is concerned. There is no totalizing vision of the character – up till the end he remains a mystery. This expresses the respect for the freedom of the human subject. That is why the end of the story could not be taken literary. If we analyze the point of view of the narrator we see the principle of love, or participation into the actual situation of Selim's life. Even if at some point the narrator fears that Selim is after all

[53] Aggelos Sikelianos, "Georgios Vizyenos" (1949), cited in the appendices to the edition of P. Moullas, 269.

insane and it is a waste of time to talk with him, through his deep sympathy he overcomes the disagreeable impressions of the grotesque appearance and the absurdity of his beliefs:

> what my companion had said, that Moscov-Selim was a crazy man, seemed to me in the final analysis an insult to me myself. The man had only one peculiarity, that he valued certain things in an unexpected way. [p.191]

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To my mind this persistent fascination with the soul of the other, besides the fact that it is, psychologically speaking, a projection (or because of that), gives a precious insight into the problems of freedom and predetermination. It harmonizes with Tillich's notion of the ambiguity of life. According to him, people do experience authentic freedom, as well as they do create reality, but since they are subject to the conditions of existential estrangement as well, those two dimensions are mixed up in actual life, and do not present themselves in an univocal way to the understanding.

Vizyenos' work is a forcefull inlustration for this ambiguity of life. It is permeated by a kind circularity which is morphologically evident in the narration, but besides that expresses a definite vision of reality. The character of Moscov-Selim goes back to the starting point – he remains a Turk as he was in the beginning of his tormented life. It is as if nothing changed, nothing happened. And still the whole text is the digging into this apparent nothing. It is the loving insight into Selim's ambiguous life – at first look ridiculous and meaningless. It is the circularity of self-reflexiveness, but also the circularity of love, of loving participation – on the part of the author, on the part of the reader.

## Truth, Nature, Authenticity

Foucault has claimed that instead of striving to discover some alleged true nature in ourselves, we would better abandon this and invent ourselves anew. Are those relevant oppositions when dealing with the self? Selim's story could be taken in different ways. Inventing oneself anew is not possible – because the blood does not become water. The collapse at the end of the story might be taken as pointing towards this negative answer. However, judging from the text, as well as of the motives present in the overall of Vizyenos' literary works, this sort of determinism is not a plausible interpretation.

It has been remarked that the kind of subjectivity Foucault is inviting for is an artifactual one.[54] Instead of subjects, bowing to the capillary power of the regimes of knowledge, individuals are exhorted to create themselves as a work of art. However this work of art is not supposed to contain any deep meaning, to express a Truth, to go beyond the principle of pleasure and aesthetic beauty. Because the nature of meaning is exposed as completely spurious, it has been unmasked as the mere ruse of the blind forces sustaining the existence of the human species[55]. It is quite interesting how Foucault finds inspiration in Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropology and in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis to say that the meaning is nothing but a by-product of the primordial system underlying our existence:

> [Lévi-Strauss et Lacan] nous ont montré que le sens n'était probablement qu'une sorte d'effet de surface, un miroitment, une écume, et ce qui nous traversait profondément, ce qui était avant nous, ce qui nous soutenait dans le temps et l'espace, c'était le système[56]

Thus, Foucault defines the task of philosophy as the unmasking and laying bare of the mechanisms behind the production of all truth-claims and ideological systems. It is this same task

[54] Weberman, "Are Freedom and Anti-humanism Compatible? The Case of Foucault and Butler", 261.
[55] See the interview "Qui êtes-vous professeur Foucault? ", *Dits et écrits*, v. I., 619.
[56] Foucault, "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", *Dits et écrits*, v. I., 514

he devoted his efforts to in *Les mots et les choses*. In this process of demystification human freedom is supposedly enacted and the intellect is raised above the limits of the dominant regime of truth:

> La tâche de la philosophie actuelle […] c'est de mettre au jour cette pensée d'avant la pensée, ce système d'avant tout système… Il est le fond sur lequel notre pensée « libre » émerge et scintille pendant un instant.[57]

On the level of the individual, Foucault believed that the liberation will come through the courageous renunciation of one's own identity. And naturally, given the conjecture that what people are, in their very intimate thoughts and feelings, is the outcome of multiple power relationships, it would be a waste of time to try to dig into this "empty synthesis"[58] in the search of an imaginary core of authenticity. Therefore the sole possible course of action which would lead us towards greater freedom is to reinvent and build anew ourselves:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures.[59]

The way, in which Foucault conceives of the formation of the subject, as well as of the possible practices of the emancipation of the individual, it becomes clear that for him « subjectivity is unavoidably a *political* affair »[60]. And this position seems to me altogether convincing – clearly subjectivity plays a primordial role in the political realm. However to focus on its political aspect as if it were its exclusive nature is perhaps too partial. It is maybe worth noticing that on some occasions Foucault established an explicit connection between his anti-humanist project and the political preoccupations of contemporary history:



[57] Foucault, Ibid., 515.
[58] The expression of *empty synthesis* is used in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History": P. Rabinow(ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, 81.
[59] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 785.
[60] Weberman, "Are Freedom and Anti-humanism Compatible? The Case of Foucault and Butler", 264.

> Notre tâche est de nous affranchir définitivement de l'humanisme, et c'est en ce sens que notre travail est un travail politique, dans la mesure où tous les régimes de l'Est ou de l'Ouest font passer leur mauvaise marchandise sous le pavillon de l'humanisme…Nous devons dénoncer toutes ces mystifications… [61]

While Foucault was willing to show the inadequacy of our political conception of power (where a definite origin and nature are assumed to exist), it seems that his own renewed concept remains stuck in this very same political context. And this is understandable since he was motivated by the need to deal with actual instances of political injustice. Still what seems to me as an "incomplete" somehow in his vision of power phenomena in relation to the subject is that while he makes the important move to destroy the bugbear of power and to show us that in order to combat its injustices we should stop think about it as of a centralized force, endowed with some mysterious intentionality, he is reluctant to go farther and explore the way in which the individual is related to power from within. In other words he is unwilling to foresee the ontological outcomes of his own speculations.

Foucault discerned an important interconnection between the demonstrative expressions of humanism and some of the greatest cruelties and injustices in society. I will just mention here that this compensatory relationship was analyzed at length by the psychoanalytical writings of C.G. Jung. "Sentimentality is the superstructure erected upon brutality"[62], he said, and affirmed the need of prophets who will promote a kind of curative "lack of feeling"[63]. Foucault sensed that man is not the independent, sovereign agent; he is not endowed with a unified personality, but on the contrary is split. I think that what is characteristic in this respect of Foucault's thought is not the diagnosis of this split – after the choc of two world wars and having in mind the cruelties of



[61] Foucault, "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", *Dits et écrits*, v. I., 516.
[62] C.G. Jung, ""Ulysses": A Monologue", *The Collected Works*, v. 15, 122.
[63] Ibid.

Nazism and Stalinism[64], it was probably the main concern of many – but the therapy he is proposing. He did not believe in the overcoming of this split, but hoped for a new world where people will *know* that the sovereign subject simply does not exist, but man's consciousness is the ever-changing function of power relations:

> Dans le grondement qui nous ébranle aujourd'hui, il faut peut-être reconnaître la naissance d'un monde où l'on saura que le sujet n'est pas un, mais scindé, non pas souverain, mais dépendant, non pas origine absolue, mais fonction sans cesse modifiante.[65]

That's what motivated his rejoicing at the news of the death of man[66]. He even acknowledged a relative resemblance between the, let's say, post-modern mentality, and the Enlightenment – in same way that then man took the place of God, nowadays "an anonymous thought" has taken the place previously attributed to man[67]. Paradoxically enough he didn't allow for the possibility that this new displacement is as bad as the previous. He believed in the possibility to get rid from myths in a definitive way, and he probably saw himself as myth destroyer:

> Le rôle du philosophe qui est celui de dire ce qui se passe consiste peut-être aujourd'hui à démontrer que l'humanité commence à découvrir qu'elle peut fonctionner sans mythes.[68]

Here I can not refrain from remembering Sigmund Freud's words. He also thought that people will be able to leave behind all that their so called inner world used to consist of:

> I only wonder what neurotics will do in the future when all their symbols have been unmasked. It will then be impossible to have a neurosis.[69]



[64] Jung is referring in a number of his writings of the psychological dimensions of those phenomena.
[65] Foucault, "La naissance d'un monde", *Dits et écrits*, v. I.,789.
[66] What he meant with the death of man was "La mort du sujet comme origine et fondement du Savoir, de la Liberté, du Langage et de l'Histoire" See « La naissance d'un monde », *Dits et écrits*, v. I.,788.
[67] See Foucault's interview with M. Chapsal, *Dits et Ecrits, volume I*, 513-518.
[68] Foucault, "Qui êtes-vous professeur Foucault? ", *Dits et écrits, volume I*, 620.
[69] Jung, "Sigmund Freud and his historical setting", *The Collected Works, volume XV*, 48.

At least up till nothing has confirmed that such a vision is something more than a utopia. Instead, a state of permanent flight from any form of more or less stable self-identity – in the way I see it being prescribed by Foucault – is usually considered as a hindrance to a satisfactory psychic life. It is of course beyond my capacity here to discuss whether this is a valid argument in favor of the idea of the centeredness of the self. However it seems to me that P. Tillich's concept of the self-actualization of life gives a more convincing account of the phenomenon of subjectivity, in the sense that he is equally apprehensive about the tendency of each form of self-identity to stiffen up, but nevertheless accounts for the need of centripetal forces which are guaranteeing the preservation of the individual as such and of its capacity for long-term purposeful action. For him the self-actualization of the personality is constituted by two alternating functions: self-integration, or the tendency to centeredness and self-creation, or the tendency to transcend every preexisting center. There are two ways in which the process of the self-actualization of life can be aborted:

> Either it is the inability to overcome a limited, stabilized, and immovable centeredness, in which case there is a center, but a center which does not have a life process whose content is changed and increased; thus it approaches the death of mere self-identity. Or it is the inability to return because of the dispersing power of the manifoldness, in which case there is life, but it is dispersed and weak in centeredness, and it faces the danger of loosing its center altogether – the death of mere self-alteration.[70]

So, there are two kinds of death for the personality: the death of immutable self-identity and the death of mere self-alteration. Now my argument is that, in large measure, we have the risk of this second specie of death in Foucault's philosophy, and it is at this point that I find his understanding of the issue if self-identity defective.



[70] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, volume III, Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God,* 33.

It seems that Foucault saw the optimal state of subjectivity in a kind of very loose connections among the self's components, a permanent openness and readiness for further modifications. This kind of existence would be the one able to continuously evade the fixation of structures of dominance:

> …a sensitivity to one's current style *as* a style enables one to collect now-marginal practices from the past which in turn allows one to engage in a loosely ordered multiplicity of activities that give life meaning or beauty, while at the same time contributing to slowly changing the totalizing background practices that endanger human freedom.[71]

And here, to my mind, are the limits of Foucault's freedom. Despite his claim that he has always opposed himself to the idea of universal necessities, there is obviously at least one determinant in human existence – the fact that there is no ultimate goal and meaning to be sought for, the fact that human beings are not supposed to be gods. Any yielding to notions of, say, the human spirit, would automatically lead to a form of intellectual slavery. Our freedom is boundless, yea, as long as we do not imagine that we are able to create something more than a work of art.



[71] H. Dreyfus, "Heidegger and Foucault on the Subject, Agency and Practices".

# Conclusions

What I hope I've managed to at least dimly suggest in this thesis is that imagining human freedom necessarily depends on some basic decisions. The differences between Foucault's and Tillich's respective philosophies are dependent on such decisions. While Foucault opts for an only partial escape for what he calls the power/knowledge regimes, Tillich invites us for the creation of love/power/justice realities.

The encounter with the "reality" of our everyday life however can easily make us despair of the possibility of freedom. And this is evident as well in the text I presented here by way of illustration. Selim's being deviant is, on the one hand predetermined by the lot he had in his childhood, while on the other seems as an active contestation of the dominant power regime. But maybe it is not his autonomous agency but just his unprivileged position which made him struggle against the system's injustices. Here we recognize Foucault's notion of resistance. All that however resembles too much to the interplay of anonymous forces, of anonymous thoughts and does inspire quite a few disquieting thoughts about the meaning of our existence. Probably these questions prompted the narrator's exclamation which opens the text:

> I wish I'd never met you on my path; I wish I'd never known you in my life! […] Your sorrowful, gaunt face, with its deep, mournful look disturbs my sleep, frightens my solitude. Your doleful, trembling voice echoes plaintively in my ears – I must write your story. [p.187]

These words are of course something more than a complaint against the injustices done to Selim: it is an expression of the anxiety, caused by the tragedy of the feeling of self-identity. The answer which Tillich's proposes to this situation is the courage to take death, meaninglessness and guilt upon oneself, or the courage to be[72].

[72] Tillich, Paul, *The Courage to Be*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1952.

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