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Projections: From Plague Town to Panopticon

Recall the situation presented in G.K. Chesterton's story "The Invisible Man," published in the collection *The Innocence of Father Brown*, whereby the eponymous Father Brown poses the following hypothetical: "An old lady lives in a castle with twenty servants. Another lady visits, and she says to the visitor 'I am always so alone'. The doctor informs her that the plague is spreading, that there is a danger of infection, etc., and then she says 'There are so many of us here'." The all-too-impressionable companion—looking to clarify Father Brown's poetics—asks, "An invisible man?" to which Father Brown responds, "A mentally invisible man. Of course you can't think of such a man, until you do think of him."¹

It seems that the structure of Father Brown's drama spawns dual axes: the relationship between the lady and the inquiring doctor on the one hand, and the relationship between the lady and her servants on the other. The relationship between the doctor and the servants notwithstanding, the relation between the lady and her servant is but a variation on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, perhaps in all too obvious analogous terms. In the Hegelian myth, at its highest level of abstraction, the issue at hand is self-consciousness and the way that it is fashioned through the meeting with the other. Crucially, for Hegel, absolute knowledge, or Spirit, cannot come to be without first a self-consciousness recognizing another self-consciousness. Father Brown's variation on this myth, however, introduces a third term: the

¹ G.K. Chesterton, "The Invisible Man." In *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Cassell and Company, 1911), 144.

doctor who incites the slave (the lady's servants) into utterance, into discourse, and ultimately in Father Brown's terms, into visibility.

The intervention offered by Father Brown reframes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in terms that bear immediate aesthetic implications. The problem of cognition becomes the ontological problem of seeing and being seen. A relationship between aesthetics and interpersonal experience is posited, but it should at this juncture be stated that this visuality is enabled only through the mediation of the doctor—the expert, the representative of the disciplines; in other words, the specter of the Foucauldian formulation of power. The expert as the quintessential figure in the Foucauldian apparatus of power appears here as the doctor which diagnoses the symptom of the woman in the crowd, transforming the threat of the contagion of the literal plague into an *emotional contagion* which might be termed empathy.

It is this idea of empathy—the German *Einfühlung*—that figures itself into the creases of Foucauldian imagery and Foucault's exemplary figural representations of power. The term *Einfühlung*, though commonly cited as the origin of the English 'empathy,' extends the interpersonal dynamic carried in the English to bear a more technical implication of a literal 'feeling into' and refers to an act of projecting oneself into another body or environment. Empathy in this form is therefore never just a process of poetic identification that fills intersubjective gaps but an optical form which projects the aesthetic experience of bodily displacement.

Twentieth century literature on empathy marks a departure from the classical formulation of the ontology of seeing and being seen. Its relatively modern reintroduction into the study of philosophy has largely reframed the concept of empathy in the service of one of two broad problematics: either the theory of mind debates concerned with the hermeneutics of observing

consciousness, or empathy as a topic of moral psychology. Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of the other summarizes one dimension of this emerged domain. Levinas' face-to-face relation appropriates the aesthetic of the other in the service of an absolute and perpetual responsibility in the face of the other's needs. Hannah Arendt offers an indirect critique of this suspiciously stable and hypostasized relation in her insistent rejection of empathy as a political value. Empathy, Arendt argues, can never offer the generalized symmetry of relations capable of generating a common political will. Summarily, the shift occurs from empathy as an aesthetic to empathy to the domain of intersubjective, social phenomenon that concerns Levinas and Arendt.

It is precisely the figuring of empathy as the passage between egoism and altruism—which opposes egoism and altruism as bitter antitheses—that must be challenged and elaborated. Empathy is the operating principle that determines the servants' visibility to Chesterton's figure of the lady. But while the lady's servants are invisible without empathy it must not be concluded that empathy is that which produces their visibility. It is simply that empathy and visibility are concomitant rather than determined upon one or the other. This prompts a mending of the break between the aesthetic and the intersubjective emphases in the history of empathy. Empathy and visibility occupy the same space and neither can be removed while the other remains but that is not to say that either came to occupy the coordinates of this space as a product of the other.

This cohabited space has, in fact, a name. In Foucault's vocabulary, this is the panopticon, the plague town, and the pasture, simultaneously. These spaces, in a reading of Foucault, are the sites of power *par excellence*. The common thematic can perhaps be summarized as follows: look at everything, but touch nothing. It is the plague town under the threat of virality that adopts as slogan and logo the poetics of molecular dispersion and attraction embedded within the fabric of society. The presence of the other is no more clearly delimited

than when you are deprived the ability to connect with it. There is connection but that connection is everything but physical. The panopticon functions no differently in this regard. The threat of the other's authority is everything but physical and corporeal. It is the complete diffusion of authority through which the senses are deprived of the faculty of discerning the corporeal body of the intersubjective other that forces the consolidation of the diffuse into a constituted knowledge of intersubjectivity. Among the conditions of empathy, particular importance attaches to solitude. It is as Walter Benjamin writes, "When all sails are broken and no sail appears on the blank horizon, when no wave of immediate experience surges and crest, then there remains to the isolated subject in the grip of *taedium vitae* one last thing—and that is empathy."²

This is not to claim a disregard of the notion of the intersubjective in Foucault's thought, even as the trajectory of his thought takes him towards a pluralization of the technologies (beyond those of power) at the end of his career. In the disciplinary model, the intersubjective is precisely the site of power's operation; in the ethics of the later Foucault, "technologies of the self" explicitly account for subject relations as a constituent element of self-care: "Technologies of the self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."³ It is not that intersubjectivity is lost in the concern for self-care. It is, rather, that the technological schema and its strict typologies subsumes the intersubjective under self-care and technologies of the self.

² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 805.

³ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

It may be appropriate to wonder: at what cost or to what relative inconsequence are we to defend a distinct technology of the other? Should this not simply be trivially filed away as a matter of terminological shuffle? The terminological distinction, between technologies of the self and a relational technology of the other, implies a difference—internal to this technological terrain—just as different as technologies of power are to technologies of the self in the technical design itself. This qualitative difference becomes the effect by which contemporary society recognizes altruism and egotism so differently. What distinguishes the relationality of this type of technology—which for the time being will be exemplified by empathy—is the asymmetricality in its practice.

The historical view taken by Foucault of these physical models of control: the plague town, the panopticon, and the pasture concretizes the diffuse mechanisms of power which fill the gaps and creases between institutions, ideas, and relations. Power and its complete arsenal of negative concepts and exclusionary sanctions must be recast as a different model of control that has replaced the simple reduction of power as repression. It is in Foucault's estimation that the very historical fact of transition from the practice of exile (as is in the recourse to the leper through expulsion from the city or confinement in the *hôpital général*) to the reactivation of the *quadrillage* model of plague control that underscores the differences in the visuality of power in its positive and negative forms. Perhaps it would seem that while Foucault takes care to stake this differentiation between the exclusion of the leper and the inclusion of the plague victim, that these same variations have less to say for the type of distinction presently being made here. Would the leper not have the most vivid impression of the society not only from which he has been banished but which made the deliberate, unilateral decision to enforce the exile? How can the traumatic act of expulsion not create but the most emotional resonance with which the leper

begins to think of the other? But yet the relation of exile, the affect created by expulsion, the mind of the leper, while surely emotional and while surely capable of *thinking* society, is no longer continuous with the idea of the other. Put differently, the exclusion of lepers at each point of execution takes as its rationale the precise foreclosure of empathy for which not only the possibility of ‘feeling into’ the other is foreclosed but the actual possibility of the other’s existence is denied.

Where Foucault uses this continuum to make the distinction between negative technologies of the power, on the one hand, and positive technologies of power, on the other, it might also be said there is a corresponding difference in continuity. That is, if *quadrillage* is characterized as “continuous due to this pyramid of control...continuous not only in this pyramidal, hierarchical structure, but also in its exercise, since surveillance had to be exercised uninterruptedly,”⁴ the practice of the exclusion of lepers is, correspondingly, discontinuous. “It involved casting these individuals out into a vague, external world beyond the town’s walls, beyond the limits of the community. As a result, two masses were constituted, each foreign to the other. And those cast out were cast out in the strict sense into outer darkness.” The leper’s exclusion was not only a “rule of no contact” but the complete disqualification of those cast out. “They entered death, and you know that the exclusion of lepers was regularly accompanied by a kind of funeral ceremony during which individuals who had been declared leprous were declared dead.”⁵

Where the *quadrillage* of the plague town becomes distinct from this practice of rejection, deprivation, refusal, and incomprehension of the leper, not only does the technology

⁴ Michel Foucault, “15 January 1975.” In *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Verso, 2003), 45.

⁵ *Ibid*, 43-44.

itself begin to shift but so too do relations between individuals. And while Foucault does term the generalized practice of the plague town a “model of inclusion,”⁶ let it be exceedingly clear that the empathy that we are attuned to in these spatial models is not the type of inclusivity that might be found crudely representative of peace-loving, Reichian discourses. It is evident that the liberal democratic use of inclusivity is not inclusivity in the way that Foucault invokes the term. “You can see that this kind of organization is in fact absolutely antithetical to, or at any rate different from, all the practices concerning lepers. It is not exclusion but quarantine. It is not a question of driving out individuals but rather of establishing and fixing them, of giving them their own place, of assigning places and of defining presences and subdivided presences. Not rejection but inclusion. You can see that there is no longer a kind of global division between two types or groups of population, one that is pure and the other impure, one that has leprosy and the other that does not. Rather, there is a series of fine and constantly observed differences between individuals who are ill and those who are not. It is a question of individualization; the division and subdivision of power extending to the fine grain of individuality.”⁷

And so emerges the trope of this period of Foucault’s career under the slogan of individuation. More specifically, it is the paradox whereby individuation—whether it is in the example of the quarantined citizen, *dressage*, or the pathologized and disciplined body, more generally—produces the mass of the governable body. “Every day the inspectors had to visit every house, stopping outside and summoning the occupants. Each individual was assigned a window in which he had to appear, and when his name was called he had to present himself at

⁶ Michel Foucault, “15 January 1975.” In *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Verso, 2003), 44.

⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

the window.”⁸ *Quadrillage* fills the space vacated by the distancing, severing of contact, or marginalization of lepers. While leprosy calls for distance, the plague town takes principle upon constant, meticulous, and insistent observation. And power of course does not simply operate from the beacons of authority and so we must insist upon the spectrality of quarantine not only spatially in its organization of space but in the performativity of the act of surveying. For the individual who presents himself at the window at the call of the inspector, the affirmation of life of the individual takes the theatrical role in a large parade of the living projected onto the plague town. This is not only the constitution of the man in the crowd but further the constitution of a consciousness. If this is just the consciousness of an individual existence, then it is an individualism always complicit and in symbiosis with the proven existence of others done systematically and theatrically.

There is a rather interesting phenomenon running parallel to the mechanics of what Foucault describes as the political dream of the plague town that Foucault seems to have difficulty accounting for. “There is a literature of plague that is a literature of the decomposition of individuality; a kind of orgiastic dream in which plague is the moment when individuals come apart and when the law is forgotten. As soon as plague breaks out, the town's forms of lawfulness disappear. Plague overcomes the law just as it overcomes the body. Such, at least, is the literary dream of the plague. But you can see that there was another dream of the plague: a political dream in which the plague is rather the marvelous moment when political power is exercised to the full.”⁹ There seems to be an anxiety in this reading of the literary dream, if not outright dismissal on Foucault’s part. The problem here it seems is not simply the incompatibility of these

⁸ Michel Foucault, “15 January 1975.” In *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Verso, 2003), 46.

⁹ *Ibid*, 47.

two phantasms—the literary and the political—brought with the plague. That these two phenomena coexist does not discount the productivity of the characterization of positive technology made through the example of the political dream. It is, however, problematic for Foucault because the concurrence of these two dreams would require a re-characterization of the discourse of the plague: one that pushes the narrative of individuation and discipline so far that the object sees the transparency of the political dream and yet cannot wake from it. This would mean that the capillary understanding of power so far invested in the Foucauldian project must cede to the uncompromising, unyielding, and inscrutable presence of a political center in the presence of which the orgiastic literary dream must be forgotten.

But perhaps there is a way of understanding these two dreams without situating one from above and the other from below. There are two equivalences claimed by Foucault: that the literature of the plague is the literature of individuality, and, that individuality is the material embodiment of the law. In these terms, if individuality is the category produced by the disciplinary mechanism of the law, how then does the plague town become the example of both the positive workings of power and the dissolution of the individual identity encouraged by this power?

The individualism being referred to in the “decomposition of individuality”¹⁰ is the subjectivity constituted by the disciplinary modalities of power—the docile individual that appears in the solitary cells of the panoptic prison. In fact, if this problem of the two dreams is found in the plague town, it should be observable in the panopticon as well, and yet the panopticon remains the canonical manifestation of disciplinary power—unperturbed and

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “15 January 1975.” In *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Verso, 2003), 47.

unchallenged. The panoptic gaze transforms the disciplined body into text, an unwieldy collection of file folders united under the aegis of a name. But more powerfully, it poses a paradox of near identical character. The panopticon both begs the question and simultaneously hopes to conceal from curious minds, “What individuates the individual?” Moreover, how does the constituted subject represent itself in consciousness given that it should not understand its own individuality to be a pathologized, normalized file cabinet. Even where mass surveillance is understood as such and an omnipresent and insidious institution is visible and well-defined, it does not, to the praise of its own effect, commute to the individual consciousness a formulation of the individual its own mind of itself as reduced to the contents of a conforming file folder. That is, individualism as it is understood in the Foucauldian system, is an asymmetrical concept.

The asymmetry of individualism allows us to elaborate upon the paradox of the plague town. The problem of the two dreams puts these two seemingly opposed phenomena not in dialectical relation to one another, but rather in a similar asymmetric imbalance. That individual consciousness refuses to see itself as automaton illuminates the two sides of a single coin. In the panopticon, the understanding of mental concepts is pitted against the position of the Supervisor. Only through the virtual projection of sovereignty onto the imagined Supervisor in the watchtower that may, or may not, exist does the incarcerated necessarily come to subject itself to disciplinary power. This virtual projection—an empathy—structures the design of panopticism; the relationship between the individual and the Supervisor is empathetic. Furthermore, the individuation of the inmate that runs alongside this empathy that—if not determined by—relies on the empathetic casting of authority, is asymmetrical. The inmate, by power’s conniving design, reifies through empathetic projection the beacon of sovereignty united from its tentacular reaches. The inmate organizes into a force that which is only implied by power. The

authority of power is immanent to the empathetic relation itself. Only through the inmate's cooperation does power realize its form of praxis. What is here termed cooperation, however, should not be confused as agency. Though the act of cooperation is asymmetrical, that asymmetry tilts with designed gravity towards the inevitable advantage of power. Panopticism relies on the self being able to conceive of the presence of a consciousness in the watchtower. Empathy is the cognitive act facilitated by the temptation of the panoptic gaze.

Empathy does not produce the Supervisor; it runs parallel to the suggestion that such a Supervisor exists. An individual in a hermetically-sealed chamber has no understanding of, and no need of an understanding of, the presence of anything other than itself and the walls which it can see. The panopticon, of course, arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and recognize immediately—in essence, reversing the principle of the dungeon. The panoptic cell's two windows not only invite visibility—it is not a matter of choice—but decrees and regulates it. The inmate does not see—at least optically—but he knows exactly what he does not see because he sees (virtually) the implications of the panopticon's axial visibility. “Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.”¹¹ Foucault significantly remarks, “visibility is a trap.”¹² The architectural apparatus materializes the blanket of the plague, inducing that state of consciousness that forces the citizen of the plague town to see his neighbor, and the inmate in the cell to see its guardian.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage Books, 1995), 201.

¹² *Ibid*, 200.

The panopticon, Foucault writes, “is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad,”¹³ and this is true insofar as the ontological problem of seeing and being seen is taken literally. This ontology, however, is not necessarily literal; it lives on in automatized and disindividuated form born from a virtual, fictitious relation. The futile optical act of looking out from the panoptic cell gives way to the virtual act of seeing and the intersubjectively accessible practice in which the inmate interpret, predicts, and explains the behavior of an implied other. It is the inability, from the cell, to empirically see that invites empathy. The threat of oblivion and the threat of death in the panopticon as in the plague town condition—perhaps necessitates in Chesterton’s novelistic design— the act of empathy.

Foucault links, though cautiously, the historical passage from Le Vaux’s menagerie to Bentham’s panopticon. Turning to the German rather than to the French to attempt to claim not antecedence but resonance, might there be an elaboration of Foucault’s panopticism and Bentham’s design in the German translation of the term panopticon: *panoptikum*? The *panoptikum* refers to, interestingly, not Bentham’s architecture but, generally in common usage, the institution of the wax museum. The first of such institutions, Castan’s Panoptikum, the creation of the brothers Louis and Gustav Castan, established itself in Berlin in the mid-nineteenth century. It’s collection of nearly five hundred odd reproductions, from likenesses of Mary Magdalene and Oliver Cromwell to Goethe and Wagner, were enjoyed with immediate success. Its wax mannequins were accompanied by mazes, mirror displays, exhibits of anatomical oddities, torture devices, and the periodic showcase of touring freak shows (*Völkerschau*). The German design took the model most commonly associated with Madame Tussauds of London and expanded the form to take the shape of a generalized macabre

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage Books, 1995), 202.

showcase. Walter Benjamin notes in *The Arcades Project*, “The wax museum <*Panoptikum*> a manifestation of the total work of art. The universalism of the nineteenth century has its monument in the waxworks. Panoptikum: not only does one see everything, but one sees it in all ways.”¹⁴ The *panoptikum* aspired to be a work of total art—a show of everything.

In the *panoptikum*, the artist becomes the anthropologist. The diversity of categories invoked by the illusion invokes, importantly, the total work of art—as *Jugendstil*—as Benjamin suggests. The anthropological reproduction of mankind, while redoubling of the body, associates it with an act of seeing made possible by totalizing differentiation and discipline. The wax mannequin is the anatomized body under artistic direction, where the disciplines of knowledge production are organized and arranged for its most striking visual and emotional effect. It perhaps lends the substance of literality to the Delphic maxim that was often invoked as the motto of these panoptic exhibits: “know thyself” (*erkenne dich selbst*).¹⁵ These anthropological displays were the materialization of the methods of knowledge production that informed and constituted the nineteenth century being.

While it would be difficult, or simply out of place, to claim empathy with the wax inhabitants of the *panoptikum*, it is perhaps less to do with the perceived impenetrability of our plastic likenesses and moreover the limits, or idealism, of the currency of the term empathy. To see the wax museum is to see the human disciplines broken into their constituent parts and exposed to the field of visibility. The promise of self-knowledge invites the individual into the *panoptikum* to validate that of which he could not be certain—the unity of his body—by putting

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 531.

¹⁵ Peter M. McIsaac, “Castan’s in Context: Introductory Remarks on a Bygone World in Wax.” In *House of Wax: Anatomical, Pathological & Ethnographic Waxworks from Castan’s Panopticum, Berlin, 1869–1922*, 5.

before him the total work of the disciplines, all that the disciplines have learned, the complete explication of the corporeal human body in its disciplinary parts standing against the conscious citizen who sees himself for the first time. Empathy understood in this moment is no longer just the method of inference which produces the certainty of the consciousness of other minds. Empathy here is non-inferential and non-theoretical; it is a hermeneutic act of understanding where the human body represented before him is the form of a scientific work of art. “Feeling into” is not just the emotional-cognitive act of identification, it is the creative act of fashioning the individual. Foucault muses, “In his analyses of Baudelaire, Flaubert, and so on, it is interesting to see that Sartre refers the work of creation to a certain relation to oneself— the author to himself—which has the form of authenticity or inauthenticity. I would like to say exactly the contrary: we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity.”¹⁶ Empathy, as induced in the wax museum—the art of the disciplines— does not reconcile another’s affective state of mind but the fact of an object existence.

Indeed, this oxymoronic pairing of empathy and the vitalism of the self is just the sort of coupling that offends those on both sides of the humanism debate. For here we find one of humanism’s darlings—the always-altruistic empathy—yoked to its repressive, authoritarian opposite: the Machiavellian scheme of power determined to undermine and undercut the wholesome human spirit at each opportunity. This is perhaps not unlike the distinction that the later Foucault stresses to make from philosophical reorientation towards the Hellenic tradition. “They had a *tekhne tou biou* in which the economy of pleasure played a very large role. In this

¹⁶ Michael Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (The New Press, 1998), 262.

‘art of life,’ the notion of exercising a perfect mastery over oneself soon became the main issue. And the Christian hermeneutics of the self constituted a new elaboration of this *tekhne*.¹⁷

By the time of Foucault’s late reformulation of his project as to be concerned not with the theorization of power but rather the broader theorization of the historical process by which “human beings are made subjects,”¹⁸ it becomes clear that he finds it necessary to address not only how power fashions the subject but how the subject enters into a process of self-fashioning. These ethics are, in present terms, the means by which Foucault looks to address the asymmetry of the fashioned individual in the plague town and the panopticon—the simultaneity of the plague town’s two dreams. As if ballasting the uneven foundation of his own earlier depiction of the world of the docile subject—that hapless figure impinged upon in body, subjected in soul by the disciplining and normalizing techniques of power—Foucault shifts the weight of his archive to the canons of Ancient Greece, to grasp the broader context of technologies (and of *tekhne*, from which the modern English derives) as plural systems of techniques that *make* the human subject.

Now we encounter a subject who is as much self-constituting as constituted. The subject who takes part as much in the literary dream of the plague as much as is shaped by the political techniques of *quadrillage*. But while Foucault alters the schema of the technological domain such as to not only distinguish between positive and negative technologies but as well the “technologies of the self,” there remains the technology of empathy which has remained with us

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (The New Press, 1998), 259.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power.” In *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), 777.

from pasture to plague town to panopticon, a technology that, following Foucault's lead, we might consider as belonging to the presently proposed 'technologies of the other'.

The appropriate concern, having raised the workings of empathy in these Foucauldian apparatuses of power, is whether this formulation of empathy problematically undercuts and nonchalantly dismisses the acts of mass extermination that have been historically attached to the exercise of power. Auschwitz, in many respects, is the implementation of panopticism *par excellence* not only architecturally but insofar as it spans across the many ideas— from discipline and surveillance to biopower and sexuality— that one encounters in Foucault's oeuvre. It would be absolutely blasphemous to say that empathy did or did not persist in the sites of the Holocaust. All that could be extended is that empathy is certainly not incompatible with even the most destructive moments of history. It does not seem right to say that what would amount to a paradoxical desire for another's conscious autonomy should equate to any such sacrifice of the self. Simply stated, it would not be difficult to point out the more vicious power implications of this virtue. The Hegelian master-slave dialectic from which this inquiry began, offers one such obvious implication. But neither is this an attempt to attack empathy as a political value, as Hannah Arendt perhaps most notably does. This is not to set the stage for the means of contesting the presence or absence of empathy in these spaces such as to overstate empathy's failure (in its altruistic yearnings) to overcome the violent aggressions germane to these institutions. It is an effort to illustrate empathy's place amongst potential 'technologies of the other' that contribute to a fuller schematization of subject formation.

Empathy as a perceived 'virtue' is not to be confused as being innately ethical, or for that matter, virtuous. It is, rather, a reflection of the dynamics of that intersubjective space where power acts. The technicity of empathy always navigates a difficult paradox, the asymmetricality

of which is summed up by the problematic of the two dreams. But why insist upon the language of Foucauldian technologies? Empathy surely exists in a multitude of spaces outside of those documented by the Foucauldian oeuvre; these technical effects, even once understood outside of the often-encountered reductive equivalence between empathy and compassion, are not bound to the panopticon or the plague town. This is all necessarily true—empathy is verifiably deployed in a variety of genial spaces—but what we can distill from empathy, its ability to project, see, and make are precisely the elements of the technological framework that, as Foucault suggests, acts on the site of subjectivity.

These latent implications of Foucault's representations of his arguably most power-infested spaces offer something not present in his ethics. The emotional contagion festering in the plague town, that makes its way into the panopticon centuries later, returns empathy to its classical ontology of seeing and being seen while preserving its modern concern for intersubjective relations. These Foucauldian moments revive empathy as of an aesthetic nature—an aesthetic technique—that operates much more actively on the intersubjective creases than just resonate a sense of altruistic compassion. Empathy produces. It delivers the subjective other from the diffuse ether to the panoptic watchtower, to the servants' quarters of Chesterton's story, to the window of the house in the plague town; and in doing so it alters the subjective self, fashioning in the reciprocal act of being seen an unshakeable assurance of one's own autonomy. This is what makes empathy such a pervasive technique of other-fashioning: neither inherently bad nor, as it is often suggested, inherently good, but rather, always vital.

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