APPENDIX

Dzogchen Dark Retreat An Abbreviated Phenomenological Diary

(1) For this queen of colours, the light, bathing all which we behold, wherever I am through the day, gliding by me in varied forms, soothes me when I am engaged by other things, and not noticing it. And so strongly doth it entwine itself, that if it be suddenly withdrawn, it is with longing sought for, and if absent long, saddeneth the mind.

Augustine, *Confessions*[1]

(2) Demeter's most important shrine was at Eleusis. There the great Mysteries, based upon Korē's seasonal death and resurrection, were performed. . . . The climax of the Mysteries was the day-long procession which danced and sang its way from Athens, wound through the pass of Daphni, debouched into the Eleusinian plain, and circled the shore of the gulf of Eleusis, to arrive at Eleusis by night. Every step of this route is marked by the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of the sacred landscape symbols. . . . Directly ahead of the outer propylaia is the grotto of Hades, a natural cave in the rock toward which the procession first directly leads. . . . Having come first to the cave of death, the [Sacred] Way passes beyond it and curves snakelike upward to the left around the side of the hill. One can imagine the path of the torches, a sinuous trail of fire, as they approached the great hollow bulk of the Telesterion, . . . a columned hall surrounded by windowless walls and pierced by narrow entrances. The Mysteries were to take place inside, with the initiates crowded together . . . in a shadowy grove of columns.

Vincent Scully, *The Earth, The Temple and The Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*[2]

(3) Thus the hierophant began the drinking; the initiates then followed his example, waiting, as they listened to his chanting in the darkened telesterion, for the moment of revelation. . . . [S]eated on the tiers of steps that lined the walls of the cavernous hall, in darkness they waited. From the potion they gradually entered into ecstasy. . . . Ancient writers unanimously indicate that something was seen in the great telesterion, or initiation hall, within the sanctuary. . . . The experience was a vision whereby the pilgrim became someone who saw, an *epoptēs*. . . . What was witnessed there was no play by actors, but *phantasmata*, ghostly apparitions, in particular, the spirit of Persephone herself, returned from the dead. . . . Then there came the vision, a sight amidst an aura of brilliant light that suddenly flickered through the darkened chamber. Eyes had never before seen the like. . . . Even a poet [Pindar, for example] could only say that he had seen the beginning and the end of life and known that they were one, something given by god. The division between earth and sky melted into a pillar of light.
R. Gordon Wasson, Carl A. P. Ruck, Albert Hofmann, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*[3]

On August 20, 1986, I went into Dark Retreat at Tsegyelgar, the Dzogchen community center in Conway, Massachusetts. After dark, I entered the isolation of a hut in the woods. This hut was designed, built and equipped for the special conditions of the Dark Retreat, during which time the practitioner lives continuously in the dark, totally cut off from contact with light. I remained for seven nights and seven days, isolated in the darkness of the hut. The practices of the Dark Retreat are at the heart of the Dzogchen teachings brought to this country by Dr. Professor Namkhai Norbu. (Norbu, Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist who teaches Tibetan language and culture at the Oriental Institute of The University of Naples, Italy. He is a meditation master, a physician trained in Tibetan, Chinese and Indian medicine, a scholar, and the author of books on Tibetan culture, medicine, and the psychology of meditation.) The *Yang-thig*, the teachings of the Dark Retreat that

he has recently begun to communicate – for the first time in Western history – were given to him by his principal teacher, Chang-chub dorje, and by a very old woman, Ayo Khandro, who at the time he studied with her had lived continuously in the darkness of a hut for more than fifty years.[4]

The teachings in question, together with their practices, are intended to develop clarity of vision and clarity about the essential nature of vision.[5] The ultimate realization of these teachings and practices is the body of light, a non-dual existence perfectly integrated into the presencing of the elemental lighting.

The *Yang-thig* teachings are concerned with the 'external' manifestations of 'internal' processes, 'internal' energy. They call for specific experiential practices: in particular, an extremely difficult set of visualizations. Although these practices are not at all 'secret', it would not be appropriate for me to discuss them here. In any case, however, it is not necessary for our present purposes that I do this. Suffice it to say that the visualizations are extraordinarily demanding, and that they presuppose some degree of accomplishment in other meditative practices: practices which are themselves difficult and exacting. These prior practices, belonging to the *'Kregschod* system, are called *zhi-gnas* (to develop *gnas-pa*, a calm and relaxed state of being in which vision is steadied in awareness by virtue of its non-duality, its neutralization of emotive energy) and *lhaktong* (to develop an experiential insight, working with the movement of mental activity, into *stong-pa nyid*, the ultimate nothingness of what we call 'reality', and into *lhundrub*, the 'self-perfectedness' of our primordial state).

Before I begin the phenomenological account, I would like to give a very brief summary of Abhidharma psychology and Madhyamika philosophy. Although the Dzogchen teachings and practices existed in Tibet long before the Abhidharma and Madhyamika systems were brought there from India, one can see, today, some very deep affinities and similarities. Since the texts of the Abhidharma and Madhyamika systems have been available for some time in the West and are therefore more accessible, if not also more familiar, a brief introduction to the Dzogchen practice of the

Dark Retreat by way of the Abhidharma and Madhyamika systems might therefore be useful.

Abhidharma is concerned with the analysis of our psychophysical development.[6] In particular, it analyzes the emergence of perception as a process governed by the ego. According to its analysis, ego-logical perception manifests six stages of 'normal' development:

(1) primordial openness, space, formlessness
(2) the advent of bodily felt forms, or *Gestalten*
(3) global feelings, moods of ontological attunement
(4) motivating intentionalities of desire: attraction, aversion, indifference
(5) object-oriented ego-logical perception
(6) conceptual articulations that further shape and structure the 'perceptual situation' (*yul-can* in Tibetan).

The experiential realization of this analysis sets the stage, however, for an experiential 'deconstruction' of the inveterate reification tendencies inherent in the perceptual process. In other words, Abhidharma psychology shows us the possibility of 'undoing' our self-limiting fixation in the ego-logical condition and experiencing a primordial openness.

Abhidharma psychology is inseparable from its philosophical interpretation.[7] In Madhyamika philosophy, two concepts are considered to be fundamental for our understanding of human psychology: one is called, in Sanskrit, *pratityasamutpada* (*rten'brel* in Tibetan), the other *shunyata* (*stong-pa nyid*, in Tibetan). The first concept refers to the fact of functional interdependence: the fact that subject and object, figure and ground, form and field, self and other are always interdependently co-emergent and co-functional. It is essentially equivalent to Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'intertwining'. The second concept refers to the fact that nothing is inherently permanent or essentially substantial: all things that come to appearance in our world (*snang-ba*) are ultimately 'empty' or 'void', in the sense that there is no eternal and immutable substratum or *hypokeimenon* underlying them. Nor is there any thing-in-itself organizing the various appearances. In the final analysis, all forms are utterly transitory, phenomenal, insubstantial, empty. Moreover, since even 'emptiness' itself, however, is a form of

interpretation, Madhyamika logic calls for the deconstruction of 'emptiness' as well.

Without further introduction, let me now report in phenomenological terms my experience with the Dzogchen practice. The first night and first day were extremely exciting. I suddenly realized, by direct experience, that light is a stimulant, exciting the activity of vision and drawing it out. But I also began to undersand that the absence of light – deprivation of light – is an equally powerful stimulant, revealing and provoking the movement of our eyes. I had expected to find the darkness restful, but instead it aroused me. I was tense, overexcited. An incessantly changing display of forms kept me enthralled, entertained, and on the look-out: forms, like clouds, making their appearance, lingering a while, and then vanishing without any enduring trace. By the second night, I understood that this ceaseless play of light, this constantly changing display of shapes and patterns, sometimes suggesting familiar objects and fantastic landscapes, was a *reflection* of my state of mind. The display was functioning like a mirror, showing me the inner nature of my mind. Because of a dynamic, functional interdependence (*pratityasamutpada*), the ever-changing forms corresponded to the nervous, agitated movements of my gaze. Instead of resting, my eyes were constantly moving about, rapidly darting and jumping about. These movements were extremely fine vibrations or oscillations – quite different from the slower, grosser REM's.

Was all this movement caused by curiosity? Perhaps at first. But the room was totally dark and objectively uneventful: nothing really was happening in the surrounding space – nothing other than the darkness itself. There was, after all, nothing (objective) to see. I did experience some waves of anxiety from time to time, but I do not believe that this anxiety, nor even occasional projections of paranoia, can explain the incessant movement. (Experimental psychology has established that, even during sleep, there are rapid eye movements, REM's, which seem to be correlated with the processes of dreaming.) By the end of that second night, I reached the conclusion that the movement was basically habitual, manifesting an inveterate tendency (in Tibetan, *bag-chags*) of embodied consciousness.

I was reminded of a remark Heidegger makes in 'Moira', his essay on Parmenides. He observes that 'ordinary perception certainly moves within the lightedness of what is

present and sees what is shining out . . . in colour', and then comments that it is 'dazzled by changes in colour' and 'pays no attention [at all] to the still light of the lighting. . . .'[8] Most scholars pay no attention to this brief analysis: their eyes glide right over the words, unchallenged by their significance. I myself missed much of it; but at least I took his words to heart, i.e., I gave them an experiential reference. Remembering the text did not immediately help me. By the end of the second day, my eyes were strained, tired, and occasionally hurt. I rubbed them gently and allowed tears to come. This brought some temporary relief.

My visionary experiences during the third night and third day were not much different. But, by the end of the third day, it was clear to me that the visualization practices I was attempting to perform were only increasing the eyes' strain and mental agitation. And since this condition of strain and agitation was reflected back by the restless changing of forms, the more intense my exertions, the more these displays of light agitated and pained me. On the fourth night, I finally realized that I was caught in a vicious cycle, a wheel of suffering, unable to break out of the dualistic polarizations characteristic of my normal, habitual, routinized patterns of ego-logical vision. I was, in fact, shifting back and fourth, interminably caught in one of four possible visionary attitudes in relation to the display of forms presencing in the dark:

(a) seduction, i.e., attraction, involvement, grasping and clinging
(b) resistance, i.e., attempts to fixate and control the wrathful movements of light by rigidly staring into the space before me
(c) disengagements that involved withdrawing into inner monologue, i.e., continuous conceptualization
(d) disengagements that resulted in drowsiness, i.e., a withdrawing into the 'unconsciousness' of sleep.

The first two attitudes only intensified the movements of light; consequently they increased my inner agitation – which, in turn, increased the play of light. Furthermore, both styles of interaction inflicted on my eyes a strain which always at some point became unbearable. But the second two attitudes were equally unsatisfactory as ultimate solutions: the monologue became repetitive, compulsive and

boring; nor could I withdraw into continuous sleep for the duration of the retreat.

The third night and the following third day were extremely difficult. They tried me to the limit. As it turned out, these were in fact the most difficult hours of the week-long retreat. I could not accomplish the principal visualization. I felt discouraged and depressed. The displays of light no longer frightened, enthralled, amused, or entertained me. They no longer had the power to divert me from an extremely negative process of self-examination. I was tired, bored, impatient, skeptical. My body ached. I tried to sleep but couldn't. I began to feel like a mouse or a mole, and wanted to escape the cold, the damp, the oppressive darkness. But I was determined to remain in the retreat for at least one week: seven nights, seven days.

The fourth night and the following day, I began to feel somewhat different. I was in the process of developing a very different attitude: toward the practices I had been struggling with and myself in relationship to them, toward the darkness, and toward the interminable displays of light. And these changes in me were immediately reflected in corresponding changes in the environment. Briefly described, this environment was gradually beginning to feel less wrathful and more friendly – more like a nurturing, gently encompassing presence. And, as I found myself able to put into practice the meditative disciplines I had been learning for many years prior to the retreat (primarily the practice of *zhi-gnas*, calming and quieting the mind, and the practice of *lhaktong*, developing the deconstructive clarity of my insight into the ultimate emptiness of all passing forms), I began to see a decisive change in the phenomenal displays. The transformations of the lighting became slower, less violent; and in between the displays of forms, I saw more of a clear space. There were more frequent times when I was surrounded by large curtains, or regions, of relatively constant and uniform illumination, sometimes brownish red, sometimes pale green, sometimes a dull white. Sometimes, I found myself looking out into an infinite expanse of clear, dark blue space, punctuated here and there by tiny stars of intense white light.

During the fourth day and fifth night, I gradually experienced the fact that there *is* a fifth attitude: a way out of the vicious cycle of suffering. The way out was to be found in the teachings and practices I had brought with me into

the retreat. And finally, I knew this through direct experience, my own experience – and not by a leap of faith. The calmness and relaxation I was beginning to achieve was reflected back to me by corresponding qualities in the luminous presencing of the darkness. This different lighting in turn helped me to deepen my state of calm and relaxation and continue developing a non-dual (*dbyer-med*) visionary presence.

Beginning with the fifth day, then, it became progressively easier for me to experience what the Tibetans call *rig-pa*: the simple presence of awareness. Staying in this non-duality, I could begin to experience my integration into the element of light. I *felt* the truth of the Dzogchen teaching that I am by nature a body of light: that I *am* light; that I and the phenomenal displays of light are really one. Correspondingly, the darkness became a warm, softly glowing sphere of light, an intimate space opening out into the unlimited. I felt bathed in its encompassing luminosity, an interplay of softly shimmering grey-white and blackish-red lights. I experienced a kind of erotic communion with the light, as if the light and I were entwined in a lover's embrace.

With the development of more neutralized, non-dualistic awareness, my vision was less caught up in the antithesis of movement (*gyu-ba*) and non-movement (*gnas-pa*). With the development of my capacity for letting go and letting be, my gaze was less troubled by forms in movement. There was less need to withdraw into sleep, because *rig-pa* is a *restful* aliveness. There was less need for painful staring, less need to stare the forms into fixity, because the greater tranquillity of my gaze effortlessly stabilized the inevitable display of moving, changing forms. There was less visual jumping and darting about, because the gaze was not so readily seduced by the play of light into forming attachments to its transformations that would disturb my becalmed presence. And there was less compulsion to withdraw into conceptual interpretation, because the gaze, more inwardly quiet, could let me begin to enjoy simply being in and with the lighting of the dark.

On the seventh night, just as I was drifting into sleep, but still in a state which is half way *between* waking and dreaming, and which the Tibetans call *Bardo*, I was suddenly jolted back into full consciousness, eyes wide open. I had been lying down, of course: in the normal position I

assumed for sleeping. But there was suddenly a peremptory 'call' to me, and, simultaneously, I lifted my head up – so fast, in fact, that I almost jumped out of bed. Confronting my raised eyes was a visionary phenomenon for which my comfortable categorial scheme was completely inadequate.

Until this unnerving event, I had experienced only *three* essentially distinctive categories of visionary event. (a) I could 'see' my own body, especially when I moved: it had a ghostly presence, luminous, yet also dark, like a shadow; but I had no doubt whatsoever that I could 'see' it – clearly and distinctly. Although this contests our normal constructs, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body calls attention to a corporeal schematism that makes it entirely understandable.[9] (b) Pure luminosities: dots, spots, jigzag and straight lines, sudden explosions, tiny cones and pyramids, irregularly shaped regions and curtains of light and, near the end of the retreat, an embracing atmosphere of softly glowing, relatively constant illumination. And (c) Rorschach phantoms: because of all the involuntary eye movements, the luminosity of the dark manifested in a continuously changing display of shapes and forms; and because of the participation of consciousness in the process of the spectacle, these apparitions were subject to continuous, and more or less effortful interpretation. (I was reminded of Wittgenstein's observations, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, in regard to the 'dawning' of an aspect.)

But the visionary apparition which compelled me to rethink my understanding of vision was fundamentally different from these fugacious Rorschach phantoms. Unlike the phantoms, it was totally spontaneous, i.e., involuntary, without any antecedent, and more or less effortful, participation by consciousness. It was sudden, instantaneous, without any gradual 'dawning' or 'unfolding'. It was totally unrelated to earlier conscious thought. And, finally, it was clear and distinct, intensely vivid, luminously present. Indeed, what made it obviously 'apparitional', rather than 'real', was precisely its *extraordinary* luminosity: colours of incredible, 'supernatural' purity, intensity, aliveness, and clarity. Otherwise, I might have been taken in by it, since it had the sharpness of outline, the distinctness, the steady duration, and also the three-dimensionality, the compelling appearing of volume and solidity, which are characteristic of the 'real' things in our normal, consensually validated world. Yet I was not at all, except for an instant, perhaps,

deceived by what I saw. Were it not for the peculiar luminosity, it might perhaps have been, or seemed to be, quite 'real'; but I looked directly at it without any doubt that it was in truth 'only' an apparition – or a manifestation of some *other* dimension of our reality. It *looked* real – or rather, it looked, in fact, *more* than real, and I saw it *as* a vision, a vision of something which 'objective reality testing' would not confirm. (It was therefore different from the visions of Eleusis, which were induced, as we now know, by the ingestion of a drink containing pulverized ergot, a hallucinogenic substance derived from barley.) By contrast, my experience was not induced by any psychotropic substance, nor was I in some radically altered state of mind, e.g., deprived of sleep. Like the Eleusinian visions, however, it was determined by the traditional symbolic associations of the Dark Retreat. What I saw was the ornamental pelt worn by Sengē Dong-ma, one of the female dakkinis and a supernatural being of light associated with the Dark Retreat teachings.

There are, then, four epistemologically distinct visionary processes, and it is essential that we not confuse them:

(a) *hallucination*: a spontaneous, i.e., unwilled projection of consciousness taken for real

(b) *phantom*: a Gestalt in whose process of formation consciousness participates, but in a relatively passive or receptive attitude, in the sense that it lets whatever configurations begin to appear (perhaps in response to its own unconscious projections) suggest the interpretation that completes and stabilizes the Gestalt

(c) *visualization*: different from the phantom in that the participation of consciousness in the process of its formation is less passive and receptive; in other words, a deliberately produced image

(d) *an authentic vision*: different from hallucination in that the projection is not deceptive, but, on the contrary very deeply understood (this understanding of the projective process is in fact a necessary condition of its possibility); different from a phantom in that its formation is instantaneous and spontaneous, and does not involve the participation of consciousness in an unfolding process of formation; and different from visualization in that it does

not appear while, or so long as, one's attention is absorbed in a process of willfully trying to produce it.

The 'authentic vision' is *like* the hallucination, however, in that its appearance is *not* immediately connected to conscious attention, willful exertions of a greater or lesser degree (as in the formation of phantoms and visualizations). And it is *like* the visualization in that a necessary condition of its possibility *is* the kind of exertion, the kind of work, that goes into the production of the image in the process of visualization. *A fortiori*, in this respect authentic vision is *unlike* the hallucination, despite the spontaneity of its actual appearance.

Let me add, as part of a final note, that the darkness profoundly altered my sense of spacial distance and my sense of the passage of time. The first of these I expected; but I was surprised to find that time passed very rapidly. The nine-hour stretch from breakfast to supper, for example, often seemed to be no more than a few hours. At no time, however, was I confused or disoriented. I maintained a 'normal' sense of reality, of being grounded in the 'reality' of the world outside.

When I emerged from the retreat at the beginning of my eighth night, I found even the tree-filtered moonlight overwhelming. My eyes had developed a tremendous sensitivity to light, and even the faintest flickering concentration of illumination seemed at first almost unbearably intense. This I expected. I was surprised, however, by the nausea and dizziness which overcame me during the first few minutes in the relatively dark night outside the hut. (The moon was waning, and I was, after all, in the woods). For one week, the eyes had been attuned by the peculiar conditions of the darkness; they needed some time – about 48 hours – to readjust and conform to the conditions of the world into which I had re-emerged.

Roger Levin, who was himself in the Dark Retreat for the same length of time, has pointed out that the sensations of dizziness and nausea seem to be related to the luminous pulsations and vibrations that make the edges and contours of things indistinct, blurred, uncertain. Arguing that the Dark Retreat makes us aware of eye movements which are *also* taking place in the world of light, he suggested that, after one week in the dark, the cortical processes of vision

were no longer making the stimulus-constancy corrections that normally function to compensate for – and successfully conceal – the movements of our eyes. In other words, our eyes are in constant motion in the light as well as in the dark; but normally, we are not made aware of this motion, since, in the presence of stimuli that make us see differences in illumination, there is a compensatory process at work in our vision, and this process reifies the light, imposing a certain level of constancy and uniformity at the edges and boundaries of things. But in the dark, we 'see nothing': the differentiating stimuli that activate the compensatory process are not present. Coming out of a prolonged retreat into darkness, the eyes cannot immediately resume their normally automatic and unconscious work of correction. Thus, what is normally concealed from awareness – the motion of the eyes and the constancy adjustments we make – is rendered visible.

The retreat was a rich and deeply therapeutic experience for me. I emerged from the archetypal womb of darkness feeling nourished in spirit and more deeply integrated, more whole and complete, than when I entered it. Conceivably, this sense of inner growth is nothing but an emotional rationalization. I am familiar with the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance. But, after much critical thought and self-examination, I have reason to believe that the benefits I have noted are real and that their significance for my life – and in particular, for my visionary propensities and habits – will be enduring.

Visionary habits are not easily broken – especially not when the prevailing social consensus continuously reinforces them. The Dark Retreat is an extension of the Dzogchen practice of the Chöd. In Tibetan, 'chöd' refers to a process of cutting off. The Dark Retreat helped me to cut myself off from the inveterate tendencies that bind human vision to the karmic wheel of endlessly reproduced suffering.

Notes

The Postmodern Situation

In his work on Nietzsche, the 'first' of the 'postmodern' thinkers, Heidegger writes: 'That period we call modern . . . is defined by the fact that man becomes the center and measure of all beings.'[1] The 'modern' world begins, in the story I want to tell about the West, with the Renaissance. It is to the people of the Renaissance that we owe the beginnings of modern science and technology, an unprecedented expansion of trade and commerce, the glorious vision of humanism, and a mighty challenge to the mediaeval authority of faith, announced in the name of a self-validating rationality. The spirit of the Renaissance continued for two hundred years, eventually coming to light in the rationality of a mechanical vision: Hobbes, Descartes. In Descartes, humanism assumed a distinctively subjective character, proclaiming its triumph even in the passage where it demonstrates the existence of God. The triumph of Cartesian subjectivity is to be seen in the objective rationality it empowered and imposed. Thus, it is in the seventeenth century that the machine appears as paradigm, partly in a dream of power, partly in a vision of divine glory which was slow to die out. There is ambiguity and paradox in the proof Descartes set down for the existence of God: what the proof really celebrated was the power of human reason, the priority of 'Man' before God, the independence, self-determination, and self-affirmation of the subject. The gaze of these moderns finally turned away from heaven, away from the sky; vision returned, but with a power stolen from its god, to the projects of its life-world.

The Enlightenment saw the perfection of this subjectivity in a social revolution whose progress was grounded in objective reason. But the subjective freedom it won turned brutish and competitive, and a false individualism soon

began to inhabit the descendants of the monadic Cartesian ego. In the nineteenth century, people were captivated by a vision of evolutionary progress: they were seeing traces of teleology, a teleology of divine origin, at work in nature. But this vision derived from an egological and essentially anthropocentric vision of reason: reason as instrumental, pragmatic, practical. And people slowly began to lose sight of the difference between reason and power: reason, increasingly asserting itself in self-destructive ways, began to think of itself as the will to truth.

When subjectivity triumphed, it imposed its will on things and brought into being a world ruled by objectivity. But in a world of objectivity, there is no place, no home, for the subject, whose subjectivity – that is to say, experience – is denied value, meaning, and ultimately any truth or reality. This triumph of subjectivity has been self-destructive; we can now see how the subject falls under the spell of its objects; how it becomes subject to the objectivity it set in power. The subject is in danger of losing touch with itself. When reason turned totally instrumental, a function solely of power, it legitimated the construction of a totalitarian state and engineered a Holocaust. The legacy of humanism is terror.

The triumph of subjectivity is self-destructive, because it has inflated the human ego without developing self-respect, the true basis of agency, and the social character of human vision. Moreover, the triumph of 'Man' necessitated the death of God. But, since God had been the sole source of our values and the origin of all meaningfulness, the death of God only accelerated the spread of a latent culture of nihilism, cancer of the spirit, contagion of despair.

We of today are survivors of the Holocaust, World War Two; we face the dangers of nuclear devastation, ecological catastrophe, world-wide famines. The 'modern' world, which began, in the West, with the Renaissance, is now coming to an end. What defines the position assumed by this book, the position I am calling the 'postmodern situation', is a strong and relatively clear sense of this ending. This sense separates us from modernity; it is critical; it sees the modern world with some understanding of it as an historical whole.

We have seen enough of the modern epoch to see how the humanism of reason, emancipatory, nevertheless produces, reproduces, and even legitimates, conditions of

alienation and oppression. In the postmodern situation, which is partly a question of awareness, it is not possible to trust in the old vision of reason – and in the 'Man' of its humanism. We are finding it more and more difficult to live in the light of the modern – that is to say, the traditional – paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality. We are living in a time of crisis: this is our *Befindlichkeit*, our present plight. We must come together to achieve a different vision.

The modern epoch brought into being a world in which the effects of nihilism are spreading. Now, we can see, today, if we look with care and thought, that nihilism is a rage against Being: 'nihilism' means the destruction of Being: the Being of all beings, including that way of being which we call 'human' and consider to be our own. Thus, in the postmodern situation, we need to achieve, both individually and collectively, a recollection of Being, of its dimensionality. This is possible, however, only if the question of Being can become, for us, a question of character – a question that questions the historical character of our vision.

Drawing on the insights of Nietzsche, whose extraordinary foresight positioned him almost a century ahead of his time, the discourse of postmodern thinking begins with a consciousness of deepening crisis, a consciousness that the nihilism which Nietzsche saw, in signs and symptoms, is now unmistakable, too pervasive to be ignored or interpreted away. It is this consciousness of our situation which separates us from modernity; but postmodern discourse is not only a discourse which takes as its problem the experience of a crisis; it is also a discourse which is itself in crisis: a discourse without grounds, without a subject, without an origin, without any absolute center, without reason. This sense of crisis, and of being irremediably separated, by this crisis, from the questions and answers that have challenged us in the past, figures in the thinking of all those who have let themselves be guided by Nietzsche's vision. It figures in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and in Jung's essays on 'Mind and Earth' (1927) and 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man' (1928), in the second of which there is a discussion woven around Hölderlin's provocative words, that 'Even danger itself makes the saving power grow also' – words, in fact, which Heidegger also attempts to explore in his 1949 lecture on 'The Turning'.[2] The crisis of modernity therefore figures, of

course, in the work of Heidegger, and also in the thought of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas and Foucault. This study on vision, indebted as it is to all of these thinkers, is intended to contribute to the ongoing conversation which constitutes our break with modernity.

VISION AND THE DISCOURSE OF METAPHYSICS

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger asserts that,

> The question of Being does not achieve its true concreteness until we have carried through the process of destroying the ontological tradition.[3]

How can we destroy the ontological tradition, the discourse of metaphysics, without abandoning the question of Being? How can we think of Being without letting ourselves be controlled by the history of metaphysics? This is a question which locates Heidegger's thinking within the discourse of postmodernism.

Heidegger chooses the most difficult path. There are, of course, two easier paths. But he does not avoid the postmodern predicament by defending the ontological tradition against the testimony of recent history; nor does he avoid it by including the question of Being in the metaphysics he wants to destroy. Wisely, I think, he challenges the ontological tradition; but he does not refuse to reflect on the question which set this tradition in motion many centuries ago. He distinguished between the question of Being and the answers of history. In that way, he kept himself open, as a thinker, to the question itself: a question of Being.

But questions mean nothing, or mean indeterminately, outside their position in a discursive context: questions cannot be understood in abstraction from their historical background – in abstraction, for example, from the texts of metaphysics and the world in which they are situated. Thus, as Heidegger knows, we may articulate a distinction between the question of Being and the tradition of metaphysics in which that question has been enunciated; but we cannot totally separate and isolate them. Metaphysics can be deconstructed, but not completely destroyed. We can break with tradition; but the rupture can also be seen as a

continuity, as an affirmation of continuity. We should struggle to release the question of Being from its metaphysical history – a history of reification and totalization, egocentrism and logocentrism. But we must understand that this struggle is never finished, never final. All we can do is maintain the vigilance of a critical spirit repeatedly questioning itself.

In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger perpetuates the very tradition he sets out to destroy when he continues to assume the paradigmatic function of vision in the formulation of ontology and the conditions of knowledge. Thus, for example, he writes that,

> In giving an existential significance to 'sight', we have merely drawn upon the peculiar feature of seeing, that it lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves. Of course, every 'sense' does this within that domain of discovery which is genuinely its own. But from the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily towards 'seeing' as a way of access to beings and to Being. To keep the connection with this tradition, we may formalize 'sight' and 'seeing' enough to obtain therewith a universal term for characterizing any access to entities or to being, as access in general.[4]

We need, as I shall argue, to see this connection with tradition, this hegemony, concretely problematized.

It seems to me that the thrust of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics brings forth serious questions regarding the complicity of vision – vision elevated to the position of paradigm for knowledge and rationality – in the historical domination of our 'universal' metaphysics. Since vision assumes primacy in the hierarchy of the metaphysical tradition, the problematizing of vision and its ontology is one of the tasks which the deconstruction of metaphysics presently requires.

However, the question of Being does not enter history only through the medium of philosophical discourse; in fact, it is first set in motion within the life-world of our experience, being that which *opens our eyes* to the field of possibilities we call 'existence'. The history of Being in the discourse of metaphysics refers back to our historical

experience – as individuals, as collectivities – with vision and its ontology.

What is in question in the deconstruction of metaphysics must be, therefore, the *opening* of vision as a 'way of access to beings and to Being'. This question will be understood, here, as demanding a discourse on the nature and character of our normal everyday vision: the vision of *das Man*, of anyone-and-everyone. Such a discourse needs to be spelled out in the hermeneutical language of phenomenological psychology, for experiential concreteness will call our attention to matters otherwise disregarded and can accordingly dispell some persistent forms of mystification and delusion. But our discourse must also bring to light the historical character of our vision: the hidden violence, the hidden nihilism. Therefore it must diagnose hermeneutically, and in an experientially familiar language, the closure-to-Being which underlies the historical character of our vision – its character, in particular, as suffering and affliction, as cultural psychopathology. Our discourse must be a 'speech of suffering,' telling the truth about its social production and reproduction in the world of our vision.

The life-world of this vision is rapidly being gathered, today, into a frontal ontology. Our epoch may close with the domination of the image. The Being of beings is now something to be confronted, placed (*gestellt*) directly in front – that is to say, in a position which gives priority to the demand for optimum clarity, certainty and control. The Being of beings is now something to be mastered, its presence in the lighting reduced to constant availability. In the succession of historical epochs, vision and its ontology have changed. The story of their historical changes belongs, ontologically, to the graphing, the writing of the light in a hermeneutics of concrete illuminations. We are beings of vision. We are beings of light: the lighting in which, and by grace of which, vision takes place. I am concerned about our future in this light. We need to look again at the ontology, the dimensions of the life, our vision has inscribed in its field. The history of Being is inscribed in a light that must no longer be occluded from our thinking. The story of vision and its light must be written into our critical history of Being.

Our task, here, is a necessary one, because the forgetful history of revision continues, and the visibility and invisibility of Being, the dimensionality of visible beings, will

otherwise be erased, little by little, from the texts we are reading and writing.

In his 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger writes:

> Perhaps what is distinctive about this world-epoch consists in the closure of the dimension of the hale [*des Heilens*]. Perhaps that is the sole malignancy.[5]

Perhaps. But what follows? For Heidegger, this situation calls us to a task of thought: 'Thinking conducts historical eksistence . . . into the realm of the upsurgence of the healing.'[6] But can thinking accomplish this when it continues to function metaphysically – that is to say, only theoretically, in a disembodied state, and in abstraction from the practices of everyday life? We need a visionary thinking which is at work in our *experiences* with vision: diagnostic, critical, attentive to closures and even the smallest opportunities for some opening.

'Each field is a dimensionality', as Merleau-Ponty says, 'and Being is dimensionality itself.'[7] When 'vision' takes place, a *Gestalt* makes its appearance: there (*da*), in the clearing (*Lichtung*) for that place of our being (*Sein*). The *Gestalt* is a structural event in which a figure differentiates itself from a surrounding ground. Being is the dimensionality in which the *Gestalten* of vision are grounded. But this dimensionality is now being subject to the most extreme negation. Today, the *Gestalt* is enframed and enframing; it takes place under the structural principle Heidegger calls *das Ge-stell*. *Das Ge-stell*, enframing, the taking-place of a distinctive positing and positioning, has taken possession of the visionary encounter most characteristic of our modern history, excluding the depth of the field, denying what cannot be reified and totalized. In the epoch of *das Ge-stell*, our present epoch, the epoch in which nihilism rages, we are tempted to enframe the very Being of beings.

Our Capacities and their Development

'The essence of thinking', according to Heidegger, 'is the understanding of Being in the possibilities of its development. . . .'[8] Vision is a capacity of our being. As such, vision is an achievement involving a process of development. There is no reason to suppose that this development does

not, or could not continue – for a lifetime. If, in our adulthood, vision is ruled over by an ego-logical subject, what could vision become when it is committed to overcoming this rule? Since we are visionary beings, this question is addressed to us, questioning our being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger observes that,

> Dasein's ways of behavior, its capacities, powers, possibilities, and vicissitudes, have been studied with varying extent in philosophical psychology, in anthropology, ethics, and 'political science', in poetry, biography, and in the writing of history. . . . But the question remains whether these interpretations of Dasein have been carried through with a primordial existentiality comparable to whatever existentiell primordiality they [Dasein's capacities and possibilities] may have possessed. Neither of these excludes the other, but they do not necessarily go together.[9]

Since individual and society are interactively and interdependently co-emergent, the development of our inborn capacity for vision, whatever that may be, is of significance not only for every individual, but also for society as a whole. The visionary life around which a society is gathered reflects and amplifies the character of the vision developed within each one of its individual members; but conversely, the conditions of society as a whole bear in many decisive ways, some of them oppressive and destructive, on the development of individual predispositions and capacities. Thus we must concern ourselves with both dimensions of visionary life: with the individual and with society. As we reflect on how individual vision, an organ of our 'potentiality-for-being', can be developed, we must also reflect, simultaneously, on how the collective visions of our society, the visions encoded in our culture, can be changed in corresponding ways.

Heidegger questions the primordiality of the prevailing interpretations of Dasein's capacities; and he questions the radicality of his own interpretation as well. The significance of this questioning is related to the fact that individual and society are interactive and interdependent. The interpretation we shall spell out in this study must likewise be questioned – questioned again and again. Primordiality is

inevitably a relative matter. Nevertheless, if we strive for primordiality, rather than give up on it, there is at least a possibility that we may move beyond the limits of prevailing roles and habits – beyond the prevailing historical conditions.

In his work on Nietzsche, Heidegger clarified the 'moment of vision', the *Augenblick*, about which he wrote in *Being and Time*:

> . . . thinking in terms of the moment . . . implies that we transpose ourselves to the temporality of independent action and decision, glancing ahead at what is assigned us as our task and back at what is given us as our endowment.[10]

Vision is part of our endowment. This endowment is not only a biological program; it is also an existential capacity, a potentiality-for-being, already corporeally schematized, already laid down in the layout, the *legein*, of the flesh. Our endowment is already inscribed in the structuring of our moodedness, our inwrought predispositions. Our visionary endowment, and the world into which we are cast, is our *Befindlichkeit*. But when we 'find' ourselves in this condition, there is an existential question to be answered by the character of our life. This is the question which 'assigns us our task'. This task is an historical task, determined in relation to the history of Being. It is a task for society as a whole. However, it is also a task for us as individuals: a task of individuation; a task which can only be achieved if we are committed, as individuals, to developing our potentiality-for-being – and to doing this in ongoing responsiveness to the question of Being as it figures in our historical experience. Thus Heidegger sought to define the task in relation to the 'overcoming of nihilism'. But we should note that he refers us to our experience of living in a condition of need:

> This implies that we transpose ourselves to the condition of need that arises with nihilism. . . . Our needy condition itself is nothing other than what our transposition to the moment [of vision] opens up to us.[11]

A relative test of interpretive 'primordiality' is suggested

here, and it is this: an interpretation is 'primordial' when, in relation to our experience of 'the condition of need', something is seen, seen differently; and something is opened up. With echoes, perhaps, of Spinoza, Nietzsche called this 'affirmation of life' and the 'enhancement' of a 'feeling of power': the power of a moral agent.

We, who call ourselves 'human beings', 'mortals', and 'rational animals' – who are we? And what will become of us? This book is part of a much larger project. The project is an attempt to articulate the emergence of an ontological body of understanding in response to the need of our time. This study was conceived and written as one of four volumes contributing to the ontological project. One of the volumes is already in print: *The Body's Recollection of Being. The Listening Self* will follow after this. The first volume is focused on our experiences with gesture and motility: on our embodiment as a whole. The third is of course an analysis of our hearing. The present volume, concerned with our capacity for vision, our visionary being, continues my work on this project.

Like the other volumes, this one is a textual interweaving of seven principal discourses. I will briefly identify them, proposing an order which I continue to find suggestive, but which we could certainly reorganize, and probably should, in other significant ways. The *first* of these, then, owing much to the thought of Merleau-Ponty, is a critical reflection on vision as a perceptual capacity: a capacity for the channelling of our ontological perceptiveness. The *second* is a diagnostic interpretation formulated in the terms of phenomenological psychology, in which I shall question the developmental achievement, the character, of the modern ego-logical subject. The main influences in this discourse are Freud and Jung; Freud, because of his uncanny understanding of adaptive and pathological processes in the constitution of the ego, and Jung, because of his understanding of the Self and his heroic attempt to go beyond a psychology of the socialized ego. The *third*, dependent on the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, spells out a postmodern interpretation of 'modernity' – our present historical situation – focused on the experience of nihilism: on our experience, therefore, of need, and of suffering and the production of suffering. The *fourth*, also inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, is a hermeneutical discourse on the metaphysical history of Being. In this discourse, I will be attempting to

articulate the history of Being in a way that could perhaps open it up to another 'beginning'. The *fifth* is a discourse intended to contribute to a practical understanding of our political economy – the character of the life we are living in the practices and institutions of our body politic. Our visionary being is a product of the prevailing economy; but it is also a place where the vision ruling this economy is engaged in its own reproduction. Merleau-Ponty again figures prominently in this discourse, but there are other decisive influences to be named here: Marx, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, Foucault.

A *sixth* discourse might be called 'philosophical anthropology', since it introduces knowledges drawn from work in cultural anthropology and registers my philosophical reflections on the significance of these knowledges for the basic questions of our project. I consider cross-cultural anthropology to be extremely important for our project, because it expands our theoretical sense of the range of possibilities that constitute our being human; and it enables us to envision opportunities for practical action we otherwise would not have considered. In the societies of earlier epochs and other cultures, visions of Being very different from ours have engaged mortal lives. In some of these visions, there is a pre-ontological understanding of Being which mythopoetic narratives in the culture have kept alive, intact, and closer to everyday consciousness. But in the Western 'world', this understanding is an excluded knowledge. The attempt to integrate systems of knowledge our tradition has excluded can be emancipatory, so long as this attempt learns from their differences, and does not suppress them. Philosophical anthropology can serve a critical function here, since it includes previously excluded knowledges, excluded ontologies, within the traditional discourse of Western philosophy. It can become a critical reflection on our age, our cultural life as a whole – but only if the inclusion is open to the value in the differences. I hope to show here how anthropology can open us to different ways of being, different visions.

There is also, finally, a *seventh* textual dimension: a discourse which I shall call a meditation on our visionary being as a spiritual vocation. Our religious traditions have been entrusted with great wisdom and so we shall draw strength and inspiration from their texts and practices. But I do not wish to reduce the life of the spirit to any of its

historical forms, the various religions of the world. We need to keep the channels of our visionary being open to what Merleau-Ponty calls 'the immemorial depth of the visible': the dimensionality of existence within which what our tradition calls the 'spirit' lives.[12] This is a dimensionality which corresponds to our 'ultimate concerns'. Its truth comes to light through the visions of our mythopoetic imagination. In the realm of the spirit, our capacities are stretched: sometimes even beyond their breaking point.

PRACTICES OF THE SELF

If we think of vision as a capacity to be developed and a task to be achieved, then we are also thinking of vision as 'practical activity', understood in the sense Heidegger explicates in his work on Nietzsche:

> The essence of thinking, experienced in this way, that is, experienced on the basis of Being, is not defined by being set off against willing and feeling. Therefore, it should not be proclaimed purely theoretical as opposed to practical activity and thus restricted in its essential importance for the essence of man.[13]

It could be said that our study is concerned with what John Welwood describes, in his 'Principles of Inner Work', as 'the process of growing beyond limited views of self towards a greater vision and realization of what it is to be human.'[14] This process *is* 'inner work', but not in the metaphysical sense of 'inner', which overlooks the intertwining of inner and outer: *this* 'inner work' is also a form of 'practical activity'. Vision is a social practice, and it needs to be understood as such.

This conception of self-development (self-realization, self-fulfillment, self-determination) proposes an interpretation of the self which contests the authority and hegemony of metaphysics, and according to which the 'self' is essentially a Cartesian substance, a fixed identity, essentially isolated and disembodied, an ego-logical 'thing' encapsulated in a machine of corruptible matter. Sharing our very different conception, Joel Kovel, author of *The Age of Desire*, argues that,

> We are thus in a position to assess the radical, i.e., transcendent, quality of particular praxes. Clearly, a radical act need not be an explicitly political one, even though its universalizing quality can be consummated only at the level of all society, indeed, for the entire globe. However, as history has yielded a fragmented society, so may it be undone, i.e., transcended, at the level of a fragment. As personal life is a principal one of these fragments, the question of transcendence may validly be asked of it.[15]

What Kovel is calling 'the question of transcendence' is a question which calls upon the self to question itself with regard for its visionary capacity, and for the roles, routines and practices in which this capacity is channelled in response to the task. In our time, this questioning does not bring to light a Cartesian self, a self of reason completely purged of body and feeling, a self without shadows, a self totally transparent to itself, totally knowing of itself, totally self-possessed, totally certain of itself. On the contrary, the self which responds to this question is an embodied, historical self feeling, today, very empty, very much alone, very unsure of itself: a self in fragments, a self in the fury of Being. It is this historical experience of ourselves which forms the basis, the starting point, for our attempt to set in motion a practice of the self very different from Descartes', and indeed very different from the modern: a practice which assigns to our visionary capacity an historical task in response to our need.

The significance of Foucault's final work lies in the fact that it recognizes the importance of relating questions of truth and ontology to the formation of character in a history of practices of the self, self-forming activities.[16] I submit that our visionary capacity as visionary beings is a question that should refer us to character and its potentiality for development. In particular, since nihilism is the negation of Being, our present historical situation calls for a development in which our relatedness to Being, our ontological response-ability, becomes for us a question that demands our attention, our care, and our thought – a question, in other words, in relation to which our character is to be formed. And this is because a self whose character is formed *in this way* simultaneously develops its own ontological potential

and initiates historical changes with an emancipatory effect.

Our project in this book is to be understood, therefore, as a contribution to the contemporary postmodern discourse of critical social theory. About this discourse, Raymond Geuss had this to say:

> A critical theory is a very complicated conceptual object; it is addressed to a particular group of agents in a particular society and aims at being their 'self-consciousness' in a process of successful emancipation and enlightenment. A process of emancipation and enlightenment is a transition from an initial state of bondage, delusion, and frustration to a final state of freedom, knowledge, and satisfaction.[17]

Except for its assumption of a 'final state', this conception of critical theory expresses very well the concerns of our project in the present book. However, whereas the authors of critical social theory do not consider the history of Being when they interpret our present historical situation, we shall. For, we cannot respond adequately and effectively to the 'malignancy' of nihilism, nor can we reflect properly, today, on the formation of character, which is, after all, a question of our being the kind of being we call 'human', without letting ourselves be addressed, be claimed, be moved by the history of Being: by the raging of nihilism, by the closure of dimensionality, by the fury of Being.

In justifying the emphasis, in this study, on the 'psychological' character of our reflections, I would like to call attention to an analysis in Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. The passage we shall read says very well how I think phenomenological psychology contributes to critical social theory:

> . . . in an individualistic society, the general not only realizes itself through the interplay of particulars, but society is essentially the substance of the individual.
>
> For this reason, social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience than Hegel conceded, while conversely the large historical categories, after all that has meanwhile been perpetrated with their help, are no longer above suspicion of fraud. . . . [T]he individual has

> gained as much in richness, differentiation, and vigour as, on the other hand, the socialization of society has enfeebled and undermined him. In the period of his decay, the individual's experience of himself and what he encounters contributes once more to knowledge. . . . In face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself, even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere. If critical theory lingers there, it is not only with a bad conscience.[18]

As Merleau-Ponty has very forcefully argued, it is not enough for philosophers 'to create or express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others'.[19] I share this conviction; however, Nietzsche has helped me to see the nihilism at work in our present historical situation as incapacitating and destructive: damaging to our sense of ourselves as agents of historical change.[20] Nihilism and false subjectivity are inherently connected. There is also a connection, therefore, between the raging of nihilism and the epidemiology of narcissistic character disorders in a culture of extreme narcissism.[21] Consequently, I want to engage critical social theory in a sustained reflection on our capacity for vision, and on the social conditions which limit, disorganize, and predispose us to misinterpret it. In order to accomplish this task, however, social theory must collaborate with a hermeneutically critical interpretation of the history of Being represented in the discourse of metaphysics, and also with a phenomenological psychology which will put us in touch with our historical experience and enable us to understand it without being misled – without being incapacitated – by the prevailing ideological interpretation, presently circulating in our culture.

There are many modes of relating to the self, many interpretations. The modern self, which we must attempt to overcome, is a Cartesian self, a self with an essentially fixed identity: a timeless self, without real history. What we are struggling to envision, then, is rather a self which lives with a continuously *changing* identity: a self open to changes in itself; a self which changes in response to changes in the world; a self capable of changing the conditions of its world according to need. I am not what I am and I am

what I am not. 'Self-development', 'self-realization', 'self-determination' and 'self-fulfillment' are words with their own histories, words which have had many different meanings – some of them self-defeating and incapacitating, some of them too entangled in the dualisms of metaphysics, which separate and oppose self and society, experience and world, inner life and external reality, what is given and what is created.

We would consider it unthinkable to condemn science and forbid its practice because of the nuclear catastrophe it has made possible. And yet, there are many thinkers, today, who refuse to consider, albeit in a deconstructive way, questions concerning 'psychological experience' and the development of the self, and who argue against them because these questions have been bound up in a destructive tradition of humanism. We should be more discerning, more careful, around the tradition of humanism, resisting what has been, for some 'post-modern' intellectuals, an irresistible temptation to abolish the discourse of humanism in its entirety and reject all efforts to contribute historically different, and more emancipatory, more developed and more self-developing 'practices of the self'.

I would like to see us attempt to *retrieve* the heart of humanism, even as we acknowledge its inhumanity, its injustice, its irrationality, its violence, its reigns of terror. For this 'same' humanism – 'same' in a sense which is not that of an essentially fixed, non-historical identity – has also changed the world for the better. In this, its deeper sense, 'humanism' is a tradition of caring for the deepest and the best in us; it is a tradition caring for the 'humanity' in us. And this means caring for the development of our potentiality-for-being-human: our capacity, our predisposition, our response-ability as human beings. It is we who have failed in our caring; the caring has not failed us. Despite a long history of errors enacted in its name, despite its complicity in violence, humanism nevertheless represents our highest care for the potential inherent in our gift of being. This, I think, is the position where Merleau-Ponty and Habermas have chosen to take their stand.

The great vision of humanism needs, certainly, to be questioned in the light of a history of domination and oppression to which it has contributed its ideology; but it cannot be identified with, cannot be reduced to, the destructiveness of this history. We are justified in our

contempt for 'practices of the self' which are little more than glorifications of narcissism, phantasies of omnipotence and omniscience, acts of self-indulgence, displays of childish regression, forms of social indifference and political irresponsibility. After all, the modernity we are rejecting once itself revolted against 'practices of the self' – the practices of mediaeval Christianity, for example, which required mortifications of the flesh and extreme forms of self-examination, self-restraint and self-punishment. But we must be careful not to cut ourselves off from practices which would enable us to continue our individual and collective development as human beings. Our 'humanity' is a capacity whose character is given shape by the roles, routines, and practices within which we live.

When Foucault was interviewed by Rabinow in April, 1983, he was asked the following question:

> . . . isn't the Greek concern with the self just an early version of our self-absorption, which many consider a central problem in our contemporary society?

The question clearly shows its confused ideological position, but I cannot tell whether or not it surreptitiously manipulated the answer:

> . . . in a culture to which we owe a certain number of our most important constant moral elements, there was a practice of the self, a conception of the self, very different from our own present culture of the self. In the Californian cult of the self, one is supposed to discover the true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychology or psychoanalytic science, which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is. Therefore I would say that this ancient culture of the self and the California cult of the self are diametrically opposed.[22]

Although unquestionably true of certain 'practices of the self', this is a very sweeping generalization: what Foucault sees in his metaphorical state of 'California' is only a caricature of practices attempting to encourage a more

authentic form of 'subjectivity'. The modern self, the self which appears in the metaphysical texts of modernity, is a self deeply divided, a self in which reason is split off from feeling, from sensibility, and from the innate wisdom of the body. It is also a self moved by the will to dominate. Even our self-knowledge must assume this character: the self exists in self-mastery and in the self-possession of immediately certain knowledge.

If we are ever to develop ourselves beyond this historical self, much experimentation is necessary. Because his attention was captured by the more degenerate practices of the self, which tend, unfortunately, to be more visible, Foucault was blind to the existence of practices which are genuinely individuating, emancipatory, and socially deconstructive. But it would take more than keen observation to see such practices. One would also need a theoretical understanding different from that which prevails, even today, in Freudian psychoanalysis. For, as Eugene Gendlin has argued very persuasively, psychoanalysis is committed to a psychology of the ego, and it therefore can envision no development beyond the social adaptation of an ego-logical subjectivity.[23] From this standpoint, practices of the self which are not centered in the ego, not bound to the traditional social ego and its linear sense of time and development, can only appear as distinctively regressive, i.e., either infantile or psychotic.

Because Foucault never questioned the Freudian theory of the ego, he could not theoretically envision the possibility of practices of the self in which a postmodern character could begin to emerge. I think it is significant, though, that, in what turned out to be the last phase of his work, Foucault reached the conclusion, which he formulated in 'Why Study Power? The Question of the Subject', that 'We have to promote new forms of subjectivity.'[24] I think he is right; and that is why I conceive this study on vision as a contribution to our thinking about practices of the self in a postmodern world.

The Future of Humanism

According to Foucault,

> humanism is based on the desire to change the ideological system without altering institutions; and