

EDLI 7833 Culture and Critical Theory

Rabinow, P. (Ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books. 1984.

Critical Commentary (Forward & Chapters 1&3)

One of the personal enlightenments I have had this semester is to understand the difference between an intellectual and an academic and to realize I am among the former. The critical theorists I have read about as a result of this class have been, for the most part, intellectuals because the very nature of critical thinking is something an intellectual must do. Intellectuals will always question, not always to critique, but to understand their role within a larger system. If that system is flawed, an intellectual considers it a moral imperative to educate those who can't see the injustice for themselves. This is how I am beginning to see this book unfold.

The introduction talks about Foucault's "Problem of the Subject," and how human beings are turned into objectified subjects, separated both socially and spatially (p. 8). I'm not sure why, but when I read this, the movie *12 Monkeys* came to mind. In that movie, Bruce Willis was sane but was thrust among mentally the mentally challenged in an effort to convince him he was also crazy. As someone who is interested in identity, the introduction is laced with techniques about self-meaning and understanding one's place in society. On page 11, the editor says, "*Foucault is primarily concerned with isolating those techniques through which a person initiates an active self-formation. This self-formation has a long and complicated genealogy; it takes place through a variety of 'operations on [people's] own bodies, one their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct.*" This sounds very much like the process of identity creation I have been studying. The interesting aspect of this formation are what Foucault describes as power and knowledge.

It is in the chapter about enlightenment that these aspects of power and knowledge come into play. I may have the idea wrong, but it reminds me of the Gramsci writings. In Gramsci's case, he was the intellectual thinker for a society; it was his role to use his knowledge to help a subaltern class rise above their circumstances and create a collective voice. As that voice matures and is willing to act in opposition to power, transformation can take place. For any of this to happen, it is first necessary for people to begin to look at their place in history from a critical perspective.

I don't know much about Nietzsche, aside from quotes on posters. What I read in the third chapter of the book needs to solidify in my consciousness before I can speak more objectively – something that Nietzsche apparently would appreciate. What I think I read is something void of passion...the type of passion that would cause someone to rise up and challenge established society. If I read an emotion at all, it is the emotion of *reason* – that everything should be explainable and rational. The description of heritage on page 82 almost sounds technological; a series of binary code that creates a heritage based on a series of events, as opposed to something more personally significant. Maybe that is what I find disturbing about Nietzsche – it seems void of emotion; I understand culture and heritage to be deeply personal.