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Foucault and the Hupomnemata: Self Writing as an Art of Life

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Abstract

Michel Foucault tells us about a form of self writing called the hupomnemata in an essay titled *Self Writing* in his book *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. In its simplest definition, the hupomnemata is a notebook, or journal of sorts for the Ancient Greeks. However, unlike the intimate, confessional journals later found in Christian literature, the hupomnemata does not intend "to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self" (Ethics 210-211). The hupomnemata is not an art object that is distinct and separate from the writer, "they must form part of ourselves: in short, the soul must make them not merely its own but itself" (Ethics 210). The creation of the hupomnemata is the creation of the self, or as Foucault claims, the hupomnemata is a tool for the Greeks concept of "*epimeleia heautou*," or "care of the self." It is not a detached documentary, the hupomnemata makes the writer just as surely as the writer makes the hupomnemata. In this project, I will examine the differences between the hupomnemata, and modern forms of self writing. I will also examine the relationship between Foucault's work on the hupomnemata and his work on the concept of *parrhesia*, or fearless speech, and his ideas

about the nature of authorship. Following this analysis, I will create my own piece of writing which, in the spirit of the hupomnemata, attempts to enable me to "form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read" (Ethics 214).

Foucault and the Hupomnemata: Self Writing as an Art of Life

In an essay titled "Self Writing" in his first volume of collected short essays and interviews *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Michel Foucault tells us about a form of self writing called the hupomnemata. In its simplest definition, the hupomnemata is a notebook, or journal of sorts for the Ancient Greeks. However, unlike the intimate, confessional journals that would later be found in Christian literature, the hupomnemata does not intend "to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self" *(Ethics, 210-211).* Unlike the contemporary genre of autobiography, the hupomnemata is not an art object that is distinct and separate from the writer. The creation of the hupomnemata is the creation of the self, or as Foucault claims, the hupomnemata is a tool with which the Greeks practiced the concept of "*epimeleia heautou*," or "care of the self." Rather than a detached documentary, the hupomnemata makes the writer just as surely as the writer makes the hupomnemata. In this project, I will examine the differences between the hupomnemata, and modern forms of self writing. I will also examine the relationship

between Foucault's work on the hupomnemata and his work on the concept of *parrhesia*, or "fearless speech," and his concept of authorship. This analysis will show that the hupomnemata allows the writer to practice the art of life in a way other forms of self writing do not. The unique way in which the hupomnemata allows a writer to constitute an identity and engage in the care of the self suggests that a reactivating of the hupomnemata could be beneficial to today's society. Following this analysis, I will create my own piece of writing which, in the spirit of the hupomnemata, attempts to enable me to "form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read" *(Ethics, 214).*

The hupomnemata is a tool with which one synthesizes the things one has heard or read to create a new self. "It is one's own soul that must be constituted in what one writes" *(Ethics, 214).* Through writing the hupomnemata, the writer assimilates what he or she has learned, and processes it into the creation of a new individual. "Through the interplay of selected reading and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read" *(Ethics, 214).* The result is not simply a mixture of what has been learned, but a completely integrated new whole. Foucault uses the metaphor of the choir to explain this phenomenon: "The voices of the individual singers are hidden; what we hear is the voices of all together" *(Ethics, 214).* Each new piece of learning adds to the choir, but its voice is indistinguishable from the other voices that make up the subject. The hupomnemata "is a matter of unifying these heterogeneous fragments through their subjectivation in the exercise of personal writing" *(Ethics, 213).* The things heard or learned that the subject has acquired over time, which were originally distinct and separate, are now transformed into a unified voice.

Foucault states that, “writing transforms the things seen or heard ‘into tissue and blood’ (in vires et in sanguinem). It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself” *(Ethics, 213).* The writing of the hupomnemata is therefore the creation of the self. This form of self writing is very different from most forms of self writing practiced today. Narrative plays a much more prominent role in contemporary self writing than it did for the hupomnemata of the Ancient Greeks. In contrast, the hupomnemata was written as a tool which the writer could actively use whenever the need arose. The hupomnemata is a way of putting what one has learned and read into action. Without taking notes, the mind is easily distracted. The hupomnemata allows the subject to retain important information, which can later to expanded upon or revised. Without this tool, the things the subject read or learned would become scattered, and would not be easily retained. “The writing of the hupomnemata resists this scattering by fixing acquired elements, and by constituting a share of the past, as it were, toward which it is always possible to turn back, to withdraw” *(Ethics, 212).* A hupomnemata written on a certain subject can be revisited again and again by the writer. The writer does not need to keep everything in the hupomnemata in mind all the time, because whenever the issues raised in the hupomnemata come up, the writer can simply turn back to the hupomnemata for the advice which was written at some earlier date.

The hupomnemata is created as a result of the complex interactions between the subjective writer, the material already learned, and the demands of the situation that called for the writer to write a hupomnemata in the first place. “Writing as a personal exercise done by and for oneself is an art of disparate truth - or, more exactly, a purposeful way of combining the traditional authority of the already-said with the

singularity of the truth that is affirmed therein and the particularity of the circumstances that determine its use" *(Ethics, 212).* Foucault explains that Plutarch had written himself a hupomnemata on "the tranquility of the soul" *(Ethics, 212),* so when Fundamus asks Plutarch for advice on this subject, Plutarch is simply able to send him the hupomnemata he had already written on the subject. Plutarch's hupomnemata on the tranquility of the soul must have first been written as a result of his own need for maintaining a tranquil soul. This need would then cause Plutarch to put things he had previously read, and his own subjective understanding together to form the hupomnemata that would help him in his particular circumstance.

The contemporary genre of Autobiography provides an interesting contrast to the hupomnemata as a form of self writing. In many ways, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is an early prototype for the genre of autobiography which is common today. However, Franklin himself referred to his self writing as a memoir, not an autobiography. It was not until after his death that the *Autobiography* was published, and the term "autobiography" was given by the publisher, and not Franklin himself. Regardless of what Franklin's *Autobiography* is called, it is self writing which is easily recognized by contemporary readers as fitting into the genre of autobiography. Franklin describes many motives for writing the *Autobiography*, both personal and political. For the most part, these reasons are different from the reasons why the Greeks wrote the hupomnemata, although there are some overlapping justifications. Franklin's reasons for writing the *Autobiography* seems similar to the reasons most successful people in contemporary society would give for writing an autobiography. The role in society which Franklin intended for his *Autobiography* is also different from the role for which the

hupomnemata was intended in many important ways.

Franklin's *Autobiography* was not meant as a tool for his own care of the self, but a guide for care of the self for others. The *Autobiography* documents the ways in which Franklin took care of himself throughout his life, his successes and failures. Franklin portrays his life as generally a success, with a few mistakes. Franklin believes that his *Autobiography* will be useful to posterity, because future generations will be able to read about the means by which Franklin was able to rise from poverty to prominence, and "may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated" *(Franklin, 1).* The hupomnemata is written as a form of the care of the self; Franklin's *Autobiography* is written for the care of others. The hupomnemata can be given to another by the writer, as Plutarch did for Fundamus, but the primary purpose of the hupomnemata is for the care of the self, not advice for others. Although Franklin describes ways in which he engaged in the care of the self in his *Autobiography*, the *Autobiography* is not itself an instrument for the care of the self. Franklin does not write the *Autobiography* in order to help himself process, retain, assimilate, organize, or understand the things he has learned during his life. He writes it as a narrative of an example of a life that is "fit to be imitated" by others.

For the Greeks, writing the hupomnemata was the process of transforming "the things seen or heard 'into tissue and blood'" *(Ethics, 213).* For Franklin, the *Autobiography* provided others with a way of imitating Franklin, and therefore turning Franklin into their own "tissue and blood." Franklin provides his readers with a list of thirteen virtues to be followed. Franklin himself had used these virtues as tools for the care of the self, and he illustrates his own personal relative successes and failures in

following these virtues. He explains his method for evaluating his success in achieving the virtues which he has enumerated:

> I made a little book in which I allotted a Page with red Ink so as to have seven Columns, one for each Day of the Week, marking each Column with a Letter for the day. I cross'd these Columns with thirteen red Lines, marking the Beginning of each Line with the first letter of one of the Virtues, on which Line and its proper Column I might mark by a little black Spot every Fault I found upon Examination, to have been committed respecting that Virtue upon that Day *(Franklin, 70).*

This method of ensuring that he live by the virtues that he values is a means for the care of the self, and if adopted by the reader of his *Autobiography*, would become a means for the care of the self for them as well. However, Franklin's recounting of the way in which he engaged in the care of the self does not itself constitute care of the self. It has remained a general rule that modern autobiography is written for the reader, not for the writer.

Franklin states in his *Autobiography*, that he would be willing to live his entire life over again from beginning to end. "However, since such a Repetition is not to be expected, the next Thing most like living one's Life over again, seems to be *a Recollection* of that Life, and to make that Recollection as durable as possible, the putting it down in Writing" *(Franklin, 1).* Here again, the purpose of the *Autobiography* differs from the purpose of the hupomnemata. Franklin's comparison of writing the *Autobiography* to living one's live over again implies a passiveness in the writing. The

purpose of writing is not to change anything or gain anything, but simply to relive and repeat what has already happened. The hupomnemata is much more active. It is a living document intended to continually aid the writer or reader with the care of the self. In this respect, the hupomnemata is more similar to the "little book," in which Franklin writes down his progress is achieving his virtues than it is to Franklin's *Autobiography*. A recounting of past events is detached and passive in a way that the hupomnemata is not. Past events are unalterable; ideas are active long after the first person to express the ideas is dead. The hupomnemata deals with ideas that the writer has read or learned about in the past, but for the writer, these ideas remain active and alive throughout the writing process.

Narrative is a necessary component of Franklin's *Autobiography*, and of most modern autobiographies, but not of the hupomnemata. Franklin uses the narrative of his life in order to give advice to his readers on how they should live their lives. When Franklin relates an episode from his life in which he feels he did not act appropriately, he refers to his actions as "erratum." The term "erratum" is taken from a printing term meaning "error." For example, Franklin describes his sexual advances towards a female acquaintance: "I grew fond of her company, and being under no Religious Restraints, and presuming on my importance to her, I attempted Familiarities, (another Erratum) which she repuls'd with a proper Resentment" *(Franklin, 36).* In this way, Franklin's actions are presented to the reader as an example of what or what not to do. In the hupomnemata, what the writer has read or learned during his or her life, as well as the particular demands of the situation, provides the basis for the advice contained in the hupomnemata. In Franklin's *Autobiography*, it is the events of Franklin's own life that

provide the basis for the advice contained within the text. Franklin's life claims authority as a proper basis for conduct on the grounds that Franklin himself has become successful as the result of the cumulative actions he has performed in the past. The hupomnemata claims authority as a tool for the care of the self on the grounds that it critically applies the things the writer has read or learned to a specific issue which the writer need to address.

Although the hupomnemata is a tool for the care of the self, and Franklin's *Autobiography* is a recollection of his past actions, both forms of self writing share the trait that they both depend on the medium of writing because of its durability. The reasons why durability is a desirable trait for the hupomnemata and Franklin's *Autobiography* however, are very different. The hupomnemata is made "by constituting a share of the past, as it were, toward which it is always possible to turn back, to withdraw" *(Ethics, 212).* The writer of the hupomnemata can always return to the hupomnemata when care of the self needs to be done in the area in which the hupomnemata was written. The durability and tangibility of the written form of the hupomnemata allows the writer to return to the hupomnemata at his or her leisure. For Franklin, the durability of the written word allows the *Autobiography* to be past down to posterity. The relatively easy process of printing numerous copies of a single document that was available in Franklin's time also allowed for the distribution of the *Autobiography* to a wider audience than a hupomnemata was ever intended for. If a hupomnemata were to achieve a wider audience than the original writer, it would only be because it was given to a friend as an aid for the particular situation faced by the friend, such as in the case of Plutarch and Fundamus.

Another interesting example of how contemporary forms of self writing differ

from the hupomnemata is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Malcolm X is credited as the author of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* with the assistance of Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is in fact an "as told to" autobiography. Based on a series of interviews with Malcolm X, Alex Haley wrote the text of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which was then reviewed and edited by Malcolm X. This form of self writing has become popular for autobiographies of celebrities who do not have the time or desire to physically write their own autobiographies. The purpose of the author, or authors, for writing this form of autobiography is generally very different from the motivation driving the writer of a hupomnemata. The motivation to write a hupomnemata comes from the writer. The idea of the "as told to" *Autobiography of Malcolm X* originated from Alex Haley's publisher, who then asked Haley to ask X to "consent to telling the intimate details of his entire life" *(X, 385). The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides the reader with both a narrative of the life of Malcolm X, and his philosophical opinions on various issues. Haley states that he has attempted to act as "a dispassionate chronicler" *(X, 456)* of Malcolm X's story.

In writing a hupomnemata, the writer makes the things he has read or learned in the past into his own flesh and blood. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Alex Haley attempts to disassociate himself from his subject and remain "a dispassionate chronicler." The purpose of the creation of *The Autobiography of Malcolm* varied considerably between the different parties involved in its creation. The publisher, who originated the idea of an "as told autobiography," was probably most concerned with getting a book that would make money for the publishing company. Haley was fascinated by the "electric personality" of Malcolm X, and wanted to provide him with a platform from which X

could tell the story of his life. Malcolm X originally agreed to cooperate in the process of creating his autobiography, stating: "I think my life story may help people to appreciate better how Mr. Muhammad salvages black people" *(X, 386).* While his autobiography was still being written, Malcolm X split with Mr. Muhammad's *Nation of Islam*, so his motivation likely changed from his original justification from participating in the writing of his autobiography. Like Franklin, Malcolm X believed that a recounting of the narrative of his life would be beneficial to others. Malcolm X does not go as far as Franklin does in stating that his life is a suitable model for imitation, but he does imply that reading the narrative of his life will be beneficial to the reader.

The subject of a hupomnemata is a specific issue or topic that the writer wants to focus on to engage in the care of the self. The subject of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is Malcolm X himself. The idea of an autobiography was not originally Malcolm X's, and he seems uncomfortable with the subject matter. Malcolm X states to Alex Haley that: "Now, I don't want anything in this book to make it sound that I think I'm somebody important" *(X, 392).* Like Franklin, he acknowledges that he has made many mistakes throughout his life. In the end of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* X states that if he has done anything to "help to destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America - then, all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine" *(X, 382).* This focus on mistakes is similar to Franklin's focus on the "erratum" he had made during his life. Because Franklin and Malcolm X use narrative rather than things read or learned in the past to provide advice to readers, it is through recounting mistakes that Franklin and Malcolm X can be most effective. Recounting mistakes allows Franklin and X to provide a counter example of how they believe people should behave. Franklin's

account of his failed seduction of a female acquaintance provides the reader with an argument for controlling one's sexual desires. Malcolm X's account of his early life of crime serves as a plea to the reader avoid the vices which X himself had succumbed to as a young man.

The intended audience of the hupomnemata and *The Autobiography of Malcolm* X are also very different. If the hupomnemata can be said to have an audience at all, it would be the writer himself. Audience may be an inappropriate term for the reader of the hupomnemata, because the word "audience" tends to suggest a passiveness. The reader of the hupomnemata is not passive, but continually engaged in the activity of incorporating the hupomnemata into daily life. Foucault states that: "It is one's own soul that must be constituted in what one writes" *(Ethics, 214).* The process of constituting the self does not end with the writing of the hupomnemata, with each subsequent reading, the writer/reader of the hupomnemata engages in this process. When the hupomnemata is given as a gift, the receiver of the hupomnemata must engage in the same constitution of the soul that the writer of the hupomnemata had engaged in. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the intended audience may differ according to the different people involved in the creation of the autobiography. The publisher would want as large an audience as possible in order to maximize profits. Malcolm X's original intended audience was African-American who he believed he would be able to help understand how "Mr. Muhammad salvages black people" *(X, 386).* Alex Haley's intended or expected audience is more unclear, he attempted to make himself detached and invisible as the "chronicler" of X's life story, so he does not presume to state who he believed the audience of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* would or should be.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X also differs from a hupomnemata in that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is largely concerned with a social cause, whereas the hupomnemata is concerned with the care of the self. X states that: "I have given to this book so much of whatever time I have because I feel, and I hope, that if I honestly and fully tell my life's account, read objectively it might prove to be a testimony of some social value" *(X, 378).* The hupomnemata is a personal tool used by the individual to engage in care of the self. Malcolm X believed his autobiography might be a tool for the care of society. X goes on to state that: "I think, I hope, that the objective reader, in following my life - the life of only one ghetto-created Negro - may gain a better picture and understanding than he has previously had of the black ghettoes which are shaping the lives and the thinking of almost all of the 22 million Negroes who live in America" *(X, 378-379).* Malcolm X hopes that his autobiography will benefit the social cause of oppressed African-Americans. He sees the example of his life as important for readers to learn about, because it increases general awareness about the situation of African-Americans living in ghettos. X believes that an increase in awareness of this situation has the potential to lead to social change. The hupomnemata in contrast, is concerned with creating change within the individual, not society.

There are more similarities between the hupomnemata and other Greek forms of care of the self than between the hupomnemata and the contemporary genre of self writing known as autobiography. In *Fearless Speech*, Michel Foucault explains the meaning and uses of the Greek word *"parrhesia*," or "fearless speech." Foucault's interest in parrhesia parallels his interest in the hupomnemata in many ways, and the similarities and differences between parrhesia and the hupomnemata are significant. The

hupomnemata should not be confused as a form of parrhesia, rather, it is a similar method by which the Greeks engaged in the care of the self. Foucault states that, "dialogue is a major technique for playing the parrhesiastic game" *(Fearless Speech, 20).* Although the hupomnemata does not actually make use of dialogue, it engages with the ideas that the writer has encountered in the past. The writer of the hupomnemata does not actually speak in dialogue with the people whose ideas he engages in the hupomnemata, but he does put the ideas he has read and learned about into dialogue with his own thoughts. Foucault states that in Seneca, "one finds the idea that personal conversations are the best vehicle for frank speaking and truth-telling insofar as one can dispense, in such conversations, with the need for rhetorical devices and ornamentation" *(Fearless Speech, 21).* The hupomnemata is also a vehicle with which the writer can dispense with rhetorical devices and ornamentation. Because the hupomnemata is a tool for the care of the self, the writer has no need to use impressive or ornamental language. The Hupomnemata is a practical tool, and such ornamentations would be unnecessary.

In the writings of Plato, Foucault claims that parrhesia became "regarded as a art of life (*techne tou biou*)" *(Fearless Speech, 23).* Socrates plays a parrhesiastic role in the writings of Plato, addressing Athenians on the street, and "bidding them to care for wisdom, truth, and the perfection of their souls" *(Fearless Speech, 23).* The Hupomnemata plays a similar role to the parrhesiastes in this form of parrhesia. The hupomnemata can be used by the writer as a means to gain wisdom, truth, and the perfection of the soul. In Plato's writing, Socrates encourages other Athenian citizens to engage in the art of life by caring for wisdom, truth, and the perfection of the soul. Socrates advises Alcibiades that, "before he will be able to take care of Athens, he must

first learn to take care of himself" *(Fearless Speech, 24).* The hupomnemata could be one tool with which Alcibiades could engage in the care of the self. With the hupomnemata, the writer must discipline himself to engage in this art of life. A hupomnemata may contain ideas from a parrhesiates such as Socrates, but it is up to the writer of the hupomnemata to incorporate these thoughts into his own life. The hupomnemata is introspective whereas the parrhesiastes gives advice and encouragement to others. The parrhesiastes encourages others to engage in the care of the self, while the hupomnemata is a tool with which the writer engages in this care of the self.

Foucault states that: "By the time of the Epicureans, *Parrhesia's* affinity with the care of oneself developed to the point where *parrhesia* itself was primarily regarded as a *teche* of spiritual guidance for the 'education of the soul.' Philodomus [c. 110-35 B.C.], for example ... wrote a book about *parrhesia* which concerns technical practices useful for teaching and helping one another in the Epicurean community" *(Fearless Speech, 24).* At this point, parrhesia has become, like the hupomnemata, an instrument for the "technical practices" of the care of oneself. Parrhesia retained a more communal nature than the hupomnemata. The hupomnemata could be given as a gift, and thus made into a communal instrument for the care of the self, but in general, it was used as a tool for the care of the self by the writer himself. For the Epicureans, parrhesia became a communal tool with which members of the community helped each other to take care of the self. The different mediums through which the hupomnemata and parrhesia are enacted help to explain why parrhesia is communal and interpersonal whereas the hupomnemata is generally personal. The dialogue typical of parrhesia inherently involves more than one person. The hupomnemata need only involve the writer and the things that the writer has

learned and read.

As tools for the care of the self, the hupomnemata and parrhesia both require the subject to make a frank and objective self evaluation. In order to demonstrate this frankness, Foucault quotes Nicias' justification for seeking a conversation with Socrates:

> I delight, Lysimachus, in conversing with the man, and see no harm in our being reminded of any past or present misdoings: nay, one must needs take more careful thought for the rest of one's life, if one does not fly from his words but is willing, as Solon said, and zealous to learn as long as one lives, and does not expect to get good sense by the mere arrival of old age *(Fearless Speech, 95).*

This passage demonstrates Nicias' willingness to engage in the care of the self, even if it means looking objectively at his past or present failures. Nicias believes that good sense can only be attained through rigorous care of the self. He is aware that Socrates will bring up Nicias' faults in conversation, but instead of fearing this prospect, Nicias views it as an opportunity to gain good sense and wisdom. Likewise, it is the practical use of the hupomnemata to help the writer to engage in the care of the self. These attempts at rational and objectives means of taking care of oneself seem threatening to a modern reader. Such rigorous self examination would probably wound a contemporary person's pride. For the Greeks, however, such unbiased self critique is a necessary aspect of the concept of care of the self.

Like the hupomnemata, parrhesia does not involve confession or narrative. Nicias relates his past and present actions to Socrates, but Foucault explains that this

form of discourse differs from contemporary forms of autobiography: "Because we are inclined to read such text through the glasses of our Christian culture, however, we might interpret this description of the Socratic game as a practice where the one who is being led by Socrates' discourse must give an autobiographical account of his life, or a confession of his faults. But such an interpretation would miss the real meaning of the text" *(Fearless Speech, 96).* The point of parrhesiastic discourse is not to tell the story of one's life, but to examine the way in which one lives. "[G]iving an account of your life, your *bios*, is also not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live" *(Fearless Speech, 97).* Confession of past mistakes is by no means a way by which the Greeks believed they could be redeemed or forgiven for these past mistakes. Discussion of past and present actions serves only as a practical means by which to examine any discrepancies between the logic that the Greeks believed in, and the way they lived there lives. The mere confession of past mistakes would not help one to avoid future mistakes. Only by examining these mistakes rationally can a person find ways in which to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.

The action of engaging in parrhesiastic discourse and the act of writing a hupomnemata were exercises which the Greeks practiced in order to take care of the self. "*Parrhesia* as it appears in the field of philosophical activity in Greco-Roman culture is not primarily a concept or theme, but a *practice* which tries to shape the specific relations individuals have to themselves" *(Fearless Speech, 106).* The writing on the hupomnemata is also a practice in which an individual attempts to change his relationship

with himself, and actively participate in the process of constituting his own soul. The purpose of parrhesia is "to convince someone that he must take care of himself and of others; and this means that he must *change his life*" *(Fearless Speech, 106).* Foucault expands upon this aspect of parrhesia by explaining that, "it is no longer just a matter of altering one's belief or opinion, but of changing one's style of life, one's relation to others, and one's relation to oneself" *(Fearless Speech, 106).* The art of the hupomnemata and the practice of parrhesia are means by which individuals try to make actual changes in the ways in which they live. By writing a hupomnemata, the writer actively creates himself. By practicing parrhesia, the individual challenges and changes the ways in which he interacts with society, other people, and himself.

Foucault explains how a shift occurred in the Greek conception of parrhesia. At first, parrhesia, "was constituted by the fact that someone was courageous enough to tell the truth to *other people*. From there is a shift from *that* kind of parrhesiastic game to another truth game which now consists in being courageous enough to disclose the truth about *oneself*" *(Fearless Speech, 143).* This new kind of parrhesia is most similar to the hupomnemata. The subject of the new form of parrhesia and the subject of the hupomnemata is the self. The purpose of the new form of parrhesia and the purpose of the hupomnemata are also similar. Concerning the new form of parrhesia, Foucault states that, "the purpose of this examination, at least in the Pythagorean tradition, was to purify the soul" *(Fearless Speech, 146).* This purification of the soul is similar to the role of the hupomnemata for constituting the soul. The need for parrhesia and the hupomnemata arise from the individual's desire to make a change in his soul or his self. To make an effective change in the self, the hupomnemata and parrhesia are useful practices. The

hupomnemata changes the soul by incorporating things the individual has learned into the individual himself. Parrhesia changes the soul through a frank and rigorous self-examination.

Greek practitioners of parrhesia had a similar conception of the role of mistakes to Franklin's. Foucault states that a Greek practitioner of parrhesia acknowledges that "he commits 'mistakes' [*errors*]; but these mistakes are only inefficient actions requiring adjustments between ends and means" *(Fearless Speech, 149).* Franklin sees the "errotas" that he has made in his life in a similar way. Neither Franklin nor the Greeks were excessively harsh on themselves for the mistakes they had made. There is no guilt associated with mistakes, they are seen only as evidence of a discrepancy between the theory and the practice of the individual. These mistakes can be eliminated, or at least decreased, through practice. For the Greeks, this practice may take the form of the hupomnemata, or of parrhesiastic self-examination. For Franklin, this practice took the form of a chart of virtues with marks to indicate when and how often he failed to live up to each virtue.

In "Self Writing," Foucault explains the use of correspondence as another form in which the Greeks used self writing as a tool for the care of the self. In many ways, the hupomnemata and the correspondence serve similar purposes. However, whereas the hupomnemata is generally a text meant for the self, the correspondence, or missive, is "by definition a text meant for others" *(Ethics, 214).* The correspondence serves a duel function: it provides the receiver with a tool for the care of the self, but "also provides [the writer] the occasion for a personal exercise" *(Ethics, 214).* The act of writing the missive is itself a personal exercise for the writer, but the necessary extension of the

practice to others is what distinguishes correspondence from the hupomnemata. Foucault explains, that the extension of a correspondence to another individual, "does not remain one-way for long," and that "it also happens that the soul service rendered by the writer to his correspondent is handed back to him in the form of 'return advice'" *(Ethics, 215).* The hupomnemata can be exchanged from one person to another, but this exchange is not a necessary condition of the hupomnemata. For a correspondence, exchange is a necessary condition.

Correspondence allows the writer to communicate the progress or difficulties he is having, in regards to the care of the self, to others. Foucault claims that the correspondence should "be understood not so much as a decipherment of the self by the self as an opening one gives the other onto oneself" *(Ethics, 217).* This "opening one gives" often takes the form of a recounting of seemingly insignificant events in everyday life. For example, in a correspondence with Fronto, Marcus Aurelius writes: "Then, after paying my respects to my father, I relieved my throat, I will not say by gargling – though the word *gargarisso* is I believe, found in Novious and elsewhere – but by swallowing honey water as far as the gullet and ejecting it again" *(Ethics, 220).* Writing such missives, Foucault believes, "constitutes a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others. The letter makes the writer 'present' to the one whom he addresses it" *(Ethics, 216).* By making himself and his actions concerning the care of the self present to another, the writer includes the other in the process of the care of the self. Foucault quotes Seneca that, "it is necessary to train oneself all one's life, and one always needs to help others in the soul's labor upon itself" *(Ethics, 214).* Both the hupomnemata and the correspondence are means by which one trains oneself. Correspondence allows the

individual elicit help from, or provide help to others concerning the "soul's work upon itself."

The Greeks believed that gaining wisdom required continuous work and practice. Foucault quotes Seneca as stating, "[s]killed wrestlers are kept up to the mark by practice; a musician is stirred to action by one of equal proficiency. The wise man also needs to have virtue kept in action; and as he prompts himself to do things, so he is prompted by another wise man" *(Ethics, 216).* Practice of the care of the self is similar to the practice of playing sports, or playing a musical instrument. In all three cases, the support and advice of another is a valuable tool for improvement. The care of the self is more effective when two people engage in a reciprocal relationship, each one helping the other with the "soul's labor upon itself." Correspondence was one of the ways in which this reciprocal relationship was possible. The hupomnemata is like one wrestler practicing by himself moves that he has learned or seen others do. A correspondence is like two wrestlers practicing together; the practice is beneficial to both wrestlers.

As with parrhesia, the Greeks believed that a simple style provided the best mean for writing a correspondence. Foucault explains that Demetrius states that a correspondence "could only be a 'simple' style, free in its composition, spare in its choice of words, since in it each one should reveal his soul" *(Ethics, 216).* Ornamental language would serve only to obscure the image of the soul which the writer is attempting to communicate. The writer is not trying to impress his correspondent with exaggerations of his deeds, the missive is simply a frank and honest "opening one gives to other onto oneself." The final goal for both people involved in a correspondence is care of the self. Anything but frank and simple honesty would make this goal more difficult to

accomplish.

The nature of the care of the self accomplished by the hupomnemata and the missive are significantly different. Foucault explains that for the hupomnemata: "It was a matter of constituting oneself as a subject of rational action through the appropriation, the unification, and the subjectivation of a fragmentary and selected already said." In contrast, "In the case of the epistolary account of oneself, it is a matter of bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and the gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures one's everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living" *(Ethics, 221).* With the hupomnemata, the writer seeks to constitute himself, the correspondence is a way by which the writer attempts to give an accurate account of himself to his correspondent. The hupomnemata uses things learned and heard in the process of constituting the self. The correspondence engages with other people, instead of things learned and heard, in order to take care of the self. The hupomnemata provides a practice by which one can constitute oneself. The correspondence allows the individual to communicate this process to others, who can provide support and advice to the individual.

In his essay "What Is an Author?" Foucault problematizes the idea of the "author," or "author function." He analyzes the "singular relationship that holds between an author a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it" *("What Is an Author?," 1623).* The possession of an author designates a certain status to a text. Texts that do not require an author are excluded from this status. Foucault states that, "a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and similarly, an anonymous poster

attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author" *("What Is an Author?," 1628).* The criteria that a text must satisfy to have an author changes depending on the demands of the culture. Foucault explains four features of authored texts, the first of which, that authored texts are "objects of appropriation" *("What Is an Author?," 1628),* clearly excludes the hupomnemata from this group. The hupomnemata has a writer, but not an author. The significance of the hupomnemata as an unauthored text, and the differences between the hupomnemata and authored text provides for interesting analysis, and also serves to connect Foucault's earlier work in "What Is an Author?" with his later work in the essay "Self Writing" from *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, and his lectures on *Fearless Speech*.

In an authored text, the author is "outside of" and "precedes" the text. In the case of the hupomnemata, the writer "transforms the thing seen or heard 'into [his own] tissue and blood'" *(Ethics, 213).* The writer of the hupomnemata is not outside the hupomnemata. The hupomnemata is a way in which we "form part of ourselves" *(Ethics, 210),* so it cannot be separated from the writer. Foucault argues against Roland Barthes idea of "the death of the author," and instead states that, "the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies" *("What Is an Author?," 1635).* The originating subject cannot be separated from the hupomnemata, because the point of the hupomnemata is to aid the originating subject in the care of the self. The idea of the death of the author has made "the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer," and the author becomes "a victim of his own writing"

("What Is an Author?," 1624). The goal of the writer of hupomnemata is the care of the self. The goal of an author appears to be to commit a sort of literary suicide.

Unlike an authored text, the hupomnemata is not an object of appropriation. Foucault states that: "In our culture - undoubtedly in others as well - discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action" *("What Is an Author?," 1628).* The hupomnemata is a perfect example of a form of writing from the past that was an action rather than a thing, product, or possession. In contemporary western culture, authors are concerned with selling their stories or ideas as products in consumer society. The hupomnemata was made by the Greeks as a tool for personal use, and was occasionally given to another as a gift. By becoming an author, the modern writer is "conferred the benefits of property" *("What Is an Author?," 1628).* For the writer of the hupomnemata, the hupomnemata is not a piece of property, but an action by which the writer "constitutes his own identity." In "What Is an Author?" Foucault states that: "The author - or what I have called the 'author-function' - is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable" *("What Is an Author?," 1636).* In his later work on the hupomnemata, Foucault found an example of a different specification of the subject.

In an interview titled "On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress," which appears in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Foucault makes some comments, that while not referring specifically to the hupomnemata, shed light on his reasons for studying the hupomnemata. In many of Foucault's projects, he demonstrates that current structures and configurations in our society are not necessary or natural, but

simply one of many possible ways of structuring our thoughts or actions. Foucault often returns to the Greeks for examples of ways that these structures and configurations have been different in the past. Foucault does not give these examples in order to recommend that we return to a structure that existed in the past. He states that, "I think there is no exemplary value in a period that is not our period … it is not anything to get back to" *(Ethics, 259).* These examples serve only to problematize the ways things are now, and show that they are not essential to human nature. The hupomnemata is an example that Foucault uses to show that the role of the writer as creative subject has changed over time. The writer of the hupomnemata is something other than the modern author. In "On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress," the interviewer asks: "So what kind of ethics can we build now, when we know that between ethics and other structures there are only historical coagulations and not a necessary relation?" Foucault replies that: "What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?" *(Ethics, 261).* The concept of one's life as a work of art is both beautiful and fascinating. Through the writing of the hupomnemata, the Greeks practiced this art of life. Foucault shows that our conceptions of art objects are not fixed and immutable. If we want, we can make ourselves works of art, the hupomnemata proves that it has been done before.

A Spiritual Genealogy: Self Writing in the Sprit of the Hupomnemata

Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read. (Ethics, 214).

When I first conceived the general idea of this project, I envisioned writing my own hupomnemata as a way of reactivating a form of self writing that no longer exists and contained certain interesting elements which contemporary self writing lacks. After conducting a more thorough analysis of the hupomnemata however, I realized that the conditions inherent in writing a thesis for an institution of education, preclude the possibility of writing a hupomnemata. Unlike the hupomnemata, a thesis for a educational institution is a commodity. It is evaluated by a certified professor, and then exchanged for credit which leads to a degree. The result of these realities create a different relationship between writer, writing, and audience than the relationship embodied by the hupomnemata. The fact that writing a hupomnemata under these circumstances is impossible is not a real loss, as Foucault puts it, "there is no exemplary value in a period that is not our period ...it is not anything to get back to" *(Ethics, 259).* Instead, I will attempt to reactivate some of the sprit of the hupomnemata. My goal is to

create a piece of writing which "[t]hrough the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing," allows me "to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read" *(Ethics, 214).*

Foucault states that the writer of the hupomnemata, "transforms the thing seen or heard 'into tissue and blood'" *(Ethics, 213).* This statement resonated with me the first time I read it. In my own experience, I have felt that the act of writing about things I have read, seen, or heard, has changed and transformed me in important ways. When I first read the interview with Foucault titled "On a Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress," I underlined Foucault's statement that, "What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?" *(Ethics, 261).* In the margin beside the quote, I wrote, "Yes!!!" I also wrote the quote down on my computer in a document which I titled "stuff" which I have used to copy down interesting fragments, poems, or song lyrics that I have come across. Underlining this passage, writing "Yes!!!" next to it, and copying it into my "stuff" document were my ways of making it my own, or part of myself.

Taking notes, underlining, and writing in the margins of pages, is my personal reincarnation of the hupomnemata. By selecting parts of texts which I find especially important and underlining them or making little notes next to them, I am able to return to them whenever something comes up in my life that I believe that part of the text is relevant to. I can also find many of these passages in my "stuff" document. Before I went

to college, I never underlined anything I read. I began to underline and make notes in my books, so that whenever I had to write an essay, I would be able to find important parts of the text quickly. Without knowing why, I also began to underline and make notes in the books that I read outside of school. The passages I underline in my personal reading do not help me to write essays more efficiently, they help me undertake the care of the self more efficiently.

Sometimes the things I underline relate to things that I have been thinking about, sometimes they are passages that I feel makes especially eloquent points that I agree with especially eloquently, and sometimes, I don't know why I choose to underline a certain passage. In Kathy Acker's novel *Empire of the Senseless*, I underlined this passage: "The beginning of any person must be the beginning of the world. To that person" (*Empire of the Senseless, 7).* I do not know exactly what to make of that line, but I like it, and it has stuck with me, or become a part of me. I find the idea of a new world being born along with every person exquisitely beautiful. The passage seems so obvious, that I am not sure if there are a lot of meanings contained within it that I am missing, or if it simply means that everyone will perceive the world differently, and create a unique world for themselves. When I think about this line, I usually don't analyze it, or think *about* it, I just think *it*. This passage sometimes comes into my mind unannounced, and I think it over and over again, like a mantra. "The beginning of any person must be the beginning of the world. To that person. The beginning of any person must be the beginning of the world. To that person. The beginning of any person must be the beginning of the world. To that person." I see constellations forming and stars exploding into supernovas. I see births and deaths. I see cells dividing and mutating. This passage is a part of me.

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Williams puts it best in Paterson: "Because it's there to be written...." If one only wrote "good" poems, what a dreary world it would be. "Writing writing" is the point. It's a process, like they say, not a production line. I love the story of Neal Cassidy writing on the bus with Ken Kesey, simply tossing the pages out the window as he finished each one. "I wonder if it was any good," I can hear someone saying. Did you ever go swimming without a place you were necessarily swimming to—the dock, say, or the lighthouse, the moored boat, the drowning woman? Did you always swim well, enter the water cleanly, proceed with efficient strokes and a steady flutter kick? I wonder if this "good" poem business is finally some echo of trying to get mother to pay attention (Spalding).

This is a quote that I copied into my "stuff" document from an interview with poet Robert Creeley in the *Cortland Review*. I believe this quote articulates ideas similar to Foucault's on writing and other issues. For Ken Kesey and Neal Cassidy, writing is a process which accomplished some sort of "care of the self," although in all probability it was a different sort of care of the self than that which was accomplished by the Greeks through the process of writing the hupomnemata. I often remember this comment from Creeley when I am engaged in my own writing. I often feel pressure to write something "good." In a critical essay for a class, my grade depends on my writing being "good." The hupomnemata was not "good" or "bad" writing, it was simply a tool for the care of the self. Although I see this project largely as a tool for care of the self similar to that

which the Greeks practiced with the hupomnemata, it also needs to be "good" enough to convince the University of Rhode Island to accept it in exchange for credits which will allow me to graduate.

Over the years, I have written a fair amount of fiction and nonfiction pieces, some of which I consider "good" and some of which I consider "bad." Starting in high school, I have made a few attempts at writing poetry, all of which have turned out to be "bad." When I begin the writing process, I always feel that the end product will be a "good" piece of writing. I am often wrong. Some ideas seem "good" when they are in my head, but they just do not work when they are put onto a page. However, I feel that I improve as much as a writer from writing "bad" writing as I do from writing "good" writing. As Creeley says, "'Writing writing' is the point." Of course, what constitutes "good" and "bad" writing is largely subjective anyway. Some things that I have written which I do not especially care for have been received better than pieces that I am rather proud of by professors and other people who have read them. My concern with producing "good" writing has not served to help me evolve as a person, or even become a better writer, it has only pressured me to take less chances with my writing and produce generic work. Creeley asks, "Did you ever go swimming without a place you were necessarily swimming to—the dock, say, or the lighthouse, the moored boat, the drowning woman?" When I know that my writing will be evaluated, it becomes difficult to write without knowing exactly where the writing is going.

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Writing is easy. It's an ongoing process, like eating, breathing, or

sleeping. It shouldn't be painful or difficult. It's a report on the state of the soul and, like the soul, should be continuously evolving. It does so through inspiration. From people, books, film, music. When inspiration is lacking, you get writer's block (Pollard, 99).

This is another quote from my "stuff" document taken from an article titled "What I've Learned: Life lessons from rocker Robert Pollard," written by former front man of the band *Guided By Voices*, Robert Pollard. This statement is remarkably similar to the idea of the hupomnemata. For Pollard, writing evolves with the soul. Without the things that have been heard, seen, read, or experienced, both the hupomnemata and Pollard's writing would be impossible. For Pollard, these things constitute inspiration, or a catalyst to write. In the hupomnemata, they are the material which is transformed into "tissue and blood" through the process of writing the hupomnemata. Although the role of the things read or heard may be somewhat different for Pollard and the writers of hupomnematas, in both cases they are a necessary component of the writing process. For Pollard and the writers of the hupomnematas, writing is an "ongoing process." For Pollard, it is a "report on the state of the soul," whereas for the Greeks, it was the process of the constitution of the soul. Although these positions may seem very different, the emphasis on the connection between the soul and writing is present for both Pollard and the Greeks. What Pollard refers to as the evolution of the soul, is similar to the Greek concept of the care of the self. Through incorporating things read or heard into the self, or the soul, an individual continuously changes and evolves.

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An implicit subtext of this essay is, then, a reflection on the extent to which the discursive machinery of a poststructuralist, new historicism itself reproduces the structure of a production-based political economy it labors to revolutionize (Rigal, 21).

I enjoy seeing which passages other people choose to underline in a text. Whenever I read a used book that has been marked and underlined, I focus particularly closely on the parts that have been underlined, and I read any notes that the previous reader has written in the margins. I am often confused or surprised by the passages that other people think are important, and other times I find that other readers have found the same passages interesting or exciting that I find interesting and exciting. Sometimes I like to imagine who the underliner was, and why a passage seemed important to them. One of my professors assigned an essay to my class that was photocopied from an essay that she had read and made notes on when she was an undergraduate. She had underlined this sentence: "An implicit subtext of this essay is, then, a reflection on the extent to which the discursive machinery of a poststructuralist, new historicism itself reproduces the structure of a production-based political economy it labors to revolutionize" *(Rigal, 21).* In the margin next to this sentence, she wrote "COOL" in large letters, and drew a big arrow pointing to the sentence. I don't think that this sentence is "COOL." The language seems incredibly dry, and whether or not "a poststructuralist, new historicism itself reproduces the structure of a production-based political economy it labors to revolutionize," is just not something I am especially interested in. However, I was

amused at the idea of my professor reading this sentence as an undergraduate, and thinking that it was "COOL." It makes sense that someone who finds ideas such as these "COOL," and exciting, would become a professor and engage in a line of work that focuses on these sorts of questions.

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Say not, "I have found the truth," but
rather, "I have found a truth."
Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."
Say rather, "I have met the soul walking
upon my path."
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line, neither
does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of
countless petals. (Gibran, 55)

I have appropriated some books that my mother owned when she was in college. One of these books is *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran. My mother had underlined many of the passages in these book, including the one which appears above. If my mother had not already underlined this passage, I would have underlined it myself. I read *The Prophet* well before I had read anything by Foucault, but my attraction to the anti-essentialism that I would later find in Foucault, was apparent in this passage from *The Prophet*. Much

of Foucault's work on the hupomnemata, I believe, is designed to show that there have been different ways of constituting the soul and finding "truth" throughout history. For Foucault, the past, "is not anything to get back to." The "path of the soul" that the Greeks traveled is a different path from the paths we travel today. There is no universal truth that can be found by following certain principles, we find different truths as we each attempt to constitute our souls in our own way. I enjoyed discovering that my mother found this passage interesting when she first read it. My mother and I were probably about the same age as each other when we first read *The Prophet*. It is interesting that we both "found a truth" in this passage when we were at similar stages in life.

Another passage from *The Prophet* that my mother underlined was this:

> Your children are not your children.
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's
> longing for itself. (Gibran, 17).

As my mother's son, I found her decision to underline this passage especially intriguing. She underlined this passage long before she had children, so her decision to underline this passage probably had more to do with her relationship with her parents than any vision of what she imagined her relationship with her own children would eventually be like. My mother was a flower child of the 1960's, and also a child of Portuguese immigrants. The hippy way of life my mother wanted to lead often clashed with the traditional Portuguese/Catholic culture of my grandparents. I would imagine that this passage seemed relevant to my mother for the same reason that Bob Dylan's verse, "your sons

and your daughters are beyond your command" from his song "The Times They Are A-Changing" seemed relevant to my mother's generation. The 1960's were a turbulent decade, when young people rebelled against the values of their parents. However, I can also see how this verse from *The Prophet* is embodied in my mother's parenting philosophy. My mother has always been a very lenient parent. My sisters and I never had a curfew, and I was never told not to drink or experiment with drugs. My mother will encourage or discourage certain behaviors in her children. She often says, "I hope you are not becoming an alcoholic," to me, but she has never tried to forcibly impose her values upon any of her children.

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The tattoo is primal parent to the visual arts. Beginning as abstract maps of spiritual visions, records of the 'other' world, tattoos were originally icons of power and mystery designating realms beyond normal land-dwellers' experience.

The extra-ordinary qualities of the tattoo's magic-religious origin remain constant even today, transferring to the bearer some sense of existing outside the conventions of normal society.

In decadent phases, the tattoo became associated with the criminal – literally the outlaw – and the power of the tattoo became intertwined with the power of those who chose to live beyond the norms of society (Empire of the Senseless, 140).

One of the decision I made which my mother had discouraged was getting a tattoo. Ironically, this tattoo is based partly on an illustration by Kahlil Gibran, which was printed in *The Prophet*. I consider my tattoo to be an example of self writing and care of the self that is in many ways more similar to the hupomnemata than contemporary forms of autobiography are. A tattoo is a text that is turned "into tissue and blood," in a way that even the hupomnemata is not. The creation of my tattoo changed me in a real and physical way. My tattoo is part of my body, and I can only remove it with expensive and painful surgery. A tattoo is a mode of self creation, or care of the self, it is a conscious and deliberate process that results in a change in the physical self. I drew the design for my tattoo myself, and like the hupomnemata, it is a subjectivation of things read and heard. I had wanted to get a tattoo for a long time before I actually got one, but I wanted to design it myself, and I wanted to get something that I would like, so I waited and worked on different designs for a long time before deciding on one. I wanted to design my own tattoo because I wanted my tattoo to reflect, or embody, my own subjectivity. I wanted my tattoo to be an act of self creation.

My tattoo is partly based on an illustration titled "The Divine World" by Kahlil Gibran, which appears in *The Prophet*. This illustration depicts a giant hand in the sky with an eye looking out from the palm of the hand. Angelic wings circle the hand, and naked figures appear above and below the wings. I liked this illustration the first time I saw it in *The Prophet*. After researching the meaning on the hand with the eye in the palm on the internet, I found that it is a symbol that is present in many different religions and cultures. It is often called "the hand of God" *(http://www.darkfiber.com/eyeinhand/).* It appears in ancient Hebrew, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Egyptian, Aztec, and Native

American artwork. In each case, the general meaning is the same: the hand represents action, and the eye represents knowledge. The hand of God is the embodiment of omnipotence and omniscience. The hand is all-powerful, and the eye is all-knowing. It also signifies a balance and connection between action and knowledge and action. Knowledge and action can not be separated in the hand of God.

I am not religious, so it may seem strange to some people that I have "the hand of God" tattooed to my back. I do not interpret my tattoo in a religious way. One of my pet peeves about the world is that many of my own and other people's actions are not informed by learning and knowledge. Also, our knowledge is not used to create change. Especially in college, it is easy to fall into the pitfall of learning interesting theories and accumulating knowledge, but not applying this knowledge to actions. It is also easy to engage in actions which are not informed by knowledge or learning. I agree with Karl Marx that, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point it to change it." *(Marx, XI).* An intricate interpretation of the world is useless if it is not put to action. However, action that is not informed by a thoughtful interpretation of the world can be disastrous. I wanted my tattoo to be a constant reminder for me to strive to avoid both of these problems.

My tattoo has two hands and two eyes, unlike Gibran's "The Divine World." Under and connecting the two hands is a tribal sun/moon eclipse. Although the sun, the moon, and eclipses all have symbolic meanings in many cultures, and many books, including Tom Robbins' *Still Life With Woodpecker*, my main reason for including the eclipse in my tattoo was an aesthetic consideration. The eclipse connects the two hands, and creates an aesthetically pleasing triangular design. In *Still Life With Woodpecker,* and

other works, the sun represents masculinity, the moon represents femininity, and the eclipse represents the mysterious or unknown. There is also a lot new age spiritual extrapolations on these idea, which I am not interested in learning about. I enjoy the idea that the symbols in my tattoo are universal or ambiguous enough to allow for multiple interpretations or various levels of complexity. People often ask me, "what does your tattoo mean?" Sometimes I explain the general meaning of the "hand of God," and how my tattoo is partly based on an illustration from *The Prophet*. Sometimes I simply say, "I just wanted to get a tattoo, it doesn't symbolize anything." Both responses are actually at least partly true. I take my tattoo both seriously and unseriously. The symbols in my tattoo have had certain meanings in different cultures that I choose to apply to my own social realities in certain ways, but I really just wanted to get a tattoo.

My tattoo artist gave me a free sweatshirt which advertised his shop. In large letters across the back, it reads, "BE ART, GET A TATTOO." Although it may be vulgar to suggest that this sweatshirt articulates a Foucaultian concept of the self as a work of art, it is tempting for me to do so. In my experience, tattoo artists take their work extremely seriously. Although tattoos may not be considered art, and certainly not "high art," by most people in our society, tattoo artists and many people who have tattoos think of tattoos as art. A friend of mine once told me that she sees her body as a canvass for tattoo artists. I see my tattoo differently. I am not simply a medium on which art is created or performed, I myself am the art. The tattoo is part of me and part of my process of self creation. In *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker writes, "It seemed to me that the body, the material, must matter. My body must matter to me... my body mattered to me, and what else is a text" *(Empire of the Senseless, 64).* Acker goes on to explain that,

"Mentality is the mirror of physicality. The body is a mirror of the mind. A mirror image is not exactly the same as what is mirrored" *(Empire of the Senseless, 65).* As I continuously change and create my mentality, my physicality should somehow mirror this evolution. Changes in physicality will also affect and change mentality. The tattoo is a way to engage in the art of the self both mentally and physically.

Kathy Acker dedicates *Empire of the Senseless* to her "tattooist," and the novel contains both a discussion of the history and meaning of the tattoo, and a scene in which the character Thivai gets a tattoo. Although I read *Empire of the Senseless* after I got my tattoo, the ideas about tattoos expressed in the novel influenced and enhanced my own ideas about tattoos. Acker states that, "In 1769, when Captain James Cook 'discovered' Tahiti, he thought he had sailed to paradise. In Tahitian, writing is 'ta-tau'; the Tahitians write directly on human flesh" *(Empire of the Senseless, 130).* Like the hupomnemata, the tattoo is a form of self writing which originated in a different culture from ours. They represent other possibilities and different ways in which people in our society can engage in self writing. Just as I am attempting to reactivate the sprit of the hupomnemata as a form of self writing, Acker attempts to reactivate the Tahitian idea of the tattoo as writing and the body as text.

Tattooing is a mode of self writing which is outside of the norms of society. For Acker, tattoos also allow humans to create themselves. She states, "Like the edges of a dream during the waking state, tattooing showed the sailor that dreams are made actual through pain. Humans make themselves and 're made through pain plus dreams" *(Empire of the Senseless, 138).* Through the act of tattooing, the Thivai the sailor is able to create himself. This concept of tattooing as a form of self creation is similar to the Greek

conception of care of the self. For Acker, dreams are made actual through the pain of tattooing. For the Greeks, things read and heard are made actual, or into "tissue and blood" through the act of writing a hupomnemata. In both cases, it is an act of an individual making something part of him or herself and in the process, changing the physical composition of who they are.

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> *Writers create what they do out of their own frightful agony and blood and mushed-up guts and horrible mixed-up insides. The more they are in touch with their insides the better they create (Blood and Guts in High School, 100).*

Although I believe a writer's insides do not necessarily need to be "frightful" or "horrible," in self writing, including the hupomnemata and the tattoo, writing is both created out of "blood and mushed-up guts," and turned into "tissue and blood." The things read and heard by a writer of a hupomnemata are already in some way part of the writer, but the act of writing helps in the subjectivation of these things. The process of writing can never be separated from the process of learning and growing. The ideas and experiences we come across during our lives determine the way in which we write. As I learn and experience more things, these things and experiences become my blood, guts and tissue. When I write, I try to both turn these things into new blood and tissue, and also into writing. Learning about ways of writing that are no longer practiced in our society, such as the hupomnemata, and ways of writing that are practiced outside the

norms of our society, such as tattooing, has allowed me to experience new possibilities as a writer. I never know for sure whether or not I will be able to use these forms of writing to allow me to continually recreate myself, but in response to Robert Creeley's question, "Did you ever go swimming without a place you were necessarily swimming to?" I would reply that the point is to strike out for new waters.

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