DISCOURSE, DOCUMENTS, AND COUNTER-DISCIPLINE: MICHEL FOUCAULT'S ETHICS AND THE PRACTICE OF WRITING

by

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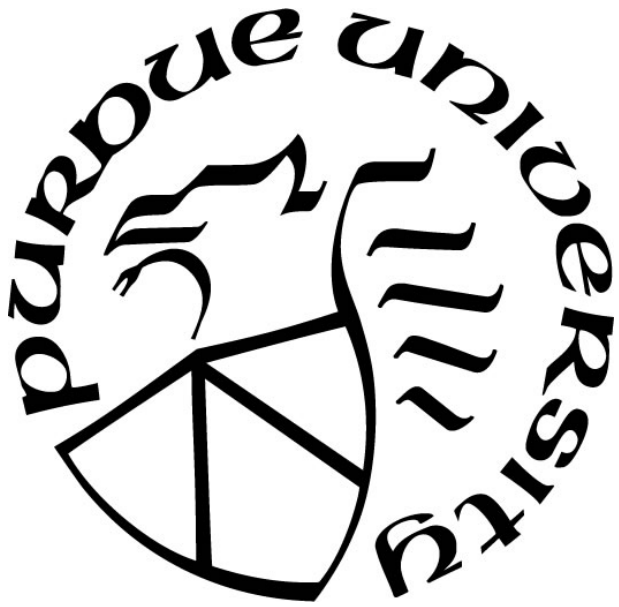

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For T. Katharine Sheldahl-Thomason and Conrad Thomason, my parents

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ABSTRACT

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Michel Foucault spent the last years of his life in an investigation of ancient ethical practices. The practices can be summarized in one phrase: the care of the self. Although this investigation grows out of Foucault's interest in biopolitics and sexuality, and is ostensibly a continuation of his History of Sexuality project, it nonetheless reconfigures that project and adds to it the dimension of subjectivity. It therefore presents a challenge to Foucault scholarship. Broadly speaking, critics have taken Foucault's ethical turn to signify either a retreat from politics or a historical investigation of how ancient people internalized social possibilities. I argue that Foucault's ethics ought to be understood as ethical and not merely historical. That is, in writing about ancient ethics, Foucault hoped to suggest ways in which we might live in modernity. Yet I argue that his ethics do not amount to a solipsistic retreat from the social. Rather, the care of the self, or how the subject relates to itself, is intimately bound up with the workings of power and discourse. Subjective transformation brings about discursive and institutional transformation as well.

To make my case, I focus on the practice of writing. Foucault made the practice of writing, its effects and possibilities, a theme throughout his career. Writing is obviously discursive insofar as it forms and transforms statements. In the form of documentation, writing is also an important technology of power. Where the care of the self is concerned, writing plays an important role in opening the self to knowledge of itself, and in working toward ethical goals with others. I argue that something like ancient self-writing is possible in modernity, and that it would effectively turn a technology of power against itself. For this reason, self-writing is counter-disciplinary. Taking the self as it emerges from discourse and power, self-writing works toward new social possibilities.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Situating Foucault's Ethics

I recently attended a talk on Michel Foucault's notion of the care of the self. I was excited about this talk because Foucault's so-called ethical period, that time toward the end of his life in which he wrote about ancient practices of subject-formation, has long been of interest to me. I think what he reveals in such works as *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* and *The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self* are deep ethical insights about how the ways we live and relate to ourselves have transformative effects. It's the scope of those effects that puzzles me. At first glance, it's easy to see these effects as personal. That is, by working on myself, by setting ethical goals and adhering to various strategies to achieve them, I can change myself. This was the interpretation presented in the talk. The speaker was engaging and animated, and argued that by the adoption of certain strategies, we could live differently. I left the talk inspired to shake up my daily routine. I thought of Kurt Schwitters, who is supposed to have had more fun each day than there was in the entirety of the Roman Empire. However, I couldn't help but think that something deeper was being missed by emphasizing the personal-aesthetic dimension of Foucault's later work. Would the thinker of discourse and power, who had challenged the philosophical ascendancy of the transcendental subject at every turn, really endorse such a personal aesthetic ethics, or was something deeper at stake? Of course there is obviously something personal going on with Foucault's later works, as indeed there is with all his works. Reading through Foucault's texts is like learning the history of philosophy in the form of a passion play. My goal in this dissertation is to show that, in this respect and others, Foucault's later works are no different than his earlier works. That is, although they are personal, and although they exhort an ethics of personal aesthetics, they do so

in the context of a sustained critical project. To understand Foucault's ethics one must understand his both his archaeological works and his genealogical works on power. One must also understand how some of Foucault's less-studied works, such as his aesthetic writings which in many ways anticipate his ethics, fit into his broader philosophical project. Indeed, his ethics in fact knots together what might have seemed disparate strands in Foucault's thought: aesthetics, archaeology, and genealogy.

The most common schema for interpreting Foucault's body of work is to divide it into three periods: the archaeological, the genealogical, and the ethical. These three periods correspond roughly to early, middle, and late. While any such division is to an extent artificial, and apt to lead to quibbles about where to draw the dividing lines, this division has become a kind of *lingua franca* among Foucault scholars. Thus, when someone refers to archaeology in Foucault, their listener (who also studies Foucault) will understand that this refers, at the very least, to one of his earlier works. I am not interested in debating the accuracy of these divisions, but I do think they capture something valuable. What they capture are shifts in emphasis. What seems clear is that Foucault shifts away from a study of the formation of discourses to a study of the functioning of institutions and governments. After Foucault's study of institutions he shifts to the study of how subjects relate to themselves. These shifts do not indicate radical departures in thought or method, though. Rather, they amount to expositions of different sides of the same triangle. For the sake of simplicity, I'll generally adhere to this terminological framework throughout this dissertation. I'll also argue that all of these moments in Foucault's thought are fundamentally related in a way that has not been fully explored.

This is, then, a dissertation that emphasizes continuity over discontinuity. However, before explaining further what I think indicates this continuity, I want to address a concern that

any Foucaultian reading this might already have. I have always regarded Foucault as primarily a thinker of discontinuity rather than continuity. Broadly speaking, each of Foucault's published works differs enough from the others to keep Foucault scholars busy grappling with his varying use of the same terms, as well as his frequent introduction of new terminology. More specifically, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, for example, Foucault rejects the argument that history proceeds in one continuous arc, thereby rejecting also Hegelian philosophy. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault points out the differences between historical ages. Facile as his distinctions between ages may be, one effect of this work is to attune the reader to the contingent events that radically alter both knowledge and the knowable. Foucault's method may be summarized as attention to granular, nearly microscopic shifts in practices, be they ways of articulating scientific objects, ways of punishing or disciplining others, or ways of relating to the self. Such attention reveals the ultimate contingency of our epistemologies, institutional forms, and very subjectivities. This method seems well-protected against being subsumed into any overarching narrative, because it immediately exposes the contingent and therefore wobbly foundations of any overarching narrative.

In the absence of the possibility of such a narrative, it is tempting to think that thought would devolve into chaos. That is, with no clear, guiding principles, such as the unfolding of history or the unifying activity of the transcendental subject, philosophy forfeits any claim to explanatory power. Anything goes if everything is contingent. Yet Foucault's is not an utterly incoherent philosophy. It is rooted in the critical tradition that investigates the limits of knowledge and the conditions of possibility of experience. To root out points of discontinuity is to prevent thought from slumbering in the comfort of its own certainty. Of course, zealousness about discontinuity has its limits, too, and to characterize Foucault as *merely* a thinker of

discontinuity is to do him a disservice. Insofar as he is interested in conditions, Foucault is as much a thinker of continuity as discontinuity. As he says in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "Archaeology proposes…to show how the continuous is formed in accordance with the same conditions and the same rules as dispersion."[1]

So, this project seeks to identify a continuity between the so-called archaeological, the genealogical, and the ethical periods of Foucault's works. Similar projects have been undertaken before. Beatrice Han's *Foucault's Critical Project* also seeks the theoretical glue that holds Foucault's works together. Her answer is that Foucault's project is critical along Kantian lines (with important differences). My interest is not so much to demonstrate that Foucault belongs to a broader tradition as it is to show that his later ethical works are consistent with and grow out of his earlier works. Foucault's ethics are of a piece with his archaeological works and his genealogical works, and this is not only because all of Foucault's work is broadly critical. Rather, Foucault turns to ethics after writing his archaeologies and genealogies because those projects, about how discourse functions and how power functions, led him to see that what remained unaddressed was the question of how subjectivity functions. That is, he saw that what remained unanswered was the question of how the self relates to itself *in the context of* its constitution by discourses and power. His ethics is also a response to those earlier periods because it answers the question, which archaeology and genealogy give rise to, of how to live given the apparent hopelessness of being conditioned by forces outside of our control. Unlike Han, who doesn't sufficiently treat Foucault's ethics as ethics, but rather as another part of his critical-historical project, I do think that, historical as they are, Foucault's ethical works are intended to point to practices that his readers may take up in modernity.

[1] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 174.

It is indeed tempting to see the ethics as a completion of Foucault's project. They appear to complete it for several reasons. The first is that they neatly fill in the third part of a tripartite notion of experience. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, for instance, Foucault argues that the structure of experience consists of the relation between knowledge, power, and subjectivity. Although Foucault analyzes each pole more or less independently, the three are always related, and no pole can be thought separately. Foucault has already given us the other two poles, and his ethics now gives us the third. The second reason is that, if his ethics is a response to a question raised by his earlier works, in giving us the response Foucault closes the circuit. He has now shown us how we are conditioned and how to live in the face of those conditions. Finally, I think that what Foucault gives us is, in the last analysis, an ontology. I will say more about this later, but here I want to point out that one can read Foucault, on the whole, as doing a kind of counter-Heideggerian ontology, and one that furthermore reverses the order of Heidegger's investigation. That is, where Heidegger begins with that being for whom its own being is a concern and moves to a philosophy of Being (Beyng) itself, Foucault's project begins with subjectivity's conditioning surroundings before moving to the question of the subject's relation to itself. I say Foucault's ontology is counter-Heideggerian (I don't think anti-Heideggerian is the right term) because it gives us markedly different results. Not the only point of difference is that, on Foucault's picture, how the self relates to itself actively shapes its conditions, whereas for Heidegger all the work one can do on oneself can at best make one passive in the face of Being. If there is an ontology at stake for Foucault, then an ethics that plays a key role in conditioning experience nicely caps off the system.

Although I am sympathetic and attracted to the picture of completeness that I just painted, I nonetheless want to trouble it right away because it risks turning Foucault into a

systematic thinker. If being a systematic thinker means either exposing formal conditions of possibility, or aspiring to theoretical completeness, then Foucault is not a systematic thinker. His late interest in the Christian Church Fathers demonstrates that he was always capable of surprising intellectual developments, and of confounding expectations. So while I don't want to reduce Foucault to the systematic, I do want to find some unifying thematic threads that run through his works. If this can be done, his ethics might assume their rightful place as a part of a deep, ongoing, incomplete, and perpetually open project. The ethics are not a completion of Foucault's project but a further development of a project that might yet reveal unexpected twists and turns.

1.2 Literature on Foucault's Ethics

Treatments of Foucault's ethical writings generally fall into one of two types. Either they are "objective" in the sense that they take the ethics more or less at face value as histories of ethics along the lines of Foucault's other histories, or they are "subjective" in the sense that they glean from these histories of ethics viable practical suggestions for how to live. As noted above, Beatrice Han's approach falls into the former category. There is much to be said for this "objective" way of reading Foucault's ethical works. Not least is that they are indeed presented as histories, and histories of varying practices at that, without explicit endorsement of all or any of the practices discussed. As Foucault himself says, "it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research," and one can characterize his entire project as a long history of subjectivity written from the outside. Thus Han reads the last two (published) volumes of *The History of Sexuality* as continuing Foucault's genealogical project insofar as that project explains how power produces subjects by founding a self-relationship that reproduces forms of power. On her reading, the ethics are essentially histories of various modes of subjection, or the ways in

which individuals recognize themselves in and construct themselves according to available forms. Of course, she is attuned to Foucault's frequent references to freedom and liberty in this later period, as well as to his revival and modification of the notion of experience, abandoned since *Madness and Civilization*. However, she finds that these developments just muddy the clearer genealogical waters. According to Han, Foucault's histories of ethics accentuate a tension between constituting and constituted subject.[2] She concludes that Foucault's "last work remains haunted by a pseudo-transcendental understanding of the subject…."[3] We can therefore hear the subtitle of her book, *Between the Transcendental and the Historical* not as articulating a new space of fruitful thinking, but as a kind of limbo in which Foucault is trapped.

Lee Braver contends, contrary to Han, that the Foucaultian subject presented in his later works is both constituted *and* constituting.[4] On Braver's reading, Foucault's ethics is a logical extension of his genealogical project from the inside, so to speak. He says, "The genealogical descriptions of the subject from the outside present her in passive terms as being formed or constituted by forces imposed upon her; without dispensing with the phenomena established in the first two phases, the ethical works add an account of the internal experience of this formation in active terms."[5] The extent of this subjective activity, what it can bring about, remains in question, though. Braver's characterization does not stray far from one side of Han's characterization of Foucault's active subject—one that participates in constructing itself according to available forms. Han thinks this is in tension with the other side of Foucault's active subject—the subject as autonomous and self-founding. Braver dismisses such a self-founding subject. He says, "There is no Kantian autonomy here in the sense of acting without

[2] Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, 185.
[3] Ibid., 187.
[4] Braver, *A Thing of This World*, 404.
[5] Ibid., 405.

causes external to oneself."[6] Rather, what Braver takes as autonomy is nothing other than self-identification with external causes. As he puts it, "What has changed in the move from genealogy to ethics is that Foucault now sees the potential for participation in the process to be more than merely a sham, so that we might be able to take a genuine ownership of the self that is constituted."[7] The emphasis for Braver, then, still falls on the *constituted*. What he calls *constituting* boils down to a kind of recognition of oneself in, or self-identification with, how one has been constituted. Braver does not address the problem of recognition raised by Han. For Han, the atemporal structure of recognition is evidence of transcendental vestiges in Foucault's philosophy. Someone taking Braver's position would presumably respond that even recognition is an effect of power-relations. This would leave open the possibility that subjectivity understood in terms of self-recognition might transform into a form that is literally *un*-recognizable should the structures of discourse and power change.

I, like Braver, want to defend Foucault against charges of creeping transcendentalism. Where Braver's position falls short, I think, is in restricting the subject's activity to merely activating forms of constitution, or recognizing oneself as constituted and identifying with that constitution. It is hard to see how such "activity" is more than merely a sham, as Braver says it is. However, since the autonomous subject, the subject that founds itself, is precisely the transcendental subject, the alternative is not appealing either. Braver points the way to a solution by holding that the Foucaultian subject is both constituted and constituting, but he doesn't demonstrate sufficiently that the subject is constituting to convincingly overcome the impasse that Han identifies. Braver ends up with a picture of subjectivity that is still more passive than

[6] Ibid., 407.
[7] Ibid., 407.

active, and he also leaves unaddressed Han's important point about the apparently atemporal nature of recognition in Foucault.

This shortcoming, I think, stems from Braver's Heideggerian reading of Foucault. While I agree that there are many similarities between Heidegger and Foucault, one of the biggest differences between them concerns how the activity of the subject functions. For Heidegger, all the work that the subject can do on itself is simply to prepare the way for receiving what Being sends. That is, the activity of the subject amounts to a becoming-*passive*. This is what Heidegger means when he says, in *Contributions to Philosophy* and elsewhere, that historical man's task is becoming Dasein. As Braver points out, in several passages Heidegger asserts something to this effect. For instance, in the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger says, "Only so far as man, ek-sisting into the truth of Being, belongs to Being can there come from Being itself the assignment of those directives that must become law and rule for man….Otherwise all law remains something fabricated by human reason."[8] This amounts to a call for standing back from productive activity in order to *let be*. Another way of putting this call is to note the essential passivity of beings in the face of Being. Even in technological enframing, for instance, historical man does not control what Being reveals (unconcealment), but is himself challenged forth to reveal nature as the standing-reserve.[9] When it comes to revealing, Being has priority over beings; the ontological has priority over the ontic. According to David Webb, this priority "insulates the ontological from any effects leaking back from the ontic level of beings; that is, what it means to be cannot be altered by beings themselves and the events that occur to them."[10] For Heidegger, Being conditions beings, while any self-conditioning on the part of historical

[8] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 262.
[9] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 323.
[10] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 116.

man functions either negatively to conceal a more originary unconcealment, or positively to unconceal that historical concealment and make way for Being's originary unconcealment. Being thoroughly conditions man's possibilities, with man's actions restricted to either recognizing or failing to recognize these possibilities, or what Braver might call taking ownership of them or not.

Braver imports this one-way conditioning relationship found in Heidegger to Foucault's history of subjectivity. Of course, since Foucault's question is not Being (explicitly), a Heideggerian reading of Foucault can only go so far. Still, on Braver's reading, the practices of the Foucaultian subject at best allow the subject to take up or take over possibilities presented to it or made available by discourse and power. There is no question of the subject's activity having a reciprocal effect on either discourse or power. That is, the subject is constituting only insofar as it recognizes itself in one or several of a range of available possibilities. The subject's practices do not condition those possibilities themselves. This reading goes a long way toward warding off any concern about the return of the transcendental subject, while at the same time leaving open the question of the structure of the recognition that allows the subject to take over an available form. Nevertheless, to hold that Foucault's account of subjectivity merely adds a layer to his genealogical project, that it repeats the external account of power from within, is to sell short both Foucault's ethics and his genealogical work.

As Pierre Hadot notes, Foucault's "description of the practices of the self…is not merely an historical study, but rather a tacit attempt to offer contemporary mankind a model of life."[11] I think it is unlikely that Foucault would suggest that a response to the functioning of discourse and power would be to take over the work of interiorizing what discourse and power already

[11] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 208.

work to get us to interiorize anyway. At the same time, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical work is clearly about transformation. His method of rigorous attention to the documentary details of an age allows him to discern when and how it became possible for new statements and institutional practices to emerge. It strikes me as odd that he would apply the same attention to the details of ancient ethical practices if he was not keen to point out similar transformation. Epistemic and institutional transformations are intimately bound up with practices. The activities of people make possible broad epistemic and institutional shifts. It is my thesis that his turn to subjectivity is an attempt to explain how such practices function to effect transformation.

This is the thesis shared by those who read Foucault's ethics from what I have called the "subjective" standpoint. This interpretation of Foucault's later work is by far the more prevalent. Works such as *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* and *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* take Foucault seriously as an ethical thinker with something to say about transformation. The problem with the majority of these interpretations, though, is that they hew closely to the self as the site of transformation. Although they claim that self-transformation will have broader social effects, the ethics that emerges from these "subjective" works begins to look a lot like self-aesthetics. It is not sufficiently clear from these works how the care of the self will constitute new social forms.

In *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, Timothy O'Leary argues that Foucault's ethics are a response to a double crisis in modernity. On the one hand, we face the decline of religious, moral, or scientific codes that might guide how we ought to live. On the other hand, we are left to grapple with the forms of individuality imposed on us by discourse and power. According to O'Leary, Foucault thinks that what Nietzsche predicted, namely the end of morality, has come to

pass. This means that we can no longer rely on any of a number of codes to shape our lives. Rather, we find ourselves in the same position as the ancient Greeks found themselves, that of cultivating "a relation of self to self in which the self is neither given nor produced, but is continuously worked on in a labor of care (*epimelia*) and skill (*technē*)."[12] That is, in the absence of code-based morality, we are left to develop an aesthetics of existence, in which the self takes itself as an ongoing work, to be shaped according to various ethical principles.

In addition to the death of morality, modern individuals are constituted and fixed by epistemic and institutional technologies whose development Foucault's earlier works traced. O'Leary sees Foucault's ethical works as a response to this situation. The question guiding Foucault's later period is how to work oneself out of this constituted self and constitute oneself differently. What the Greeks offer Foucault is a model of self-aesthetics that can effect this re-constitution. This is, in part, because on the Greek model the self requires continuous work and a sustained self-relationship.[13] Ancient Greek ethics also furnish a model because the end toward which an ethics of self-aesthetics aims is the beautiful self. This aspect of a self-aesthetic project is the most contentious, however, and O'Leary is at pains to distance himself from what he takes to be Foucault's overemphasis of the beautiful at the expense of the technical (*technē*).[14] O'Leary concludes that, for Foucault, Greek ethics present strategies that can be adapted to our present situation. The specific strategy that is available to the aspiring self-aesthete in the present is, according to O'Leary, philosophy. Furthermore, that toward which self-aesthetics aims in the present is not beauty but the maintenance of freedom, which O'Leary sees as placing Foucault in the tradition of enlightenment thinkers.[15]

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[12] O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 2.
[13] Ibid., 14.
[14] Ibid., 14-15.
[15] Ibid., 17.

Throughout O'Leary's account of Foucault's ethics is a concern for the transformation of the self. It is the self that becomes the site of any possible resistance to power that is at work everywhere. Or rather, it is the self that becomes the site of a continuous re-opening that counters the tendency of power relations to become relations of domination. On O'Leary's reading, the self's relationship to itself marks out a space in which the play of freedom, understood not as contrary to power but as one of its effects, is preserved.[16] This freedom becomes the aim of the ethical practices that it makes possible, and this aim is achieved only through the continuous activation of those practices, which amounts to, again, the continuous work of the self on the self. This is not to say that O'Leary thinks that the self can somehow transcend the power relations that have heretofore constituted it. He is aware of the impossibility of abstracting individuals from such power relations. Rather, given the individual's situation in a network of power relations, the only recourse one has is to fashion oneself as a work of art. To do this is to demonstrate "an undeniable commitment to social and subjective change."[17] A commitment to such change, moreover, carries on the critical tradition of (enlightenment) philosophy, because it tests the limits of what we are and continually asks the question of the human condition in the present. For this reason Foucault finds in Baudelaire an ethical example akin to that set by the Greeks. As O'Leary reminds the reader, for Baudelaire modernity is an "exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it."[18] On O'Leary's reading, the self is the site of this confrontation, and the task of modern man is self-(re)invention and, by extension, the invention of new forms of life.

[16] Ibid., 160.
[17] Ibid., 167.
[18] Ibid., 169.

Edward F. McGushin provides an extensive presentation of the care of the self as critical philosophy in his *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*. Like O'Leary, McGushin sees the self as the site of the response to the constituting forces of discourse and power. In McGushin's words, "If…the formation of the self has been almost completely absorbed within the biopolitical project and its disciplinary techniques…care of the self offers a possible counterpractice in the form of alternative techniques of self-fashioning."[19] As we saw in O'Leary's reading, a project of self-aesthetics appears as the response to the tendency of power relations to become forces of domination insofar as they constitute individuals, and insofar as they take over the work of assigning, from without, as it were, the truth about each individual to each individual. Self-aesthetics, then, is already political, if only because subjectivity is always already thoroughly implicated in the unfolding of discourse and power. Still, for McGushin, the self is what is most at stake in Foucault's later works. He characterizes the care of the self as a conversion to the self that is "a form of *salvation* in the sense that conversion frees other possibilities of fashioning our ethical subjectivity."[20]

As the title of McGushin's book suggests, his reading takes seriously the notion that philosophy is a way of life. His reading of the late Foucault takes the care of the self as philosophical practice that continuously tests the limits of who we are and orients us toward new possibilities. It is critical because it responds to the present, to the question of what makes it possible to be who I am, and to the limits imposed by discourse and power. Although he does not rely on the language of freedom as heavily as O'Leary, McGushin suggests that through the care of the self new "systems of actuality" will arise.[21] These systems, in turn, ought to be

[19] McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*, xx.
[20] Ibid., xx.
[21] Ibid., 287.

continuously evaluated and challenged in a process of ongoing critique. The philosophical life amounts to the carrying out of this critique in the form of those exercises on oneself that reshape the self and convert the self to the self and away from the self as constituted by discourse and power. Thus, as in O'Leary, the self-relationship is that locus of freedom within the structures of discourse and power that serves as the engine of transformation, at least where the subject is concerned, and likely also where society is concerned.

Of the two prevalent readings of Foucault's late work, that which takes the care of the self as activating social forms made available by discourse and power through a process in which one comes to recognize and take ownership of one's constitution, and that which sees the care of the self as a process through which such constitution is resisted in favor of a critical openness that yields new possibilities, I strongly prefer the latter. I think it better accords with Foucault's own lifelong practice of philosophy (which is another thesis of McGushin's). I further think that critics like O'Leary and McGushin are correct in noting that Foucault wanted his studies of ancient ethics to tell us something about how we should live in the present. I find it highly unlikely that what they would tell us would amount to working to take ownership of the possibilities power leaves us, especially when those possibilities so often lead to misery. However, there are yet some pitfalls to this reading of Foucault's ethics that, on the one hand, leaves him open to some persistent but misguided criticisms, and on the other hand fails to do full justice to Foucault's earlier work on discourse and power.

Perhaps the most obvious criticism of the second, "subjective" reading of Foucault's ethics is that it still fails to address Han's point about the apparently transcendental status of recognition. Although most critics who take the "subjective" line hardly mention recognition, it nonetheless plays an important role on this picture. The self must come to recognize itself as the

effect of power in order to transform itself, and it must also recognize itself as the possible object of a transformation. So there still seems to be a vestigial transcendental concept at work here. Perhaps the most obvious response to this line of argument, though, is that the self is constituted with the kind of reflective interiority that makes recognition possible. Furthermore, the possibility of the self being constituted otherwise is clearly on the table, since transformation of the self into something other than what it has been constituted as is the very point of the "subjective" reading of Foucault's ethics. O'Leary captures this open-endedness best when he says of exercises of self creation that they can "call upon no given criteria for success, no universally recognized set of rules."[22] Indeed, not only is the care of the self an ongoing task that does not aim at completion, what possibilities it might open up are unforeseen and in fact unforeseeable, since any foreseeable possibilities for the development of subjectivity are only foreseeable from within the current constitution of the self. Again, the purpose of self-aesthetics is to work oneself out of one's current constitution. What this self may become, and whether its future constitution will involve a process of recognition, nobody can say. In other words, recognition is not a transcendental structure but is conditioned by the historical unfolding of discourse, power, and subjectivity.

A more common and more pernicious strand of criticism says that Foucault's ethics opens the door to any number of immoral or solipsistic projects because it closes the door on any possible normativity. Arguments that take up this line of thinking have been advanced most forcefully by Richard Rorty, Thomas McCarthy, and Richard Wolin. It is worth considering several of these arguments briefly, in order to know the kind of charges that Foucault is up against.

[22] O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 17.

Richard Rorty claims that Foucault's later works reject the need for any kind of community because the kind of self-creation that these works champion is undertaken on a completely individual basis. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty argues that private aesthetic projects and public altruistic projects are incommensurable but may yet exist side by side in society. He advocates for a utopia full of what he calls liberal ironists, or people who oppose cruelty while recognizing that humans are contingent beings.[23] That is, he refuses to ground normative moral claims in anything either transcendent or universally human, but he doesn't jettison morality wholesale. In his utopia, "solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved."[24] Shared truth would not be the binding glue of community, but a shared commitment to preventing suffering while remaining open to all kinds of lives and accepting of innumerable private projects would be.

As Rorty sees it, the problem with Foucault is that he "is an ironist who is unwilling be a liberal."[25] As evidence for this, Rorty points to an interview in which Foucault rejects the consensus of any "we" as that which can validate a thought. Foucault questions whether one ought to place oneself within a "we" before asserting the values one accepts, or if questions of values ought to be raised first to point to the future formation of a "we."[26] On Rorty's reading, this indicates Foucault's dissatisfaction with any extant "we," any extant community formed around shared values, including the "liberal we" that rejects cruelty. Instead of standing with any community, Foucault hopes to extend his desire for private autonomy to the public sphere. This is how Rorty reads Foucault's mention of a possible future "we." That future "we,"

[23] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xv.
[24] Ibid., xvi.
[25] Ibid., 61.
[26] Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 385.

according to Rorty, would embody personal autonomy. It would be, as Rorty puts it, "a societal counterpart to the desire for autonomy."[27] In pointing out the problems with liberal society, such as the formation of institutions whose operations constitute and shape individuals, Foucault both ignores the progress that liberal society has made with respect to diminishing cruelty, and refuses to propose a collective alternative to such society. Instead he holds that even reform is bound up with the workings of liberal power. Because of this he stretches his desire for personal autonomy to a desire for total revolution in which all present institutions are rejected in favor of those to come.

Thomas McCarthy echoes some of these concerns in "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School." McCarthy notes that Foucault's criticism of liberal society casts virtually all social institutions as mechanisms of constraint that impede personal autonomy. On McCarthy's reading, Foucault's notion of liberty excludes any society whatsoever. He says, "Community and tradition, shared forms of life and collective identities, common fates and the common good play no central role in the practice of liberty as he represents it."[28] Rather, "Foucault's liberty appears to consist in a desocialized aesthetics of individual existence."[29] Unlike Rorty, McCarthy doesn't fault Foucault for extending what should be a personal project to the public sphere. Instead, McCarthy sees in Foucault's ethical turn a retreat from the political altogether. In the absence of any viable strategies of resistance to the workings of all-pervasive power, Foucault turns to the only place where a degree of autonomy may still be exerted: the self's relationship to the self.

[27] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, 196.
[28] McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School," 461.
[29] Ibid., 461.

For McCarthy, the problem with this retreat is that it leaves no possibility for critical social theory. In throwing up his hands and turning to self-cultivation, Foucault effectively adopts a position of political quietism. For Rorty the problem is one of adopting the standpoint of the grandiose revolutionary, albeit one with no vision of what is to come. In many ways the second problem is the more sinister one, because it opens the door to fascism. Indeed, Rorty sees the kind of projection of the private into the public that he identifies in Foucault as what "leads to Hitlerlike and Maolike fantasies about 'creating a new kind of human being'."[30] Rorty's vision, on the other hand, is of a liberal society that merely allows people to do what they want without hurting each other. McCarthy makes a similar point about universal morality construed on a juridical model.[31] Such a morality allows individuals to pursue different ends from within it. McCarthy thinks that Foucault's hesitation to put forward any positive moral claims stems from his conflation of a juridical morality with a morality that emphasizes substantive codes.

Richard Wolin most forcefully advances the charge of latent fascism against Foucault. Wolin calls Foucault an "aesthetic decisionist," where aestheticism means "the exclusive primacy of an artistic approach to life, in opposition to science and morality," and decisionism means the belief that might makes right, or *auctoritas, non veritas, facit legem.*[32] Wolin holds that these two strands of Foucault's thought come together and get their fullest expression in his later works, especially *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self.* In the background of these works, Wolin sees the spectre of Nietzschean aestheticism, or "the choice of a glorious life which rides roughshod over the trammels of social respectability and convention."[33] If the

[30] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 196.
[31] McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School," 460.
[32] Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," 71.
[33] Ibid., 81.

development of a singular, beautiful life is the only ethical imperative, then any style of life, no matter how harmful to other people, is sanctioned. Ethics becomes all form, no content.

This picture is decisionist for two reasons. First, the self-aesthetic, in rejecting all norms, expresses a totally free will. Foucault is an *aesthetic* decisionist, not merely a decisionist, because the expression of the free will has to have style.[34] Whatever the will expresses, albeit tastefully, is right. Second, the elevation of the aesthetic comes at the expense of other values. This leads to a regard for others as mere means in an aesthetic project. As Wolin puts it, "once an aesthetic outlook becomes the sole determinant of life, its insensitivity to other values ultimately translates to an insensitivity to other persons qua ends in themselves. They are viewed as the pliable objects of aesthetic fashioning, raw materials to be integrated to a grandiose aesthetic spectacle that is not of their own making."[35] The committed self-aesthetic would find no moral norms external to his own will stopping him from using people however he sees fit in order to further his own project.

Leaving aside Nietzsche's influence on Foucault, the connection between aestheticism and fascism has been the subject of much philosophical and social-critical commentary. Walter Benjamin famously concludes "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" with the comment that fascism aestheticizes politics while communism politicizes art. Fascism aestheticizes politics by allowing citizens a degree of expression in a political context.[36] It makes a ritual out of politics in which each person can recognize themselves as part of an aesthetic movement. Aesthetic expression in the political ritual becomes the paramount political value, at the expense of any other value. Once this happens,

[34] Ibid., 84.
[35] Ibid., 85.
[36] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility," 269.

humanity regards itself, as a whole, as an object of fascination, and so it experiences "its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure."[37] If there is a sense of community operative here, it is not one of mutual exchange or of difference allowed to proliferate because of certain broad, anchoring values (e.g. justice). Rather, it is a community wrought of uniformity, the "we" of fascism is the same "I" activated in a group—the "new kind of human being." Benjamin's text elaborates the kind of self-aestheticization writ large that worries Rorty.

I think it is easy to demonstrate that Foucault's ethics is not anti-social but in fact pro-social. I also think it's abundantly clear that Foucault is no fascist, and that much of his intellectual project is fundamentally a response to the conditions that gave rise to Europe's fascist nightmare. However, to be charitable to Rorty and others, their arguments are about where Foucault's ethics might lead, not what Foucault personally endorsed. Indeed, one question I've received in discussing Foucault's ethics is if Donald Trump is not an example of the self-aesthete. The reason for this question is that Trump responds to the various forces that seek to constitute him in some way with a flurry of counter-information. Is he not making himself anew, regardless of what has been said about him? Although Foucault would not endorse a fascist, might not the Trumpian ethos be an unintended and unfortunate outcome of Foucault's ethics? As reductive as this reading is, it is surprisingly attractive to many people. On the "subjective" reading of Foucault's ethics, the charge that self-aesthetics leads to fascism or Donald Trump fails for many reasons. It fails because the self-aesthete, as Foucault describes her, has a deep concern for the truth. To simply deny one's constitution, as some claim Trump does, is not enough to escape it. Self-aestheticism calls for recognition of how one has been constituted, and painstaking work to constitute the self differently. Furthermore, the care of the

[37] Ibid., 270.

self is about elaborating new social possibilities and new forms of life. It is through such work that, for instance, erotic possibilities may be decoupled from sexuality. The dominating tendencies of power can thereby be defused. This is one way of saying that the care of the self is about conditions of (at least) subjective truths. It is not merely a matter of denying facts. In my opinion, the "subjective" reading of Foucault's ethics has abundant resources to address these concerns. Nonetheless, those who overlook Foucault's emphasis on conditions and see only the elaboration of a solipsistic self-aesthetic project can be forgiven. What is missing from most commentaries on Foucault's ethics is an adequate account of *how* the care of the self might alter the conditions of experience.

My task in this dissertation is to fill in this lacunae. My thesis is that the care of the self brings about epistemic and institutional transformation as well as subjective transformation. The care of the self thereby alters those very forces that constitute the subject. The picture I will paint is one of reciprocal relations between knowledge, power, and subjectivity. My aim is not to uncover to an elusive origin or show that subjectivity is in fact constitutive of knowledge and power. This would be a return to the transcendental philosophy that Foucault argues against. Rather, I will show that the care of the self is in a mutually conditioning relationship with discourse and power. For this reason the care of the self contributes to the alteration of what can be said and to the contestation of power. The possibilities that the care of the self opens up are not merely subjective. They are much broader because they are reflected in our very knowledge and institutions. There is still no question of escape from the effects of discourse and power, but there is the possibility of contributing to the re-structuring of discourse, power, and subjectivity. As I have said before, I think Foucault gives us an ontology. Given the scope of my project, I

will not argue directly for this claim. However, I hope that the outlines of this ontology will become clearer as my argument progresses.

1.3 Methodology

My strategy will be to focus on those practices of the self that, I'll argue, are common to both the constitution of knowledge and the formation of subjects as well. My primary example will be the practice of writing. In a certain light, Foucault's project appears as an extended reflection on writing. His analyses of discursive practices are obviously related to writing as an important mode of the production of statements. He wrote several works of literary criticism which are often overlooked in discussions of Foucault's project as a whole. Written documentation figures prominently in disciplinary practices. Writing letters and keeping a written account of the self are important technologies of the self that Foucault highlights in his studies of ancient ethics. Each of these forms of writing function differently, or at least appear to function differently depending on the level of analysis. However, I'll argue that the functioning of these forms of writing is ultimately more similar than different. Knowledge, power, and subjectivity are not states, ideals, or forms, but dynamic processes. Writing plays an important role in the development of each process, and it plays that role similarly for each process. Where discourses are concerned, writing proliferates statements. Since the rules governing the formation of statements are historical and immanent to the system of the formation of statements, that which proliferates statements thereby also alters the rules of their formation. Likewise, power functions through various technologies which in turn determine the possibilities of its functioning. Writing, in the form of documentation, contributes to the constitution of durable individuals and furnishes knowledge of these individuals to disciplinary techniques. Subjects come to recognize the shape of their constitution through the practice of self-documentation, and

that documentation reveals new possibilities for the re-working of that constitution. In none of the above cases, furthermore, does writing function in a vacuum. Self-documentation, for example, contributes to the proliferation of statements and can become a part of the functioning of institutions (as has been the case in certain legal and medical instances). By paying close attention to the role writing plays in knowledge formation, power's production, subjectivity's (self)-constitution, and the relation of all three of these domains I can show in granular detail *how* a practice can affect the structure of experience and, ultimately, what *is*.

Because this is a dissertation about the unity of Foucault's project, and because I'm arguing that Foucault's ethics represent a point in a logical progression from his earliest works, I will devote my next chapter to some of Foucault's earlier, archaeological works. My purpose in starting at the beginning is to clarify some of the concepts that he articulates in these works. This will allow me to show that they reappear in his later periods, albeit in slightly different guises. This kind of thing has been done before, but here I will restrict my focus to those concepts that pertain to the interrelated transformative practices that I refer to above. Indeed, transformation and subjectivity are already central themes of Foucault's earliest works. I will first explain how Foucault's criticism of phenomenology, and his identification of the empirico-transcendental doublet at the heart of phenomenology, leads him to proclaim the impending death of man and motivates his search for conditions of experience outside of the subject. Foucault's concern is already, I argue, the conditions of experience, or what makes the peculiar experience of modernity possible, or rather, *actual*. This concern has been evident since *The History of Madness*, and it is further developed in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Because it is the most succinct and schematic presentation of Foucault's thought during this period I will restrict the bulk of my discussion to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

The Archaeology of Knowledge presents a detailed argument that the conditions of discourse are historical, as well as a thorough exposition of the ways in which the internal structures of discourses effect discursive transformations. It also lays many of the seeds that would blossom later in Foucault's work, and it prepares the ground for the account of subjective practices that affect discourse formation that Foucault develops at the end of his life. I don't want to say that Foucault's genealogy and ethics are derivative of his archaeology, or that what he is doing in those periods is *really* just archaeology. Rather, a close reading of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* can yield crucial clues to the coherence of Foucault's broader project.

To that end, in this chapter I will highlight these important clues. The first is Foucault's argument that the rules of discourse formation are conditioned by their own history. The second is Foucault's nascent account of temporal dispersion, according to which each discourse develops according to its own temporality, which is structured by its contact with other discourses that develop according to other temporalities. The third is his account of discursive transformation, which involves the intersection of different discourses with different temporalities that, through their interaction, can reshape each other or give rise to new discourses. Although Foucault does not make the practice of writing a specific theme of his analysis, it is plain that writing is an important mechanism by which discourses transform.

In chapter three I will apply the insights from chapter one to several of Foucault's works of literary criticism. In the 1960's Foucault produced two books and a number of essays on literature and literary figures. In artistic circles, these works are often some of the first of Foucault's writings that people encounter. Their allure is enhanced by their looping, twisting, overflowing style. However, Foucault scholars have had a hard time reconciling them with his more straightforward (at least by Foucault's standards) works. Foucault did not help the

situation by commenting that his book on Raymond Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth*, should not be included in the "sequence" of his books.[38] Therefore few critics have taken this work seriously, and only a few more, such as Timothy O'Leary and Simon During, have written extensively about Foucault and literature. Nonetheless, the interpretive framework that I am developing makes it easy to incorporate these works into Foucault's broader intellectual project. This incorporation is not gratuitous, but rather shows that these works played an important part in Foucault's development of the theme of transformation within immanence.

My focus in this chapter will be on Foucault's work on Raymond Roussel and the Marquis de Sade. Both Roussel and Sade, I argue, engage with discourse, even the mundane discourse of local geography, to produce statements that take those discourses to their limits. Roussel's work generates new meanings from the actually said, while Sade's treats the discourse on desire as supplanting the reality principle, and therefore as the appropriate scene of ethical work that amplifies and reshapes desire. By contrast, Maurice Blanchot's fiction stands outside any discourse save that of literature. For this reason what he writes remain mere sentences, not statements, and so the ethical possibilities of Blanchot's writing are restricted. Roussel and Sade demonstrate that the activity of subjects, functioning within their constitution as subjects, affects that functioning whereby they are constituted as subjects.

Writing's role in the constitution of knowledge and subjects is only deepened in Foucault's ensuing studies. It is these studies that I turn to in chapter four. Although Foucault's genealogies are widely considered to represent a shift in emphasis from discourse to power, a shift which Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow have described in terms of a shift from theory to practice, the shift is by no means so clear cut (which, it should be noted, Dreyfus and Rabinow

[38] Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 187.

acknowledge). What is different is that most of the vocabulary of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* drops away in favor of granular descriptions of how *discipline* functions and how things like architecture and training constitute people as objects of knowledge *and* reflective subjects that regulate their own activities. While practices had already been of integral importance to discourse formation, what Foucault now gives us is an account of how non-discursive practices produce objects and subjects. However, as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* makes clear, institutional practices are so intimately bound up with discourse as to be intrinsic to discourse. Still, the rules governing the non-discursive, which Foucault now identifies positively as *power*, are autonomous, just as the rules of discourse formation are autonomous, if not historically independent. Foucault's shift of emphasis here is to a study of power in its autonomy.

Yet just as institutions participate in the rules of discourse formation, so discourse participates in power's functioning. One site of this overlap is the practice of documentation. As Foucault makes clear in *Discipline and Punish*, documentation becomes a means of opening up individuals to knowledge. That is, through documentation, it is possible to know individuals as individuals. It is also possible to establish a history of each individual. Indeed, documentation is an invaluable resource for *determining* individuals and *training* them for future use. Furthermore, the advent of *biopolitics* calls for the proliferation of confessional documents, especially auto-biographical documents, that reveal the truth of one's sexuality and that might reveal latent criminal madness. In this way documentation furthers the aims of power, but it also presents a means of resisting power. I will read Foucault's edition of Herculine Barbin's memoir, *Herculine Barbin*, as an instance of auto-documentation that functions as both

discursively transformative and resistant to power. Barbin shows us the way from counter-discourse to counter-discipline.

Chapter five will demonstrate the way in which the care of the self functions as counter-discipline. Because Foucault revives the notion of experience in his later works, I will first explain that revival and argue that experience should be understood as a local, mobile concept rather than a totalizing or universal one. The phrase "the structure of experience" is perhaps better put as "the structures of experiences." I will then provide an account of the importance of the care of the self in antiquity, as Foucault identifies it in *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of the Self*, and several related lectures. I will show that writing, especially self-writing, is an important technique of the self. Self-writing induces self-mastery by taking on the role of an external observer. It contributes to self-constitution by fostering reflection on and internalization of preserved discursive fragments. It also exposes the subject to others, who serve as external observers and spiritual guides. In its autobiographical function, self-writing presages institutional documentation. However, rather than creating fixed truths of the self that call for institutional regulation, self-writing takes the self as an ongoing work that transforms through a process of continuous exposure to heterogeneous discourses. Self-writing also places the self in local relationships that work below the level of institutions and struggle against disciplinary aims while nonetheless employing technologies similar to those used by disciplinary societies.

Because of these discursive and counter-institutional valences, self-writing has the capacity to transform the structures of experiences. If something like the ancient practices of the care of the self are revived in modernity, what would emerge in self-writing would be statements in a discourse on the self, which discourse would take its place amongst other discourses, and so transform what can be said and who can say it. Likewise, self-writing and the relationships it

involves resist power. Therefore they are integral to the workings of power. They are also bound to force power to adapt and form new strategies aimed at maintaining a society of productive individuals. In these ways the care of the self rebounds on the structures of both knowledge and power, which is to say that it rebounds on and reshapes experience. This reshaping is, furthermore, always ongoing. There is no telling what shape social forms might assume if we take Foucault's ethics seriously, since any broad ethical aims set in advance can only be articulated on the basis of the very conditions that his ethics seeks to transform. Still, where discourse, power, and subjectivity continue to recondition one another, there remains the need for critical activity. This is in part because new philosophical and ethical problems will arise. For now at least, Foucault's ethics, and writing specifically, offer us an avenue for addressing current, untenable social situations.

CHAPTER 2. WRITING AND DISCOURSE FORMATION

2.1 Introduction

Michel Foucault's first major works, *History of Madness, The Order of Things,* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* are best read against the backdrop of phenomenology. One way of characterizing these works is as a critique of, and beginning of a response to, the phenomenological tradition. The first two of these works especially address phenomenological themes, such as the conditions of experience, although they develop an approach to these conditions that does not locate them in the transcendental subject. Instead, Foucault approaches the conditions of experience from the outside, so to speak, analyzing the historical and linguistic practices that, as he argues, give us both the objective and subjective sides of experience. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* most fully articulates this approach. It represents the culmination of his project as it had developed from *History of Madness* through *The Order of Things*, but in Foucault's own estimation it is a needed corrective to some of the ambiguities and excesses of those earlier works. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault drops the language of experience, apparently out of the concern that the term brings with it the baggage of historical uniformity that Foucault is at pains to avoid. Instead of explicitly addressing experience, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* takes discourse as its central theme. Foucault argues that discourse is productive of both subjects and objects, and that the conditions of discourse are immanent to discourse itself. Still, experience never seems far from Foucault's mind throughout *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This is most evident in his subtle treatment of subjectivity in the work. To avoid the pitfalls of transcendental philosophy, Foucault restricts his discussion of subjectivity here to its discursive position as an enunciative modality. Even so understood, subjects play a role in the conditioning of discourse. According to Foucault, the conditions of

discourse are practical—they involve activity. Subjects undertake at least some discursive activity, and in so doing they contribute to the formation and transformation of discourse. This amounts to saying that subjects participate in the constitution of both themselves and objects of discourse, or objects of knowledge. I think it is safe to say that a concern for subjects, objects, and the two in relation is a concern for experience, even if the concern is not directly presented that way. In any case, what emerges from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is a framework of reciprocal conditioning that Foucault will maintain throughout his following works. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* should be read as the beginning of a positive philosophy that will only be deepened, not abandoned, later on.

In this chapter I will outline Foucault's criticism of phenomenology before turning to an explication of archaeology. I will then highlight those archaeological themes that I think are crucial for understanding Foucault's later works. Those themes are the immanence to discourse of the rules of discourse formation, the temporal dispersion of discourses, and the role of subjects in discourse formation and transformation. These accounts of formation, dispersion, and subjectivity offer a kind of template for understanding Foucault's broader philosophy as it expands to encompass more than discourse alone.

2.2 Experience and Phenomenology

Experience is a major theme in Foucault's work from the beginning. His first major work, *History of Madness* (first translated into English, in an abridged form, as *Madness and Civilization*), examines the social processes by which madness is constituted as an object of knowledge. It is a *history* of *madness*, where madness means the experience of madness *as an object of knowledge* (i.e., not a history of what it is like to be mad, but a history of madness as a phenomenon), and history signals that this phenomenon develops across time. The story

Foucault tells is of the way madness moves from the fringes of reason, where it functioned as a continuous reminder of the chaotic void always threatening reason, to the interior of reason, where it becomes that other which nonetheless speaks the same language as reason, and which reason dominates and studies. This account of the isolation of madness as an object of discourse is an account of the conditions of possibility of a contemporary experience. That is to say that it is an explanation of how a phenomenon becomes intelligible as *madness*. However, where phenomenology (of the Husserlian variety) seeks the constitution of objects in subjective, transcendental processes, Foucault explains the becoming-intelligible of madness as the result of a series of impersonal, social processes (e.g., institutional confinement, the articulation of a discourse relating madness to medicine, etc.). Foucault's originality in this work is to highlight the incommensurability of one age's experience of madness with another's, and to locate the constitution of an object of knowledge in a variety of practices that make the object appear as natural.

Still, Foucault does not completely exorcise the specter of phenomenology, although identifying the way phenomenology lurks in the text is a tricky issue. In his introduction to *History of Madness*, Jean Khalfa notes that "the vocabulary of the phenomenological approach is still common" in the text. Although it is unclear what vocabulary Khalfa has in mind beyond Foucault's frequent references to the *experience* of madness, it is true that the word experience appears frequently throughout *History of Madness*. Beyond the mere appearance of this word, though, is the question of its function. As Foucault came to recognize, *History of Madness* posits what Foucault would later call a "total description." It presents the constitution of madness as an object of knowledge as a more or less linear development from one age to the next. Although there are distinct breaks between ages, what each age has in common is the problem of madness,

and Foucault's account of how madness gets constituted in each age has the flavor of a totalizing, unified response to this problem that gives rise to a consistent experience of the phenomenon of madness. This flavor of totality leads Foucault to say, in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "[*History of Madness*] accorded far too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too, to what I called an 'experience' (*expérience*. Given the context, I think "experience" is a better translation here than "experiment," which is how the Vintage edition has it), thus showing to what extent one was still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history."[39] Granted, reference to an anonymous subject of history evokes Hegelian phenomenology more than the Husserlian tradition. Yet what Hegel and the phenomenologists have in common is a penchant for totality, and insofar as Foucault wants to distance himself from either tradition, he must dispense with anything that risks characterizing an experience as uniform.

Beyond the problem of totality, *History of Madness* contains many references and allusions to an undifferentiated experience of madness, and it is important to disambiguate this use of the term experience from the more general use of the term that refers to the constitution of phenomena. In the preface to the 1961 edition Foucault claims that what is needed is "to recapture, in history, this degree zero of the history of madness, when it was undifferentiated experience."[40] Although he goes on to say that reconstituting this experience in its "primitive purity" is impossible, the very notion of a kind of primitive purity lurking behind structured experience evokes an originary outside. The situation is further complicated by Foucault's concluding account of the madness of the artist. According to Foucault, wherever there is the work of art, madness is excluded (Foucault says, "*where there is a work of art, there is no*

[39] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 16.
[40] Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxvii.

madness" which has also been translated as "*where there is an oeuvre, there is no madness*").[41] He describes the tension between madness and the work of art in terms of a life and death struggle. Madness contests the work of art and makes it impossible because "it draws the exterior edge, the line of dissolution, the contour against the void."[42] Madness is the excess of an outside that cannot be reduced to the language or figures of a work of art.

Many critics, including Ian Hacking in his preface to *History of Madness*, dismiss the notion of pure madness as a romantic notion that Foucault moved away from as his work developed. On the other hand, Christopher Penfield argues that the possibility of such experience remains important to Foucault despite his rejection of his use of the term experience in other contexts. I point out the debate in order to clarify the senses of experience that appear in *History of Madness.* Foucault's description of the excess of madness is what opens the possibility of a *limit-experience*, or a de-subjectifying experience that dissolves both subjective and objective constitutions. It is this kind of experience Foucault has in mind when he says, "madness has become man's possibility of destroying both man and the world."[43] A limit-experience is different than the more general structure of experience insofar as it threatens to reconfigure general experience. It may be characterized as a kind of experience that momentarily touches the border of general experience before what is at that border is folded into general experience. There is thus a tension in *History of Madness* between description of the phenomenon of madness as it is constituted in a given age, and hints at how the structure implied by that description may be destabilized. It is a tension similar to the tension between observation and participation. Foucault neither commits to merely describing what makes madness appear as

[41] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 289.
[42] Ibid., 287.
[43] Ibid., 281.

an object of knowledge, nor does he commit to what would amount to an ethical position of advocating practices that would challenge this constitution. It is the notion of the outside of general experience that Hacking thinks Foucault comes to reject, while Penfield argues that it is only the first, general use of the term that Foucault rejects. I think the truth lies somewhere in the middle. As I'll argue, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault begins to resolve the tension between observation and participation by showing that any observation is equally participatory, and that no object of knowledge is ever uniform or stable.

As for the notion of general experience, although Foucault drops the language of experience from his subsequent works, it nonetheless functions in the background as something that calls for explanation. His driving question never ceases to be how the modern experience came to be what it is, and how it might come to be otherwise. What phenomenology gets wrong is not the question of what makes experience what it is, but the answer that it is universal, ahistorical, transcendental, subjective conditions.

Foucault offers his most direct criticism of phenomenology in *The Order of Things*. In that work, Foucault applies his historical method to language and the human sciences. His aim is to explain how it became possible for humans to take themselves as objects of scientific knowledge, and how the various objects of that knowledge could appear and disappear. He identifies three distinct periods, each with its own discursive framework. The Renaissance was characterized by resemblances between words and things. The Classical Age (roughly Descartes to Kant) was characterized by tabular linguistic representation that humans clarified but did not create. The contemporary period, or the Age of Man, sees humanity become the ground of representation. Whereas in the Classical period humans appear as one creature among many, albeit with the ability to use transparent linguistic signs, the Age of Man takes humans as both

objects of knowledge and the special creatures who make representation possible. Humanity's new role as ground of representation renders humans ambiguous, since humans are at once required for the representation of everything that exists and determined by those representations. That is, humans are living, working, speaking beings who are limited by biological, economic, and linguistic practices that predate them but that their representation yet makes possible.[44] This limitation by the objects of representation highlights humanity's finitude—or the fact that some things are impossible for humanity. Yet, with Kant, this finitude becomes the condition of possibility of knowledge. As Foucault says, "limitation is expressed not as a determination imposed upon man from outside (because he has a nature or history), but as a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation." Philosophy becomes an analytic of finitude because it examines the conditions of possibility of representation, including the fundamental fact of finitude. In the words of Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, with the analytic of finitude "man emerges…as organizer of the spectacle in which he appears."[45]

The analytic of finitude engenders three untenable doublings. It makes man a fact among facts but also the condition of the possibility of knowledge, it takes man as immersed in what is not thought while being the source of all thinking, and it takes man as the product of a history of which he is the source. The contemporary understanding of representation and the analytic of finitude give rise to what Foucault calls the "empirico-transcendental doublet," by which he means human beings thought as both transcendental condition of knowledge and empirical object of knowledge.[46] When the human subject is taken as the foundation of all knowledge, the human

[44] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 313
[45] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 29.
[46] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 318.

sciences take as their object that which allows humans to be such a foundation. In other words the empirical sciences turn their gaze toward that object which is at the same time the conditioning subject of knowledge. This direction of study takes one of two paths. Either it investigates the bodily conditions of knowledge, becoming neurobiology or the study of perception, for example. Or it investigates history and those developments and relations between people that have conditioned knowledge. Whichever form the investigation takes, it assumes that it possesses "a neutral discourse capable of revealing" the truth.[47] The problem with this is that it leads either to uncritical positivism, in which the truth of the neutral discourse is derived from the discourse-independent truth of nature, or an eschatology, in which the discourse on history anticipates the truth that it identifies as coming out of history (e.g., Marxism). According to Foucault, furthermore, these two tendencies, toward positivism and eschatology, are always found together in an unstable fluctuation. As he says, "a discourse attempting to be both empirical and critical cannot but be both positivist and eschatological."[48]

Phenomenology attempts to avoid this fluctuation by analyzing everyday experience. Yet this strategy fails because of a fundamental ambiguity. Foucault says, "The analysis of actual experience is a discourse of mixed nature: it is directed to a specific yet ambiguous stratum, concrete enough for it to be possible to apply to it a meticulous and descriptive language, yet sufficiently removed from the positivity of things for it to be possible, from that starting-point, to escape from that naiveté, to contest it and seek foundations for it."[49] The stratum to which the analyses of phenomenology are directed is evidently the transcendental, and the rich language of description for which phenomenology is famous describes the data or objects of consciousness,

[47] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 33.
[48] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 320.
[49] Ibid., 321.

and the processes by which they becomes such objects. By restricting itself to the description of everyday experience, and bracketing things in themselves, phenomenology is in a position to address the ground that makes representations possible while avoiding needless abstraction. The description of everyday experience undertaken in phenomenology amounts to an investigation into how the "I think" can accompany representations, or how humans can become conscious of what is not immediately given in consciousness. However, such a research project, Foucault thinks, ultimately maintains the empirico-transcendental doublet and repeats the mistake of searching for the transcendental in the empirical by substituting thorough description for immediate certainty of the being of the subject that constitutes experience. That is, by describing in ever-greater detail how thought accompanies representations and is distributed amongst them, phenomenology pushes further and further back the being that is supposed to be the ground of representation. Foucault asks if we can seriously say that we *are* those representations that our thought accompanies.[50] We cannot, he thinks, and so phenomenology is condemned to both the fluctuation that arises from such a substitution of description for the certainty of our being, and a project of endless description that always moves toward a completion that it can never attain.

2.3 Archaeology and Immanence

As Foucault sees it, the solution to this problem lies not in more phenomenology, but in rejecting the empirico-transcendental doublet wholesale by posing the question, "Does man really exist?"[51] The famous last line of *The Order of Things*, in which Foucault muses about man being washed away like a face drawn in sand at the beach, makes clear his response: man does not necessarily exist as the empirico-transcendental doublet. So much for Foucault's

[50] Ibid., 324.
[51] Ibid., 322.

criticism of phenomenology and the analysis of experience that, on the one hand, totalizes subjective experience, and, on the other hand, leaves unresolved the tension between the empirical and the transcendental. For Foucault, the philosophical task becomes to rethink experience such that man is no longer at its center. This is, of course, no easy task. Such a task runs the obvious risks of falling back into positivism or of becoming absolute idealism. The question becomes how to think objects and subjects at the same level while at the same time adequately accounting for their conditions. This is actually several questions: How are objects and subjects what they are? How can subjects know anything about objects? How can one explain these things without resorting to untenable talk of transcendental subjectivity, absolute spirit, or naïve positivism? Furthermore, to avoid the totalizing impulse that phenomenology and absolute idealism share, to avoid grounding conditions in an anonymous subject of history, Foucault will have to rethink temporality and question its unity. As daunting as these questions seem, Foucault has already hinted at a new way of rethinking experience. As *History of Madness* and *The Order of Things* demonstrate, Foucault takes objects of knowledge to be constituted by historical processes, namely the practices of discourse and institutions. It should come as no surprise, then, that to rethink experience Foucault takes one of these processes as his starting point. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault takes discourse as his object of study. By so doing, he seeks the ground of knowledge in historical conditions that are immanent to their object.

There is some philosophical precedent for grounding the conditions of knowledge in history. As Foucault remarks in an essay drawn from his introduction to the English translation of Georges Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, the French reception of phenomenology led to a division between those, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-

Ponty, who developed philosophies of experience, meaning, and subjectivity, and those, such as Jean Cavaillès, Gaston Bachelard, Alexander Koyré, and Canguilhem, who developed philosophies of knowledge, rationality, and the concept.[52] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he is taking up some of the work of the second group, these other phenomenologists, and adapting it to the domain of discourse. David Webb argues that Jean Cavaillès' constructivist philosophy of mathematics directly influenced Foucault's similar philosophy of discourse. According to Webb, Cavaillès "argued that even the most basic of mathematical objects is the outcome of antecedent acts and operations and that the history of such acts is complex, with no simple origin."[53] This move not only divorces the conditions for mathematical knowledge from consciousness, it also locates the foundations of mathematical knowledge in the history of mathematics itself. So located, mathematical foundations are themselves historical. As Webb puts it, "Every element of this process is therefore undergoing continual change, which means that the conditions for the existence of mathematical objects at a given stage of mathematics do not define the formal limits of all possible mathematical objects…both the conditions and the conditioned existence are specific to a given historical moment."[54]

Something similar is going on in Foucault's account of discourse. In the broadest terms, discourse refers to actually existing statements. More specifically, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is about groups of related actually existing statements whose unities form them into discourses. The problem of the unity of these statements is something that Foucault hopes to address, but one thing is clear right away: conventional understandings of what unites disparate statements will be rejected, especially those explanations that posit that discourse points beyond

[52] Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 466.
[53] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 17.
[54] Ibid., 20.

itself to something historically continuous. Foucault starts with the plain facts of discourse, or as he says, "Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of an origin, but treated as and when it occurs."[55] In his effort to avoid assigning a constitutive role to transcendental grounds, he resolves to take the positivity of discourse at face value. For Foucault, there is nothing behind discourse that guides it and guarantees its unity.

Foucault's rejection of common explanations of discursive unity leaves him with the task of articulating his object of study. Discursive unity, he decides, rests in what he calls a "*system of dispersion*."[56] A system of dispersion might seem like a paradoxical way to account for the *unity* of anything, yet Foucault arrives at the idea of such a system by noting that in attempting to account for unity through other means, such as the grouping of statements around shared objects, concepts, formal principles, or themes, one is consistently led from apparent unity to multiplicity. By positing a system of dispersion Foucault seems to be pointing out the tenuousness of any apparent unity of a discourse, as well as highlighting that it is the *relations* within a discourse that account for this unity. The object of Foucault's study then will be what he calls "*discursive formations*," which he says are found "whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)."[57] Furthermore, since Foucault is not interested in identifying discursive formations but in accounting for both their appearance as what they are and their ability to constitute the objects they constitute, he will analyze their "*rules of formation*." These rules are "conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance,

[55] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 25.
[56] Ibid., 37.
[57] Ibid., 38.

modifications, and disappearance) in a given discursive" formation.[58] Foucault's language of conditions of existence, rather than conditions of possibility, reveals already his shift toward situating conditions in history. What he is seeking are the mutable conditions of actuality, rather than the transcendental or formal conditions of possibility.

Foucault initially treats statements, however tacitly, as the basic units of discourse. However, he goes on to subject them to a critique similar to his critique of common notions of discursive unity. He finds that statements do not correspond to either sentences, logical propositions, or speech acts. Statements are not propositions because propositions are evaluated only according to logical structures, and what is only one proposition when seen from the point of view of logic may in fact be several statements (e.g.: "no one heard" or "it is true that no one heard"). They are not sentences, because sentences are bound by grammatical rules that don't apply to statements. They are not speech acts because speech acts often require complicated formulas that require multiple statements, as in the case of prayers or contracts.

Foucault situates the statement positively as in relation to a referential, a subject position, an associated field, and a materiality. This means that, for an utterance, piece of writing, or collection of linguistic signs to be a statement it must stand in relation to a "referential," or what Foucault calls a "principle of differentiation."[59] This is not a thing or fact, but a correlate of the statement. "The present king of France" can be this referential, to use one of Foucault's examples, if we suppose that we are not talking about the order of current political affairs. A statement must stand in relation to a subject, understood as a position that may be filled by this or that person. It must stand in relation to an associated field, which is the space where other, similar statements may appear. This is one way of highlighting that no statement may stand in

[58] Ibid., 38.
[59] Ibid., 115.

isolation. Finally, a statement must have a materiality, which means that a statement is bound to a specific means of reproducibility. Statements are not merely formal, but actual.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Foucault discards the notion that statements are a unit of discourse, and instead defines them according to their function. He says, "The statement is…a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense', according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written)."[60] This move may seem paradoxical, but what Foucault is again getting at is that statements cannot be treated in isolation. Any discursive event is only intelligible on the basis of other discursive events surrounding it. Although statements appear as units or atoms, they cannot be thought apart from discursive relations, and it would be a mistake to think that the relations are established between prior, atomic elements. David Webb draws another helpful connection to mathematics here when he says, a "function defines a relation between two or more variables…individually, each may be given any value one likes, as long as the other then takes the value specified by this relation."[61] Foucault thinks of statements as functions like this. A statement brings the variables of the referential, subject position, associated field, and materiality into relation and deploys them according to rules drawn from the surrounding discourse. On example Foucault gives of a statement is the keys of a typewriter as they are laid out in a typing manual. An image of a keyboard in a typing manual integrates a correlate (typewriter), a subject position (typist), an associated field (all that can be said about typing), and the material on which the manual is printed, as well as the ink used to print it, and it distributes these into a momentarily stable formation.

[60] Ibid., 86-87.
[61] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 90.

Foucault's elaboration of the concepts of discourse, discursive formation, and statement, describe a complex system of interrelated parts that conditions itself. Foucault frequently alludes to the rules or regularities that govern what statements can appear in discourse, but he rarely pauses to clarify exactly what he means by rules or regularities, or the mechanism by which they govern discourse formation. However, several clues resolve these issues. It is worth quoting Foucault at length here to grasp how he understands the discursive system (or what he calls the "system of formation") as containing its own conditions of actuality. In the "Remarks and Consequences" section of Part I of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he writes,

> These systems of formation must not be taken as blocks of immobility, static forms that are imposed on discourse from the outside, and that define once and for all its characteristics and possibilities. …These systems…reside in discourse itself; or rather…on its frontier, at that limit at which the specific rules that enable it to exist as such are defined. By system of formation, then, I mean a complex group of relations that function as a rule. … To define a system of formation in its specific individuality is therefore to characterize a discourse or a group of statements by the regularity of a practice.[62]

In this passage, Foucault reiterates his challenge to philosophy to locate the conditions of actuality within the positive phenomena they condition. He then associates those conditions with the rules that allow discourse to exist. He then goes on to tie those rules to the regularity of a practice. By tying rules to regularities Foucault suggests that when he uses the term rule it should evoke what is "the rule," rather than rule in the sense of dominion. Furthermore, since regularities can be understood as articulated series of related instances, the rules of discourse formation will have to do with what new instances a series tolerates and allows to appear. The

[62] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 73-74.

appearance of a new instance subtly changes the series and in turn affects what new instances might appear. A rule in Foucault's sense, then, is not a binding or formal law, but a practical law. A legal analogy might be the difference between a law derived from custom or precedent as opposed to a law derived from a statute. In each case the law has prescriptive power, but in the case of common law that power changes as custom changes, where statutes prescribe from without and change only if other statutes supersede them.

Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow argue that Foucault creates difficulties for himself by equating laws and regularities. In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, they correctly point out that Foucault wishes to reject "objective causal laws," and "subjective rules." They also think he wishes to reject a Heideggerian notion of a "horizon of meaningful practices" that has causal efficacy. They claim that the only alternative, which Foucault also rejects, is a structuralist account of formal rules. An account of discourse formation that followed the structuralist model would be at once descriptive and conditioning. If one thinks of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, according to which any word can evoke whatever is capable of being associated with it in some way, one can see what Dreyfus and Rabinow have in mind here. In a structuralist system, relations between words, which neither exist independently of the system in an objective sense, nor in a subjective, transcendental sense, condition what new utterances can be produced. However, as is well-known, to arrive at a complete object of study, and thereby ground linguistics as a science, Saussure has to exclude the diachronic dimension of language, leaving only the synchronic state of a language to study. Saussurean linguistics can study any synchronic state of a language, but not its transformations from state to state. Since it is transformation, or at least, in the present discussion, discourse as

perpetually transforming, that interests Foucault, structuralist formal rules won't quite do when it comes to explaining discourse formation.

It is true that both Foucault and the structuralists derive rules from linguistic regularities. However, structuralist formal rules are necessarily static, and so they cannot offer Foucault a way of showing how new statements affect the rules by which further new statements are generated. Nonetheless, Foucault does seem to have developed an alternative explanation of discourse formation in which the rules are both immanent to the empirical phenomena of discourse and conditioning of that discourse. Yet Dreyfus and Rabinow accuse Foucault of "illegitimately hypostatizing" observed regularities into conditions.[63] It is unclear why they think taking observed regularities as conditions is an illegitimate move. If it is an illegitimate move in Foucault's case, then it must also be illegitimate for the structuralists to have made a similar move, but Dreyfus and Rabinow don't raise this charge. In any case, Foucault's explanation of discourse formation paints a clear, if complex, picture of how regularities are also conditions.

It is the temporal dimension of discourse formation that differentiates Foucault's archaeology from structuralist linguistics. According to Foucault, "As a group of rules for discursive practice, the system of formation is not a stranger to time."[64] The immediate consequence of this position is that developments don't refer back to a static system, nor do they represent a shift to static system that is different from one that came before. Rather, a discourse's unity survives, and survives because of, the temporal dispersion of its rules of formation. As the long passage above implies, discourse is a dynamic object, and it develops not according to formal rules but according to rules that its very development affects. In David

[63] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 83.
[64] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 74.

Webb words, discourse "incorporates a form of feedback, as what is produced becomes in turn a condition, modifying, disturbing or even destroying the patterns of statements in which they occur."[65] It is easy to see how such a system might work. If we take for granted that statements already exist, as Foucault does, and that they are already related to each other in such a way as to form a discourse, then we can readily see that some new statements are possible in a given discourse while others are not. To take a medical example, it is currently possible to say, "smoking causes cancer." Looking around that statement to those that surround it reveals a wealth of statements that created the conditions for that particular statement's emergence. These include statements about tobacco and how it is grown and processed, scientists and their methods of research, the human body and its parts, etc. Furthermore, the new statement takes its place among those existing statements and begins exerting an effect on what further statements might follow it. These include judgments: "smoking is bad" or "smoking is bad for you." They include retorts of varying degree: "smoking is *strongly correlated* with cancer" or "the causes of cancer are complex." Some statements are obviously not possible, or would at least be non-sequiturs, such as "dirt is garbage." As each new statement is folded into the discourse, the discourse grows and shifts accordingly, however quickly or slowly. As this process unfolds, the relations between statements begin to shift. Whereas medical discourse may have at one point accommodated the statement, "smoking helps you lose weight," it no longer does so, although another discourse might.

[65] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 110.

2.4 Discourse and Subjectivity

Taking a description of discourse, discursive formations, and their rules of formation as his point of departure leaves Foucault the task of accounting for the role of subjects with respect to discourse. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault does not tackle the looming task of explaining the existence of subjects, which is an obvious reality even if subjects are not necessarily empirico-transcendental doublets. However, he does begin undermining the primacy of this doublet by subordinating speaking or writing subjects, the enunciative modalities, to the rules of discourse formation. As he puts it, "I do not refer the various enunciative modalities to the unity of the subject… In the proposed analysis, instead of referring back to *the* synthesis or *the* unifying function of *a* subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest his dispersion."[66] Instead of expressing what is united in a subject who stands outside of discourse, the rules of formation of discourse allow certain subjects to say certain things. What someone can say depends on what position they occupy and particularities of a situation. Foucault's example is of a doctor, who has met certain epistemic criteria different from those of other professions, who has access to institutions such as hospitals as well as a "documentary field" pertaining to medicine, and who uses a variety of instruments in observation of objects, as well as a variety of documentary techniques to transmit information. Archaeology reduces these elements to variables distributed by statement-functions. Discourse is "a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed."[67] Subjects clearly play a role in discursive formation and transformation, but that role is no longer foundational.

The emphasis on discursive *practice* that emerges throughout *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is perhaps the most important aspect of archaeology. Practices condition what

[66] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 54.
[67] Ibid., 55.

positions speakers can occupy, and Foucault also argues that they condition what the objects of discourse are, what concepts are operative, and what strategies are employed. Although Foucault does not elaborate on what he means by practice, I think practices here can be understood simply as discursive events. A discursive event, in turn, can be understood as any utterance or act of writing that functions as a statement, as well as any shift in relations between statements. Some practices are clearly impersonal. These might include such things as the loss of a trove of research, or the development of a new computer system that can search and aggregate information from a vast number of documents. Some practices, though, directly involve subjects as enunciative modalities. According to the system that Foucault has elaborated, the activity of speakers and writers has a direct, conditioning effect not only on what further activities they may take up, but on their status relative to the discourse they are caught up in. One way of grasping how this might work is straightforward. Subjects exist and produce statements. In so doing, they are contributing to the wealth of statements that exist and condition new statements. Any subjective contribution to a discursive formation contributes further conditions of existence. It is easy to see, given this situation, that, with enough time and additions, the types of enunciative modalities available will change, as will the objects of knowledge, how discourses relate to each other, and so on. This means that, by continuing to speak and write, subjects participate in the formation of discourses as well as the reshaping of the positions they may occupy as speakers.

However, the situation cannot be so clear cut if Foucault is to avoid the spectre of the impersonal subject of history. As it stands, discourse seems monolithic. A system of formation appears to unfold in a temporal progression. As new statements appear old statements recede into the past, but it is a past that is commensurate with the present insofar as both past and present are part of the same temporal field. In fact, if the system I describe above holds, then all

discourse appears to be conditioned by a temporality that exists independently of discourse. That is, discourse appears to exist *in time*. However, if this is the case, then Foucault would have to explain the status of conditions that are not immanent to discourse. He would then lose the philosophical advantages he has gained by restricting his discussion to discourse alone. Rather than take this option, Foucault endeavors to show that temporality is as much discursive as anything else. Of discourse, Foucault says, "It does not concentrate everything that may appear through an age-old series of statements into an initial point that is, at the same time, beginning, origin, foundation, system of axioms, and on the basis of which the events of real history have merely to unfold in a quite necessary way."[68] On the contrary, the temporal dispersion of discourse means we are dealing with temporalities plural, not a unifying temporality. In other words, as tempting as it is to think of discourse as dispersed in time, it should rather be thought as a network of intersecting temporalities.

So conceived, all the systems of discourse formation taken together, or what Foucault calls the archive, form no kind of recognizable totality. Instead, the archive is the open-ended space of interplay in which various discourses, with their own rules and temporalities, interact. Rather than an empirical series of events that condition further events, the archive is a collection of discontinuous events that condition each other, to varying degrees, at the intersection of heterogeneous temporalities. Furthermore, conditions should be thought as conditions that emerge alongside or contemporaneously with those empirical events they condition. New events can, retroactively as it were, alter those conditions. As David Webb puts it, "Across the discontinuities that separate discourses from one another, the regularities defining rules of one may be disrupted by events formed elsewhere, giving rise to transformation."[69] That is, two or

[68] Ibid., 74.
[69] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 118.

more heterogeneous temporalities, if brought into relation with each other, may alter each other at the level of their conditions. An alteration like this would have a ripple effect that alters not only what can emerge but what has emerged empirically in each temporal series. An example of this kind of reconditioning of discursive empirical events is the relabeling of medical maladies according to contemporary terminology. Thus neurasthenia becomes shell shock, which becomes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Because of this perpetual reconditioning, the archive eludes exhaustive description. Any description that pretends to be exhaustive will inevitably be surprised by developments that it could not have predicted, even developments that an attempted exhaustive description provoked. More than this, Foucault asserts that it is not possible for us to know our own archive, "since it is from within these rules that we speak."[70] Presumably it is our closeness to our archive that prevents us from (totally) knowing it. Because it is at work conditioning what we know, our statements about it will always be limited. We are not afforded a bird's eye view of the archive, and the archive retreats before our understanding to the extent that each statement about the archive alters the archive, however subtly. Yet this retreat should not be confused with the retreat of the origin that Foucault identifies in *The Order of Things*. There is a way of approaching knowledge of our archive by paying close attention to its borders. According to Foucault, to get a sense of our own archive we should analyze "the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us."[71] Archaeology appears in its most ethical light here, because a project like this aims, ultimately, not at full-fledged knowledge about or account of either what we are or what the present is, but an attunement to otherness and new possibilities. What archaeology

[70] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.
[71] Ibid., 130.

does, Foucault says, is establish "that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the differences of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make."[72] The archaeologist, by describing what is going on at the borders of our own thought, not only attunes us to the instability of our condition, but participates in the very making of our own dispersion. The archaeologist is a practitioner of transformation, and as such does not have a privileged view of the archive apart from that which comes with a conscientious openness to transformation. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is therefore at once the outline of a research method and the activation of the very elements about which that method purports to speak.

To understand the archaeologist as a full participant in the discursive transformation he describes, and as partially blind to the very conditions he describes because he is conditioned by those conditions, is crucial in warding off one criticism of Foucault's archaeological project. Dreyfus and Rabinow give articulation to this criticism when they describe the archaeologist as taking a position of extreme detachment. According to them, this situates the archeologist in the dubious position of describing discourse from the point of view of no discourse. What they call a double reduction, that brackets both truth and meaning, clears away philosophical baggage at the expense of judgment and intelligibility.[73] They take as evidence for their position Foucault's claim that archeology is "nothing more than a rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of an exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written…it is the systematic description of a discourse object."[74] However, this brief passage in fact demonstrates that the archaeologist is as fully abandoned to discourse as anyone else. The archaeologist emerges from

[72] Ibid., 131.
[73] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 50-51, 85.
[74] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 140.

what has already been written, and his work effects a rewriting. Dreyfus and Rabinow take systematic description to mean description that is not involved with or regulated by its object, but, as Foucault here makes clear, archaeological description *is* regulated by discourse. As such it participates in discursive transformation. This is why Foucault calls archaeological description a rewriting. Rewriting should be heard here as transformative, in other words, and not as mere transcription. There is no a-discursive description of a preserved object, but only a description that transforms its object because it emerges from its object and is bound by the same rules of formation. Foucault's reference to preserved exteriority is a reference to the logical space of discourse in which the archaeologist's work unfolds. It is to be contrasted with the interior space of transcendental subjectivity, to which, presumably, the historian is condemned. That is, by the phrase "the preserved form of an exteriority," Foucault refers to the exteriority *of* discourse, not exteriority *to* discourse.

The archaeologist's involvement in discourse and the transformative effect on discourse of archeological description have several important philosophical consequences. First of all it quashes any thought of total description. Although Foucault does at one point call discourse a totality,[75] it is clear that no amount of description would ever capture this totality, since such description would have to capture the rules of formation as they emerged contemporaneously with the description, and at the same time freeze any further discursive developments. Total description would also have to unite several heterogeneous temporalities under one temporality, which would reintroduce the problems of transcendental philosophy. What Foucault means by calling discourse a totality is, I think, similar to what he means when he concedes that the archaeologist is a kind of positivist, since the archaeologist remains at the level of the discursive

[75] Ibid., 55.

and refuses explanations that look for causes, be they transcendental or empirical, *behind* discourse. In other words discourse is all, but discourse is never completed.

The second consequence is that the archaeologist cannot rely on any notion of individual or personal stability as the unifying thread of a research project. Rather, the archaeologist ought to be prepared to be borne along by the work of transformative description. This demands a toleration of ambiguity, since it is not possible to say at the outset of such a descriptive project either what it might look like when completed, or what kinds of further projects it will lead to. The archaeologist also wagers his own position in his work, since operating on the conditions that give rise to his enunciative modality risks changing those conditions. Changing those conditions, in turn, might give rise to something unrecognizable on current conditions. As we know from Foucault, this is hardly a risk, since contemporary subjectivity is philosophically untenable. Indeed, one of his aims in writing *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is to find a way out of modern subjectivity. Showing that speaking wagers one's very position as speaker is an important first step to this end.

A third consequence of Foucault's location of the archaeologist in the midst of discourse is, paradoxically, that it sheds light on the transformative practices of the everyday. The archaeologist's description of discursive formations is transformative because it activates the rules of discourse formation and contributes to discourse. Yet the archaeologist is hardly alone in so contributing to or participating in discourse formation. We have already seen that the rules of discourse formation are the regularities of practice. Where enunciative modalities are involved in this practice, the bulk of discursive practitioners aren't archaeologists but anyone engaged in speaking or writing. If we restrict our understanding of subjects to a discursive understanding of subject positions or enunciative modalities, as Foucault does, then it is safe to

say that subjects exist and produce statements, which in turn condition new statements as well as the subjects themselves. For this to not be merely an empirical conditioning or one that invokes the anonymous subject of history, Foucault argues that various discourses generate their own temporalities, and that these are heterogeneous to each other. If this is the case, by simply speaking or writing the subject is already in contact with heterogeneous temporalities. Everyday speaking or writing, then, involves the same kind of risk that the archaeologist takes. As David Webb says, "Because the rules of discourse formation are temporal, to engage with discourses…will be to expose one's own temporal configuration."[76] In the encounter of temporal configurations, furthermore, objective configurations are as exposed as subjective ones. The difference between the archaeologist and the non-archaeologist is that the archaeologist's discourse is about the archive in general, and he concerns himself with its limits in order to approximate a description of it, while the non-archaeologist's discourse involves one or more formations within the archive. Still, in principle the practices of both archaeologists and everybody else should be equally transformative of discourse.

An example from the discourse of mathematics will illustrate the nature of everyday involvement in a discursive formation. Since Descartes, intuition has played a foundational role in mathematics. For Descartes as well as Husserl, the certainty of a mathematical proposition rests on the immediate clarity to consciousness of its truth. The demonstration of a mathematical truth coincides with the consciousness of the truth of the demonstration, and its certainty depends upon that consciousness. In this way the foundations of mathematics are situated in the subjective conditions of consciousness. Following Cavaillès, Foucault rejects such a move, arguing instead that the foundations of mathematics are to be found in the discourse on

[76] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 157.

mathematics, in the manner that the foundations of any object of discourse are found in that discourse. This move frees mathematics from subjective temporality, as well as from the demand that demonstration rest on intuition.

On Foucault's picture, mathematical demonstration involves a temporal plurality, which relates subjective temporality to the temporality of mathematical discourse. To effect a mathematical demonstration no longer means to hold before consciousness the truth of that demonstration, and by extension the truths of any antecedent demonstrations. Rather it means to drop into a series of demonstrations already in progress, as it were, and to submit to the temporality of a discourse to the extent that, in demonstrating or repeating a demonstration, a subject contributes to a discourse that he has not founded, and may not be capable of recapitulating. The subject therefore becomes something like the site of mathematical development, but not its foundation. This is one way of saying that a mathematical demonstration does not depend for its truth on the consciousness of its truth on the part of the subject who performs the demonstration. This seems to me an obviously correct position. For example, while I may not be able to say 2+2=4 without also being certain of the truth of the demonstration, I am able to accurately perform calculations using the quadratic equation without the intuitive certainty of their truth. The lack of that certainty does not in any way impugn the demonstration. Rather, when I make such a demonstration I am taking up a wealth of knowledge that has developed independently of me and activating the relations between statements that are a part of this knowledge. In so doing I am also establishing relations between myself and a temporality that is not my own. Taken together, these sides—the demonstration carried out on the back of an independent discourse and my engagement with a heterogeneous temporality—set the stage for development in mathematics. Not always and not even usually, but occasionally,

someone's engagement with math shifts the discourse dramatically. Yet even in the absence of a dramatic shift, any engagement with mathematics works to establish new discursive relations and shift existing ones.

Dreyfus and Rabinow note the everyday person's involvement in discourse as well, but they equate it to the kind of background social practices that Husserl and Heidegger identify as determining of subjects but generally unavailable to the consciousness of those subjects. In other words, they think that the subjects constituted by discourse are generally unaware of the conditions of their constitution. Only the archaeologist has the resources to make those conditions an object of study. Like the phenomenologists, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, Foucault is creating the untenable situation of uncovering an enlightened position (that of the archaeologist) that claims to whisk away naiveté while at the same time relying on that naiveté (the unreflective lives of everyday people) to make sense. Naiveté is necessary because without it, they argue, the very discursive formations that archaeologists take as their object would cease functioning.[77] That is, if everyone became as enlightened as the archaeologist, the ground that makes enlightenment possible would crumble.

Dreyfus and Rabinow raise this point as part of an argument that archeology succumbs to some of the same problems as the transcendental philosophies to which it supposedly responds. Yet, in this case at least, their criticism is misguided. They assume that, should the discursive relations that constitute objects as well as subjects be revealed, then people will stop taking discourse seriously and abandon the kind of involvement that perpetuates discursive transformation. However, just the opposite seems more likely. If people involved in a discourse such as medicine, mathematics, or psychology come to see the conditions of that discourse as

[77] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 95.

immanent to that discourse, rather than relying on notions of finality or totality to guide their work, then those discourses are freed for proliferation rather than contraction. The aim of any program of research would become the transformation of conditions rather than the search for hidden meaning or truth. It is easy to imagine research fields developing ever more subfields and growing in many unforeseen directions *because* practitioners take archeology seriously rather than remaining ignorant of it. In any case, it is by no means clear that non-archaeologists need to remain ignorant of archaeology in order for archaeology to make sense.

It may seem, though, that at least some of the problems Foucault identifies with phenomenology remain. Although Foucault makes no claim to have discovered "a neutral discourse capable of revealing" the truth, one might say he has done so at the cost of making archaeology the very kind of interminable project that he accuses phenomenology of being. I think it is certainly true that archaeology is interminable—the archaeologist's work is never done. However, the archaeology does not promise completion or aim at something that is, at least hypothetically, unified. On Foucault's reading, phenomenology does aim at getting ahold of the subject in its foundational unity. For someone like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the endlessness of the phenomenological project contributes to its appeal, but it nonetheless rests on the unity of the subject that it endlessly describes. Archaeology dispenses with such unity in advance, and as a result the ongoing work of the archaeologist is left open ended. Certainly, as long as there are archeologists they will not achieve a total description of discourse, but the nature of their work opens unexplored avenues for thought. On the other hand, because archaeologists are not also the founders of discourse, the question of their being is resolvable. They exist as effects of discourse, occupying a certain position with respect to other professions

and allowed a domain of expertise. However, from the outset that being is understood in its relational instability, while the self-conditioning being of discourse is not in doubt.

The Archaeology of Knowledge does not offer a complete account of how experience may be thought as not founded in the subject. However, it goes some way toward showing how objects of knowledge aren't constituted subjectively, or at least not entirely. By locating subjects in a discourse that they do not found, and treating them at the same level as the objects about which they speak, Foucault gives us a preliminary sense of subjects as constituted *and* constituting. As effects of discourse, subjects (as enunciative modalities) are constituted by discourse. As discursively constituted practitioners of discourse, subjects also constitute discourse to the extent that their discursive activity contributes to and alters the rules of discourse formation. Of course, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* restricts its argument to discourse. Although at times Foucault suggests that he wishes to reduce all that *is* to the discursive, he clearly moves to other topics in his later works. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to think that he moves beyond the discursive, or that his later works supersede *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Rather, they should be thought as complementing and filling out the project begun in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault's works on literature should also be read this way. While much of the terminology developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is absent in these works, they take up the theme of the subject's relation to discourse through engagement with concrete examples of writing that functions not as expression but as a reshaping of discursive conditions. It is to these works that I turn in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE AND DISCOURSE

3.1 Introduction

The picture of discourse that emerges from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is one of perpetual transformation, albeit rule-governed, in which discursive unities are secondary to the relations that constitute them. As such, unities are more like momentary crystallizations than substantial unities. Discursive practice, or the production of statements, is the engine driving the transformation of these crystallizations. Each new statement is conditioned by the regularities that coincide with its production, yet once a new statement is produced it is itself folded back into discourse in such a way as to affect the relations between all the statements in a discursive formation. It thereby affects the conditions of any further statements. For this reason David Webb, as we have seen, characterizes discourse as a kind of feedback loop in which the conditions of the existence of statements are immanent to the system of their production. I have argued that discursive practitioners, namely speakers and writers, even everyday practitioners, or speakers and writers in mundane, non-scientific settings, help drive discursive transformation through their practice. Any discursive event, however rote, contributes to the reconditioning of discourse as well as the subject positions that discourse makes possible.

Foucault's ethics grows out of this insight. However, if ethics is to be anything but the continued, arbitrary production of statements, if ethics is to be more than merely the assignation of the term "ethics" to the relation between subjects and discourse as it already functions, then it calls for something on the part of the constituted subject. That something, I think, is adoption of a kind of regimen, discursive as it may be, that nonetheless aims at the transformation of both the subject that adopts it and the structure of experience in which it occurs. The constituted subject would therefore consciously adopt a regimen, albeit one that does not take consciousness as its

ultimate ground, nor does it aim at the perfecting of consciousness or the subject to which it is attached. Such a regimen may be understood as a kind of counter-discourse, or the creation of a discourse within discourse, a new discursive formation, that forces established relations to change. While the outcome of such a regimen cannot be determined in advance, because it could only be determined according to conditions that it itself seeks to change, a consciously adopted discursive regimen may yet provide the catalyst for discursive transformation.

The language of counter-discourse should not be surprising to any scholar of Foucault. He uses the term himself in *The Order of Things* to describe literature.[78] What he means there, though, is that literature achieves an autonomous existence. Literary language refers only to itself, and it is "freed from the principles of order regulating scientific as well as everyday discourses."[79] This meaning of counter-discourse is a discourse outside discourse. Literature "has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being."[80] It is related to those other discourses only as a parallel discourse, even a parallel world, that can both expose their arbitrary nature and expose thought to new possibilities. However, in this chapter I do not adopt this meaning of counter-discourse. What interests me is how writing might work on discourse from the inside. The writing I am interested in, while it might end up forming a parallel discourse, and indeed, find itself trapped there, yet maintains crucial connections to the discourses it purports to counter. It is these connections that I wish to emphasize. While literature has value as the kind of counter-discourse Foucault takes it to be, writing also forms an important part of a counter-discourse that works through and against the principles of order organizing other discourses.

[78] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 44.
[79] Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 84.
[80] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 300.

In this chapter I will argue that two of Foucault's favorite authors, Raymond Roussel and the Marquis de Sade, are exemplars of a conscious adoption of a discursive regimen, although neither writer succeeds, ultimately, in transforming discourse. They are therefore imperfect exemplars, but they serve the dual purpose of showing what the subject's relationship to writing ought to be like if it is to count as ethical, and of showing that ethics, in the sense of a kind of care of the self, was on Foucault's mind even very early in his intellectual life. They further show how literary writing might move from the outside of discourse as its parallel antagonist to function *within* discourse. While Roussel and Sade might seem an odd pair, their methods in fact overlap in important ways. Not only do both reflect, in writing, on their methods (directly or indirectly), but both treat writing as expository of those elements that constitute discursive reality. Roussel's dense, descriptive novels betray an obsession with the slightest variations in meaning between two similar sentences. His work concerns the proliferation of new meanings authorized by the actually said. He presents a novel challenge to the principle of identity by painstakingly accumulating a mass of language that could just as well have been said in the saying of anything. To show that Roussel's works do these things, I'll develop a reading of Raymond Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* in conjunction with Foucault's book on Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth*. I will also refer to Roussel's novel *Locus Solus*.

Sade's libertine novels explicitly address writing as a mechanism of transformation. In them writing dovetails with desire, with the result that both desire and the subjectivity of the libertine are pushed beyond their limits. His writing neither expresses the truth of desire, nor expresses the truth that would set desire free, but rather works with and through the discourse of desire to constitute its truth. My reading of Sade comes primarily from two lectures on Sade that

Foucault delivered at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1970: "Why Did Sade Write?" and "Theoretical Discourses and Erotic Scenes."

In addition to my discussion of these writers, I will address a case that I take to be in contrast to these two with respect to the writer's role in reshaping discourse: Maurice Blanchot. Despite the fact that Roussel, Sade, and Blanchot treat writing, ultimately, as a form of depersonalization, and despite the fact that all three treat of what is given in experience—what might be called the knowable—as only a limit to be transgressed rather than substantive reality, only Roussel and Sade find a role for subjectivity as active in this transgressive transformation. Blanchot, on the other hand, like Heidegger, allots subjectivity only the role of becoming passive. For Blanchot, the writer writes only to accede to a space where language reigns in the fullness of its being. In his work, writing is essentially destructive of subjectivity and positivity. For Roussel and Sade, it is both destructive of subjectivity and positivity, and constructive of a new positivity.

3.2 Raymond Roussel

Given Roussel's personal and artistic style, it is no surprise that he piqued Foucault's interest. Consider these apparent *non sequiturs*, from *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, which appear after a long section in which Roussel recounts, with lots of examples, the various methods he used to create his works: "It is fruitless to look for any links between the book *La Doublure* and the story 'Chiquenade'; there are none." Then, after a section break, "I would like to draw your attention to a curious crisis which I underwent when I was nineteen, just after I had written *La Doublure*. For several months I was filled with an extraordinary intense sensation of universal glory. Doctor Pierre Janet, who has attended me for many years, described this crisis

in the first volume of his work *De l'Angoisse à l'Extase*."[81] Here is someone who wants to be allowed to change styles, which is to say that he wants to ward off the morality of bureaucrats that insists on direct consistency between works. Here is someone, too, who has become a case for the psychological establishment. Yet he seems perfectly aware of what makes him such a case, and is able to report on it in a detached manner. Here is someone whose literary eccentricity and single-mindedness made him a curiosity around 1920's Paris, known mostly to burgeoning surrealists. Yet he left behind a body of meticulously crafted poetry and prose that explores every nook and cranny of the space opened up by subtle linguistic variations. He seems to be Foucault's kindred spirit on the one hand, and on the other hand his status as a minor figure, and one of interest to psychologists, makes him an ideal subject for one of Foucault's marginal investigations. James Bernauer notes that Foucault's literary interests were guided by a sensitivity to those voices that seemed to escape unreason's banishment and madness' confinement. They included Friedrich Nietzsche, Antonin Artaud, and Gérard de Nerval as well as Roussel and Sade. According to Bernauer, Foucault takes them as at once witnesses to unreason at the limit of reason, and as signposts marking the way that thought ought to take.[82] Since many of Foucault's literary interests held that language was that autonomous, exterior realm in which thought was dispersed, they served as at least a useful vanguard for him as he developed his theory of an autonomous discourse. I think, furthermore, that in Roussel's method we can decipher a nascent form of what would become Foucaultian ethics.

If Foucault studies figures on society's cultural and temporal margins to uncover that unsaid and unseen that is yet operative in the wider cultural present, Roussel studies the margins of language to find the unsaid that that lies just below the said. As he explains, his tool is as

[81] Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 19.
[82] Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, 44-45, 58.

much the metagram as the pen. He says, "I chose two almost identical words…. For example, *billard* and *pillard*. To these I added similar words capable of two different meanings, thus obtaining two almost identical phrases."[83] In the case of *Impressions d'Afrique*, in an example that is by now fairly well-known, the two sentences are, *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard* and *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard*. The first sentence Roussel takes according to its most obvious meaning: The white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table. The substitution of *pillard* for *billard* in the second sentence changes the meaning to: The white man's letters about the hordes of the old plunderer. As Roussel says, "The two phrases found, it was a case of writing a story which could begin with the first and end with the latter. Now it was from the resolution of this problem that I derived all my materials."[84] Getting from the first sentence to the second sets off an unspooling chain of events.

The next step in the process is to populate the emerging story with characters drawn from the two sentences. Thus the *blanc* becomes a white explorer, Carmichael, who writes an epistolary work called "Among the Blacks." The *pillard* becomes Talou, an African warlord. This step complete, Roussel sets about finding words with double meanings that relate to the elements of the sentences. He then connects two such words with the preposition *à*. So Roussel thinks of *queue* when thinking of billiards. Avid billiards players sometimes have monogrammed cues, which generates the word *chiffre*. This generates *queue à chiffre*, which becomes Talou's robe and train (*queue*) with a numeral (*chiffre*) inscribed on it. To go with the word *blanc* Roussel thinks of *colle*, or the glue that keeps the paper on the base of (billiards) chalk.[85] This becomes *blanc à colle*, or Carmichael's three-hour detention (*colle*) when he

[83] Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 3.
[84] Ibid., 4.
[85] Ibid., 5.

appears among Talou's hordes. Working his way out from the initial sentences, Roussel continues to collect ambiguous word pairings from which he derives the objects and the actions that fill his story.

The above associative method gradually developed into what Roussel calls the evolutionary method. This method works through the slight distortion of a given phrase. The new phrase, however nonsensical, yields a wealth of elements for Roussel to arrange. For example, "Napoléon premier empereur" becomes "Nappe ollé ombre miettes hamper air heure," or "Tablecloth olé shadow crumbs pole wind time." Roussel arranges this chain of elements into "the Spanish dancers mounted on the table and the shadows cast by crumbs visible on the table-cloth—followed by the wind-clock in the land of Cockaigne."[86] Roussel is not clear about whether he considered the evolutionary method as complimentary to the associative method, or whether he used the one exclusively for some books and the other exclusively for others, but it seems as though he used both methods in the same work at least sometimes. (It would be virtually impossible to tell which method Roussel used, and when, by simply reading his books. Even Roussel admits to having forgotten how he derived many of his concoctions. Still, Michel Leiris has done so plausibly. Whether accurately is a different question.) He does say, however, that for the evolutionary method he

> used anything at hand. For instance, there was a well-known advertisement for some apparatus called 'Phonotypia'; this supplied me with 'fausse note tibia,' hence the Breton, Lelgoulach. I even utilized the name and address of my shoemaker: 'Hellstern, 5, place Vendôme,' gave me 'Helice tourney zinc plat se rend (devient) dôme' [Propeller turns zinc flat goes (becomes) dome].[87]

[86] Ibid., 13.
[87] Ibid., 15.

Where Roussel's method grew initially out of simple word association, the evolutionary method connects it to the broader social world, even if that connection is very slight. In the case of the associative method, Roussel draws from statements that make sense given a certain milieu that includes such things as billiards tables and letters. In the case of the evolutionary method he draws from found phrases actually produced discursively independently of his imagination.

It is noteworthy, then, that Roussel composed *Locus Solus*, one of the "certain books" that was written according to the above methods, while living in one of his family's homes on the Boulevard Richard Wallace, across from the Bois de Boulogne. (According to John Ashbury, Roussel's father was a wealthy stockbroker and his mother came from a fairly prominent bourgeois family. Their primary residence was on the same street as Marcel Proust's family, with whom they were friendly). The house on Boulevard Richard Wallace is reminiscent of Martial Canterel's *solitary place* of the novel, where Canterel is "adequately sheltered from the turmoil of Paris—and yet is able to reach the capital within a quarter of an hour…."[88] Furthermore, directly across Boulevard Richard Wallace is the Parc de Bagatelle, which can be translated as "trifle park," although bagatelle can also evoke sexual relations, as in the phrase "*pas de bague, pas de bagatelle*." The park was originally designed along Anglo-Chinese lines, and included a pagoda and several grottos. In 1905 it was redesigned according to a more symmetrical, European fashion, and became something of a botanical garden, with an extensive collection of roses. As a result, the winding paths of the original design are interspersed with symmetrical plant galleries. One can also find an Orangery and The Château de Bagatelle located in the park. The chateau lent its name to the game Bagatelle, which is a type of billiards first played there, a fact which surely would have delighted Roussel. The park itself is a kind of

[88] Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*, 3.

secret garden within the Bois, and Canterel's garden of curiosities in *Locus Solus* echoes its layout. Still, Roussel is quick to tell us that, although he has traveled a great deal, "from all these travels I never took anything for my books. It seems to me that this is worth mentioning, since it clearly shows just how much imagination accounts for everything in my work."[89]

This contradiction between Roussel's professed utilization of objects for linguistic inspiration (coupled with the apparent utilization of physical spaces for the settings of his works) and his assertion of his indifference to the world outside of his imagination has gone unremarked in literature on Roussel. For his part, Foucault takes Roussel's second assertion more or less at face value. Certainly the imagination, understood as dispersed in the exterior space of language, is the most important element of Roussel's work, and it's this position that Foucault elucidates. However, to keep in mind the role that the discursive world of ordered spaces and printed advertisements play for Roussel, whether or not he always acknowledges it, is to keep in mind the ethical importance of his work.

Throughout his writing, Roussel's abiding concern is the ambiguities that attend any utterance. The significance of these ambiguities for Roussel involves the relationship between the visible and the sayable. The question of this relationship runs through much of Foucault's early work as well. To make sense of Roussel's project, it is worth elucidating Foucault's understanding of this relationship. *The Order of Things* and *Birth of the Clinic* deal with two orders: things and words. *The Order of Things* in particular outlines language's contemporary separation from things, or the slippage of language over things that characterizes modern thought. With the decline of representation and the advent of modernity, language becomes no longer transparent but opaque and mobile, like clouded glass in motion. Not only does language

[89] Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 20.

now become an object in its own right, it is thrust into the unenviable position of being too impoverished to adequately capture reality. Because of this poverty, language becomes infinitely malleable, and it is this malleability that gives language its duplicitous character. That is, to compensate for its poverty, language has to assign multiple meanings to words, each of which can be evoked any time a word is used.

As Gilles Deleuze points out, the order of things is no less multiple. On Deleuze' interpretation, "As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked."[90] However, it is when things and words are opened up that the seeable and the sayable become separate, the order of things yielding a proliferation of visibilities, the order of words a proliferation of meanings. According to Deleuze, only at their limit are the two orders linked. They are in relation, but that relation is one of distance, words stretching out across multiplying meanings to just touch, but not capture, the equally multiplying visibilities of things.

In *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault derides the structuralist theme of the excess of the signified that authorizes an endless commentary. Such commentary professes to get behind what has been said and uncover *what it really wanted to say, but didn't quite*. Commentary rests on the view that the poverty of language, or the superabundance of things in the face of language, which amounts to the same thing, means that no utterance can possibly capture everything that it intended to. To catch up to what it is that outstrips the said calls for a kind of speech—commentary—that says what was left unsaid initially. Foucault thinks that commentary is a dead end because it "dooms us to an endless task that nothing can limit."[91]

[90] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 65.
[91] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, xvi.

In opposition to commentary, Foucault calls for a return to the connection between words and things. To track the discursive changes in medicine, Foucault says, "we must look beyond its thematic content or its logical modalities to the region where 'things' and 'words' have not yet been separated, and where—at the most fundamental level of language—seeing and saying are still one."[92] The "still one" and "have not yet been separated" of Foucault's formulation seems to evoke a temporal return to a pre-modern functioning of language, so it would seem that Foucault is calling for language to function as it did in the Renaissance, when nature and words formed one vast text, the key to which lay in deciphering resemblances. However, even this function authorized commentary, because the discovery of more hidden resemblances was always one interpretation away. Foucault is not calling, here, for a return to a past function of language, but for a flattening out of the level of analysis. He asks, "Is it not possible to make a structural analysis of discourses that would evade the fate of commentary by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of its historical appearance?"[93] In short, Foucault's hesitance about the theme of the signified's excess and the signifier's poverty stems from a methodological concern about the way to analyze statements. He is simply calling for taking discourse at face value, a call that he reiterates in depth in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

The call to study discourse as and when it appears does not deny the malleability of language, however, nor does it deny language's character as an independent object. What it does is ask why, case by case, language appears as it does when it does, and not some other way, or why, out of its malleability, language settles one way and not another. This is the question Foucault wants to find a method of addressing in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The goal that

[92] Ibid., xi.
[93] Ibid., xvii.

guides Raymond Roussel's novels is that of exposing those linguistic mutations that are not in touch with things, but that the said silently suggests. His is therefore a question of possibility where Foucault's is a question of actuality. Still, the actually said yields the possibly said for Roussel. This is an important point because his is not a project of the pure play of language, or of its murmur independent of its relations to things.

On Foucault's reading, Roussel's process aims at a methodical accounting and control of all the unsaid that mirrors the said, or that can be derived from the said. Since it is by now well-known that the surrealists greatly admired Roussel, even if that admiration was not returned, it is tempting to draw connections between Roussel's process and the automatic writing of, for example, André Breton and Philippe Soupault. Automatic writing, which abandons conscious control of writing, "is the affirmation of this language without silence, of this infinite murmur opened near us, underneath our common utterances, which seems an eternal spring."[94] As such, automatic writing embraces the chance occurrence of words, and continues indefinitely, springing from chance to chance. Taking seriously the notion that subjectivity is dispersed in language, the surrealists thought of automatic writing as a tool for mining the unconscious. Roussel's writing, by contrast,

> is not automatic writing as such but the most conscious writing of all: it has mastered all the imperceptible and fragmentary play of chance. It has sealed all the interstices of language where it could insidiously creep in. It has eliminated gaps and detours and exorcised the nonbeing which is activated when one speaks."[95]

Roussel's process is, in other words, not about embracing chance at all but about organizing against it. As his own description of his process makes clear, Roussel's language has the

[94] Blanchot, *The Space of Language*, 181.
[95] Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 40.

character of a filling-in. This is most evident in the case of the associative method, in which one sentence is slightly transformed into a second, and the task before Roussel is to get, linguistically, from the first to the second, or to fill in the space between the two. Furthermore, unlike the case of automatic writing, which does not pay close attention to language's inherent ambiguities, Roussel's process not only displays these but attempts to accumulate every possible ambiguity. Indeed, although, like the surrealists, Roussel likes the image of a mine (he calls himself a prospector on several occasions), he does not want to bring back linguistic treasure as much as he wants to fill in or cover over every possible linguistic space between objects. In this respect his technique more closely resembles the method of oil drilling called fracking, in which minor cracks in rock are expanded hydraulically, and then pumped full of fluid after what they contain has been extracted. Roussel's series of richly described fantastic images leave language no place left to go, no further description to be made. His process brings every possible description lurking within a linguistic space to the surface.

The ambiguity that attends the excess of the signified threatens meaning because each utterance opens up several concomitant possibilities. Roussel paradoxically exorcises the threat of excessive language by bringing all possible meanings to the surface of speech. In this way Roussel mounts a curious *defense* against the incessant murmur of language. By accumulating all the ambiguities that attend a spoken phrase, he hopes to fashion a solid mass of language. Such a mass would effectively short-circuit chance or play by accounting for it in advance. In Derridian terms, Roussel's process neuters *différance* by presenting all that each word can mean simultaneously. Deconstruction cannot gain purchase if the entire system of mutually supporting meanings is given at once. Roussel's response-in-advance to Derrida is to make an absolute presence of language itself (language as writing, no less). The fact that Roussel already accounts

for all possible deferring is another way of saying, as Foucault does, that Roussel hurls "a fundamental challenge toward time."[96]

According to Foucault, Roussel's project "shows that at the moment of speaking the words are already there, while before speaking there was nothing."[97] In this way language appears as just the kind of immanent condition (already there) that Foucault describes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Roussel's project remains firmly attuned to what is said, refusing to speculate about what lies behind the said except what can be derived from the said itself. From such an attunement, furthermore, Roussel finds grounds for a novel challenge to identity. If what is said activates all the ambiguities that Roussel collects, then the identity of the said is dispersed across those ambiguities. Roussel thus challenges the principle of identity without turning to a notion of temporal deferring to do so. On his account, what is is also other, not because of a (temporal) spacing that perpetually pushes back self-identity or self-presence, but because it is immediately dispersed among a variety of meanings. Although they are collected in his impenetrable block, that does not lessen their ambiguity in relation to each other. As Foucault points out, "Even when this language…states one thing, it could as well, with the same words, mean something else."[98] With the varying permutations of the said that Roussel collects, the said does not remain identical to itself but authorizes its own deformity.

The sense of the identical bearing within itself its own other that Roussel's method gives rise to is reinforced by the importance of death for Roussel. Death is a theme throughout much of his work, and it is especially central to *Locus Solus*. The main character Canterel's property is full of life-size dioramas in which the dead are reanimated to re-enact particular events from

[96] Ibid., 41.
[97] Ibid., 41.
[98] Ibid., 149.

their lives. Canterel has developed a two-part drug cocktail, made up of the substances resurrectine and vitalium, to reanimate bodies that he stores in an ice house. He pioneered his system on Danton's submerged head, with the help of a cat that can breathe underwater, and a pink creature called a Khóng-dēk-lèn.[99] *Locus Solus* is that place where death haunts life, but haunts it from within, mocking life with its ghoulish repetitions.

Of the macabre dioramas in *Locus Solus*, Foucault says that they are "the repetition, the reflection in which death and life mirror each other."[100] According to David Scott, it is no coincidence that Foucault published both *Death and the Labyrinth* and *The Birth of the Clinic* in the same year, 1963.[101] Both works are fundamentally about the repetition of death within life. *Death and the Labyrinth* demonstrates this point, through a reading of Roussel, on the order of discourse. *The Birth of the Clinic* demonstrates the point, through a study of medical practices, on the order of the visible. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault argues that the dissection of human bodies revealed diseases in various stages for the first time, and so revealed the presence of death within life. "Opening up a few corpses," as Foucault puts it, shifts the perception of death from something that strikes from without to something immanent to life. Likewise, Roussel locates the potential for profound change within the matter to be changed, and indeed includes it in discursive identity.

It is easy to see, then, how Roussel stands as a kind of model discursive practitioner. At a very rudimentary level, Roussel's project takes a conditioning statement, for example, *The white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table* and, by making connections authorized by that statement and the discourse of which it is a part, transforms it into *The white man's letters about*

[99] Roussel, *Locus Solus*, 59.
[100] Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 56
[101] Scott, "The Secret of the Corpse-Language Machine: The Birth of the Clinic and Raymond Roussel," 39.

the hordes of the old plunderer. Nothing outside of discourse has guided this process. Moreover, Roussel occupies a specific position with respect to his process. Foucault notes how Roussel's work echoes some of his fantastic contraptions. His work relies on a "mechanism whose principles and evolution are described as though suspended between heaven and earth—as a series of movements which function independently, pulling the author into a logic of which he is the occasion more than the subject."[102] Roussel is, to be sure, involved in his process, but his involvement is not that of subjective guarantor. Rather, he submits the relation between words and things to a mutation, and thereby risks or destabilizes at least part of the very discourse in which he finds himself.

Roussel's turn to the evolutionary method especially makes plain the destabilization that he inaugurates. Where his method initially seeks control of ambiguities, the introduction of objects, images, or addresses into his work (if only as a means of furnishing himself with a stockpile of phrases for his novels) also reintroduces the very element of chance that he so diligently works against. As Foucault points out, with the advent of the evolutionary method, "the field of chance is no longer proportionate to anything known," and, "chance is not a play of positive elements, it's an infinite opening, renewed at the very moment of annihilation."[103] However, the chance here introduced has more to do with discursive complexity than with the kind of linguistic play that occupies the surrealists. Whereas Roussel could initially restrict his process to certain curated sentences, with his use of elements from his surroundings the field of language spirals beyond his ability to contain it. Crucially, this discursive chance appears contemporaneously with those elements. That is, unlike the chance that drives automatic writing, which relies on the random eruption of words out of language's prior, infinite murmur,

[102]Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 67.
[103] Ibid., 44, 46.

the discursive chance that propels Roussel's novels is an infinity blossoming out of words as they occur in discursive formations. Those words that discourse invests with meaning serve as the keys to the labyrinth of linguistic possibility for Roussel. In this way Roussel identifies an alterity in the time of our own thought. As radical as Roussel's creations are, they are nonetheless authorized by the same system that authorizes street addresses and advertisements.

It would be a stretch to say, though, that Roussel in any way alters that system. It does not appear that his fictions rebound on discourse and its rules of formation in the way that other utterances might. What Roussel's writing produces are statements, but they do not function as statements in the discourses upon which they draw. They remain merely literary statements. Roussel's fictions are a perfect example of that literary discourse that runs parallel to other discourses but is not subject to their rules. In this regard Roussel is like André Breton, about whom Foucault says writing has the power to change the world, but only by scintillating outside it.[104] Of course, like the archaeologist, Roussel contributes to discourse. Indeed, his published works transformed what was possible in the space of the novel, and showed surrealism a path of development. However, his impact is restricted to fiction, and while this may have had or may yet have effects on what may be said in other domains, this is not enough to treat Roussel or his process as transformative in a robust sense, at least not any more than the everyday person making or contributing to statements. That is, Roussel does not present a serious challenge to the broader functioning of discourse. Outside of his novels, science continues to develop, subjectivity continues to reign, people continue to visit their shoemakers and view advertisements. Roussel's novels don't alter the structure of experience in any appreciable way.

[104] Foucault, "A Swimmer Between Two Words," in, *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 173.

Still, Roussel is hardly diminished as an ethical example. What Roussel demonstrates is, above all, how writing, especially writing that pays painstaking attention to the said, the actually said, can expose unforeseen avenues for thought. This is accomplished in part by the encounter of heterogeneous elements. Conscious as his writing may be, in it Roussel effects a depersonalization, or an exposure to those linguistic elements that surround him and constitute his experience. Indeed, not only does he describe his process in impersonal terms ("As the method developed I was led to take a random phrase…."[105]), his own life, as his doctor Janet said, was structured like his books.[106] Where his books are devoted to the thorough description of fantastic objects or repetitive scenes, and introduce characters only for the purpose of moving from one description to the next, Roussel likewise was given over completely to a ritualized life. He wore his clothes according to a strict schedule, for instance, and fasted often to avoid the unsettlement of digestion.[107] In short, Roussel was entirely given over to regimen, which yielded quite unexpected linguistic developments. He was, furthermore, great at impersonations and would perform them frequently. On Foucault's reading, "Roussel deadened himself in order to be able to imitate this other life alive in others."[108] It might be said that Roussel's self-deadening was both a result of and a facilitating condition of his extensive encounter with the limits of the said. Yet Roussel is ultimately a tragic figure because his literary inventions, while in a sense mocking discourse's seriousness, find themselves trapped in the space of literature. That is, his literary creations grow out of discourse like a vestigial structure in an organism. They are part of the discursive organism, but don't affect its functioning. Through his adoption of a writing

[105] Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 12.
[106] Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 161.
[107] Ibid., 161.
[108] Ibid., 163.

regimen, Roussel is able to displace his subjectivity, but he ends up a lonely man in a very solitary place, still subjected by a discourse he could not fully penetrate.

3.3 Marquis de Sade

The novels *Justine* and *Juliette* may seem strange places to turn after an investigation into a fantastical wordsmith. The Marquis de Sade wrote these works more than a century before Roussel wrote his, and in a remarkably different style. Thematically the works are very different as well. *Justine* and *Juliette* both purport to show that vice is always rewarded, while virtue punished, while Roussel totally ignores any kind of moral theme. Yet the Marquis de Sade and Roussel have some things in common. For one, both profess the importance of the imagination. In Roussel's case, despite his claim that he relied on imagination without external input, we saw that in fact his imagination engaged with the visible and the said, and out of their encounter came new linguistic possibilities. For the Marquis de Sade, the practice of writing functions reciprocally with imagination to reorient desire's relation with truth. It is writing that pushes desire beyond its limits and situates desire differently with respect to discourse. Both Sade and Roussel are tragic, marginal figures as well, to put it mildly. However, that historical fact should not dampen our optimism about Sade's ability to furnish us with a kind of ethical example, if only in terms of method. With Sade, we see the conscious undertaking of a writing regimen that explicitly aims at transformation.

In addressing the question, "Why did Sade Write?", Foucault dismisses Sade's profession that he is revealing a fundamental truth that vice leads to reward and virtue to punishment. Although it is the case in Sade's work that vice is rewarded and virtue punished, there is no logic that dictates these outcomes. Rather, the punishment of the virtuous happens at random, as when, for instance, Justine rescues a person who is then immediately killed by a passer-by who

also kidnaps Justine. Foucault concludes that the chance punishment of the virtuous in Sade's novels undermines his claim that he writes to *express* an underlying moral rationality that had been missed. Rather, Foucault's thesis is that Sade writes to *bring about* the true. What is true is the form of rationality that desire promotes and that in turn supports desire.[109] On this interpretation, writing appears as a practice with transformative efficacy that works on desire, allowing it to develop according to new temporal and spatial rules.

As evidence of this function of writing, Foucault points to a passage from *Juliette* in which Juliette advises an apprentice in perversion. She prescribes a two week period of abstaining from fantasy. At the end of the two weeks, the apprentice is to call to mind all the fantasies that she has been suppressing, letting her imagination run wild. She is then to pick out the most captivating and vivid of these fantasies and write it down in extreme detail. The next day she is to read what she has written, thereby activating again the fantasy in her imagination, and she is to add anything new that the imagination suggests. She should repeat this process until the fantasy is complete. The final instruction Juliette offers is to execute the fantasy, which she offers bluntly, and almost as an afterthought: "after that, execute it."[110]

Foucault draws three conclusions from this passage. First, he thinks it shows that writing is not here an instrument of rational communication, but a supplement to the imagination. As such, Foucault takes writing to be an intermediary step between imagination and performed event. Second, he thinks that this is in fact the method by which Sade wrote his books, with the exception that Sade did not carry out the fantasy. Third, he links writing to the mastery of the imagination, because writing the fantasy and rereading it enables desire to go beyond the apparent limits that may have restricted the initial fantasy. Writing amounts to a kind of exercise

[109] Foucault, "Why Did Sade Write?" in *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, 100.
[110] Ibid., 104.

for the imagination, allowing it to vary and multiply its images and thereby go beyond whatever it could have attained without the aid of writing.[111]

So, like Roussel, Sade's method involves a kind of mastery. However, as in the case of Roussel, this is not subjective mastery, or the dominion of a subject over something, but mastery in the sense of development of a skill. With Roussel, a painstaking literary practice generates an accumulation of language that extends far beyond the limits of the visible. With Sade, mastery allows the imagination to go beyond whatever limits had heretofore restricted it. It would be wrong, furthermore, to think of such mastery in terms of possession. As we saw in the case of Roussel, mastering language's play of ambiguities is not the kind of skill that can be deployed in the service of the subject, but rather de-centers subjectivity. In the case of Sade, mastery of the imagination does release desire from illusory limits, but ultimately at the expense of the very existence of the subject.

Although Foucault characterizes writing as an intermediary step between imagination and the real, he does not mean that writing facilitates the introduction of the imagined fantasy into the order of the real. Rather, he means that writing allows the imagination to push the real out of its limiting capacity. Writing does this by taking over the place of the real. For Foucault, this is partially indicated by the flippant way Juliette tells the aspiring libertine to "execute" her fantasy. The absurdity of this command, which follows writing down the most perverse and extraordinary visions (e.g., burning down "hundreds of hospitals," or causing "a volcano to explode"), means that "Writing…is this method, this moment that will lead to the real but which, in truth, pushes the real to the limits of nonexistence."[112] Perhaps this explains why Sade himself did not execute his fantasies. The writing of them, in tome after tome, *was* their execution. The

[111] Ibid., 104-106.
[112] Ibid., 107.

question for Sade is not one of submitting the imagination to an external world that forces it to delay its pleasures. Nor is the question one of training the imagination to generate more intensely pleasurable situations that might then take place in an external reality. Instead, the aim of a program of libertine writing is to exclude reality entirely. The imagination developed with the aid of writing is, thanks to writing, no longer under the demand of attaining pleasure only in the external world. Writing thus aids in both the intensification of pleasures and in their satisfaction. Resorting to Freudian language, Foucault says, "writing is that which takes the place of the reality principle and absolves the imagination from ever having to achieve reality. … Because of writing, we will have…a world entirely governed by the pleasure principle that will never have to encounter the reality principle."[113] In this libertine practice, then, we see the development of a kind of counter-discourse. It is one that collapses the distinction between the imaginary and the real, and sets itself up in opposition to the prevailing discourse on desire that says that desire stands fundamentally in relation to a reality principle.

Yet Sade does not conjure a new discursive formation out of the blue, so to speak. He begins with the imagination and desire as they appear in a discourse. His starting point is the language of desire that comes out of a discourse that sets it up in relation to a reality principle. It is only by paying rigorous attention to desire as it so appears that Sade is able to amplify and alter that language, to the point that it gradually separates from the reality principle. Such a separation amounts to the establishment of something like a new discursive formation that challenges the relationship between desire, language, and reality.

The temporality of desire is also bound up with this discursive challenge. Writing allows for the repetition of the pleasure of the fantasy in a way that goes beyond "exhaustion, fatigue,

[113] Ibid., 108.

old age."[114] This is because writing takes the place of the release that heretofore depended on certain functions of the body. Foucault interprets this separation of the body and pleasure as the erasure of the limitations of time. He says, "The second function of writing…is to erase the limitations of time and free repetition for itself."[115] What he means is that writing frees desire from the time *of the body*. Such a freedom does not result in the dissolution of temporality in general, but the introduction into discourse of a time of desire that is heterogeneous with that of the body. With the advent of its own temporality, desire is now free to compound its pleasures in a way that the body had heretofore limited. Foucault claims that "repetitive writing is also multiplicative writing, writing that exacerbates, writing that augments and multiplies without end."[116] This is evident enough from Juliette's instruction to the libertine to add to the recorded fantasy whatever new images come to mind. Furthermore, desire's repetitions and multiplications according to its own temporality accomplishes its separation from subjectivity. Now, like mathematics, libertine discourse on desire develops according to its own rules that are not grounded in subjectivity. Rather, subjects may pop in and out of ongoing fantasies, contributing to their development or merely repeating them.

It is worth recalling here Foucault's earlier declarations, in *The Archaeology if Knowledge*, about desire's relation to discourse. There, in making the case that the non-discursive elements that determine the theoretical choices made by a discourse (the elements in relation to which a discourse forms its strategies) do not disturb discourse from without but are in fact integral to its formation, Foucault singles out desire as one of the characteristics of this integral determining authority. He says, "discourse may in fact be the place for a phantasmatic

[114] Ibid., 109.
[115] Ibid., 109.
[116] Ibid., 110.

representation, an element of symbolization, a form of the forbidden, an instrument of derived satisfaction."[117] Furthermore, for discourse to be this place is not merely a function of its fictional or imaginary practice. Desire and discourse have a relation of mutual influence.

This helps explain why Foucault says, writing about Sade, that "discourse and desire are interlinked and engaged with each other, they are not subordinate to each other," and that Sade "rearticulates truth and desire in terms of each other."[118] Foucault makes these claims to defend Sade against a Freudian reading, according to which Sade would be taken as expressing the truth about desire, and a Marcusian reading, according to which a true discourse can free desire. On either reading, one pole of the desire-discourse relation has priority over the other. Either desire holds a truth that discourse painstakingly uncovers, or discourse is that realm of truth that can liberate desire from the illusions that have restrained it. By placing desire and discourse on an equal footing, Sade avoids either position. Instead, desire works to shape discourse, which works to shape desire.

As evidence for this claim, Foucault cites several elements of Sade's texts. The first is a rejection of all norms. Libertines constantly assert the nonexistence of God, the soul, the law, and nature. Each libertine is therefore irregular insofar as she is disconnected from any obligation or continuity.[119] Libertines repeat this discourse of nonexistence to each other before their orgies as a way of erasing the limits on the desire that they are about to unleash. This is in stark contrast to the trajectory of Western philosophy, which calls on each person to renounce a part of herself, to renounce murderous desires and fantasies, in exchange for individuality—a name and a place in society.[120] Western philosophy is thus "affirmative at the level of ontology;

[117] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 68.
[118] Foucault, "Theoretical Discourses and Erotic Scenes," in *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, 145.
[119] Ibid., 120.
[120] Ibid., 122.

it is negative at the level of prescriptiveness."[121] In other words, by affirming the existences of God, the soul, the law, and nature, Western philosophy stifles what individuals may do. The libertine rejects this affirmative ontology, and so opens up different possibilities of behavior.

By constantly repeating the negation of that which Western philosophy affirms in order to free desire, it appears as though the libertine is in fact grounding the truth of desire in subjectivity. However, the five functions of libertine discourse that Foucault identifies reveal this to not be the case. The first function is to "establish itself as libertine discourse, that is to say, a discourse that shifts the system of negation to within the metaphysical discourse of the West."[122] This function frees the desire of the libertine, promising the libertine a full selfhood *without* the renunciation of any part of that selfhood. The second function is to signal to other libertines that one is part of their community (rather than, for instance, to persuade a victim to become a libertine), and to distinguish victims and libertines. The third function is that of destruction (which Foucault only introduces at the end of the essay, as the point around which the other functions revolve. The fourth function (which Foucault opposes to the second) is one of rivalry, or the variation in the presentation of libertine discourse. Such variation, while reaffirming the same four negative principles, organizes them differently. Foucault takes this to mean that there is no general system of libertinage. Rather, each articulation of these principles defines a libertine in her irregularity. The fifth function of libertine discourse (opposed to the first) is exposure to death. Indeed, as the only remaining existents in a system of nonexistence, libertines should embrace death, logically, because they are the only remnants of limiting positivity. This embrace is borne out by the fact that Sade's libertines experience the greatest sexual excitement at the moment that they embrace their own deaths. Yet this function

[121] Ibid., 123.
[122] Ibid., 124.

challenges the first function of libertine discourse because, instead of saying that this discourse frees the desire of each libertine and ensures each libertine that no part of himself will be sacrificed, it says that desire demands complete sacrifice.

The third function of libertine discourse around which the other four revolve is that of destruction. Destruction is the central function of libertine discourse because the other four functions negate each other. What this negation shows is that, in pursuing the discourse of desire to its logical limits, libertines abolish their own subjectivities. While the first two functions appear to serve subjectivity, the final two functions utterly undermine those subjective functions. The central destructive function of libertine discourse, which is in part the final outcome of a regimen of writing that gives desire back its own temporality, Sade's characters sever the subject's relation to desire. It would thus be wrong to say that a libertine regimen of writing allows full knowledge of desire to be attained in a subject. It would be just as wrong to say that subjective desire had been brought into accord with the truth. Foucault says as much when he says, "desire and truth are endlessly multiplied in the unfolding, the scintillation, the infinite continuation of desire."[123] Libertine discourse amounts to a conscious practice, a regimen of writing, that establishes a language of desire that outstrips subjectivity. No longer grounded in subjectivity, desire develops on its own time.

With the Marquis de Sade, the way writing can function as a means of conscious discursive transformation begins to come into clearer focus. De Sade goes further than Roussel in tying writing to the rules of a discursive formation. For all his attention to the actually said, Roussel ends up creating a neutered parallel discourse. While it mocks by exposing the death within it, it still does not have any appreciable effect on discourse's functioning. Roussel's

[123] Ibid., 146.

works remain only fictions, in other words, and not fictions with real effects. Because Sade's writing is so closely bound to the discourse on desire, he is able to affect the rules of desire's development.

Still, even this is not enough to bring about real discursive change. The appearance of Sade's fictions and the method they suggest hardly moves the discourse of desire away from subjectivity. Although he shows us how writing can disentangle the discourse on desire from subjectivity and allow desire to develop according to its own time, Sade, like Roussel, ends up in a kind of exile, equally unable to bend the trajectory of the broader discourse. This has to do, I think, with those non-discursive elements that are yet integral to discourses formation. Sade, more that Roussel, places his language into relation with one of these elements—desire—but libertine discourse is unable to establish relations with non-discursive institutions. While the discourse on desire authorized by psychology has the support of institutions, be they educational or medical, that allow the proliferation of statements on desire, Sade's counter-discourse lacks such support. Although libertines, if they exist outside of Sade's novels, might form societies, they would yet run afoul of other institutions that determine criminality, etc. The cases of Roussel and especially Sade demonstrate the need, where discursive practice is concerned, for a sustained engagement with and *within* prevailing institutions. A writing regimen forms an important part of this practice, but it calls for complementary practices, social practices, to penetrate discourse and hijack its functioning.

3.4 Maurice Blanchot—A Point in Contrast

Although Foucault is very fond of Maurice Blanchot, as he is fond of Stéphane Mallarmé and André Breton, Blanchot's writing may be said to be the best example of literature as counter-discourse in the sense that Foucault means it in *The Order of Things*. Blanchot represents

thought from outside because his writing accesses language in its purity, where it is free from discursive constraint. On Foucault's understanding of Blanchot, his language "is no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority. And the subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse…than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues."[124] It is, in short, so thoroughly counter-discursive that it is no longer discourse. While Blanchot's writing does share with Roussel and Sade the emptying of the subject, it nonetheless deliberately severs all ties with discourse to witness and support language's infinite murmur in the pure space of literature.

The practice of writing, or the task of the writer, is thus paradoxical for Blanchot. The writer is called to writing by a task that cannot be completed. According to Blanchot, all that the writer can do is complete books, never the *work*, which is the unending work of literature. Once the writer completes a book, the work remains over the book's horizon, beckoning. One way Blanchot explains this is with reference to impatience. Literary writers exhibit an initial impatience with language, or a desire to "exhaust the infinite."[125] As the realization dawns on them that this is impossible, these writers gradually learn patience, but it is a patience that is of a piece with their impatience, which is to say that patience is "impatience suffered and endured endlessly."[126] Such patience, is, furthermore, punctuated with moments of impatience—as when a writer finishes a book. Thus Orpheus is the ultimate figure of the artist for Blanchot, and Eurydice the work. The writer is able to draw the work near him, out of that nonbeing that lies just beyond the spoken and the phenomenal. Yet as it approaches his impatience causes him to

[124] Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot, the Thought from Outside*, 11.
[125] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 173.
[126] Ibid., 173.

look, or to complete the book, and in so doing the work recedes again. So the writer is condemned to write on endlessly, never finding solace.

Blanchot's image of the writer as Orpheus reveals that his concern is not discursive transformation, but a standing-open to language that amounts to a becoming passive. From this perspective, even the production of the written work seems to be a mistake, since it is analogous to the moment of active impatience that causes Eurydice to be pulled to Hades once again. Yet Blanchot is clear that this is the only recourse the writer has in order to become the blank space where language can flourish. The best the writer can do is convert himself away from consciousness and the world of his concern. Blanchot describes this conversion as follows:

> Instead of leading consciousness back toward that which we call the real but which is only the objective reality where we dwell in the security of stable forms and separate existences—instead, also, of maintaining consciousness at its own surface, in the world of representations which is only the double of objects—such a conversion would turn it away toward a profounder intimacy, toward the most interior and the most invisible, where we are no longer anxious to do and act, but free of ourselves and of real things and of phantom things…."[127]

Where Roussel and Sade remained attuned to the world of discourse-the world of things, phantom and otherwise—Blanchot advocates a retreat from that world into a pure passivity where language plays free of its relation to the visible. So, while Blanchot advocates a depersonalization or de-subjectivation as much as Roussel and Sade, he does not call for a further reorganization of discourse, only a wholesale abandonment of discourse.

In *Foucault's Archaeology*, David Webb points out that Foucault comes close to Blanchot's position when he wonders whether he should not speak of the exteriority of discourse

[127] Ibid., 138.

as "neutrality," a word Blanchot uses as a synonym for passivity, instead.[128] However, Foucault decides against this move because neutrality, and indeed Blanchot's work in general, implies "an effacement…of all positions of existence."[129] Here we see again that exteriority for Foucault is that space of discursive dispersion that constitutes subjectivity, not an absolute exteriority that disengages with the world of things. The ethics appropriate to such an exteriority does involve depersonalization, but it also involves active engagement that works to restructure or recondition what can be said.

Clearly, though, fulfilling the latter half of the above ethical formulation remains elusive. Writers like Roussel and Sade seem to be on the way to such an active engagement, but their work falls short of restructuring discourse. Perhaps the failure of literature to effect real transformation caused Foucault to cease writing about literature. Instead he turns his attention to different writers, who might be called documentarians, at the same time as he turns his attention to those very institutions that, while they are integral to discourse and conditioned immanently like discourse, are nonetheless not discursive themselves. Writing, as we shall see, remains important to the ethics of transformation, but to be transformative it must emerge within discourse, and establish relations with non-discursive institutions.

[128] Webb, *Foucault's Archaeology*, 107.
[129] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 121.

CHAPTER 4. DISCIPLINE AND DOCUMENTS

"But where danger is, grows
The saving power also."—Hölderlin

4.1 Introduction

Raymond Roussel and the Marquis de Sade represent an important step in the development of Foucault's ethics. Their writing projects expose the possibility of, and strive toward, explicitly discursive transformation. Something more than the constitution of a parallel discourse that refers only to itself is at stake in their writing. However, as discursively oriented as their projects are, they don't attain to the level of transformation towards which Foucault's broader project points. Roussel and Sade both remain by and large discursively determined, and psychiatric, medical, and other discourses can either safely ignore their work, or identify it as something that requires containment. Foucault isolates the cunning of institutions as the reason for this in "The Discourse on Language." In that lecture he argues that "the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality."[130] In the cases of Roussel and Sade, these procedures succeed in shunting their work into the discourse on literature, and thereby quarantining anything radical in their writing from the discourses out of which it arises. They both remain figures on the fringe, fixed discursively as little better than madmen.

This chapter will begin to address the question of how writing might avoid this fate and exert real transformative force. I will show the ways that writing has become discursively

[130] Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 216.

transformative by asserting itself in the discourses which make it possible. This capacity of writing depends upon certain non-discursive techniques that relate to discourse. Yet these non-discursive practices tend, where discourse is concerned, to play the repressive role alluded to above. In the works that immediately follow *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, especially *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault introduces several methodological innovations and shifts in emphasis. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies the non-discursive with a positive term: *power*. Power concerns itself with the administration of bodies and populations, or what Foucault calls *discipline* and *biopolitics*. It aims at the creation of productive individuals. Its domain is the visible rather than the sayable, and its techniques are chiefly architectural and bodily. Power should be thought as actions on actions, and therefore, while it is integral to discourse formation, it is autonomous from discourse. However, just as power is integral to discourse formation, discourse is integral to the functioning of power. I argue that one point of contact between discourse and power is the *document*. The technique of documentation allows an exchange between the visible and the sayable, and it reinforces both discipline's productive aims and discourse's stabilization.

However, documentation may also be turned against power's aims and discourse's stability. According to Foucault, where there is power, there is also resistance, and writing is one technique of disciplinary power that can readily become a technique of resistance. The narrative of Herculine Barbin, the 19th century hermaphrodite whose memoir Foucault edited and published in a collection of documents pertaining to her life, illustrates this point. Her memoir not only shows the effects of power and discourse, but also points to how documentation can be subvert prevailing power relations and work to counter institutional functioning and contribute to discursive transformation at the same time. Although Barbin's memoir does not succeed as a

means of resistance to power's functioning, it nonetheless holds out the promise of documentary resistance. Documentation not only bridges the gap between the visible and the sayable, it also bridges the gap between counter-discourse and *counter-discipline*.

4.2 Discipline and Documents

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's radical thesis is that power, understood as a relation of forces, is ubiquitous and productive. It should not be thought as merely repressive. The aim of power is to know and discipline bodies, or to access the truth about bodies so that the appropriate course of action may be taken to regulate them. Discipline ultimately works towards industrial productivity, since well-regulated individuals are productive members of society. It also cultivates individuals in such a way that they take over their own self-regulation. Hence what we call psyche, personality, consciousness, or soul is the effect of disciplinary power.

The mechanism through which the body becomes visible, becomes known and corralled in its usefulness, is discipline. We should not be surprised that Foucault finds that discipline itself is not monolithic, but rather that it is diffuse, and micro-physical, working through a variety of techniques. Four such techniques are *the art of distributions, the control of activity, the organization of geneses, and the composition of forces*, each of which is divided into several sub-techniques. The art of distributions literally distributes bodies in space.[131] It therefore requires the physical construction of disciplinary sites, such as factories and schools. The control of activity and the organization of geneses concern the measurement of time, adherence to schedules, and fostering an economy of bodily motion and gestures.[132] The composition of forces organizes a mass of individual elements for maximum productivity by measuring

[131] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141.
[132] Ibid., 149-162.

individuals in relation to one another and developing methods of command that can be followed unreflectively.[133] Institutional techniques are primarily spatial, then, and concern the body in its visibility and its capacity for action more than they concern what can be said about bodies. That is, the goal of discipline is not to be able to say this or that about bodies, but to make bodies do things.

However, discourse is never far from the functioning of power. The importance of schedules and the need for effective signals shows that statements do play an important role in disciplinary techniques. Furthermore, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* argues that non-discursive practices should be thought as integral to discourse formation rather than as intruding on discourse from without. Foucault asserts that "political practice…takes part in [discourse's] conditions of emergence, insertion, and functioning."[134] The role of statements in discipline reveals that statements participate in conditioning power, while institutional practices participate in the conditioning of discourse (while power is not coextensive with institutional practices, all institutional practices are power's practices).

Yet Foucault insists that discourse and power are autonomous fields. This raises the obvious question of how that autonomy is to be understood. According to Foucault, archaeology "tries to show how the autonomy of discourse…nevertheless do[es] not give it the status of pure ideality and total historical independence."[135] So, while its rules of formation are autonomous, discourse is yet dependent on non-discursive practices. Still, David Webb wonders how one can draw a line between discourse and the non-discursive without "straying dangerously close to making precisely the kind of distinction between formal conditions and empirical events that

[133] Ibid., 164-166.
[134] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 163.
[135] Ibid., 164-5.

archaeology tries to avoid."[136] That is, at times it seems like institutions are the formal conditions of discourse.

The way out of this difficulty is to think power and discourse as autonomous domains that meet at their limit, like parallel lines stretching to infinity. What differentiates archaeology from a study of power and institutions is that the knowledge gained about bodies by means of disciplinary techniques is visual and not verbal. Gilles Deleuze picks up on this difference and his reading of Foucault develops the distinction between the visible and the sayable that arises in *The Birth of the Clinic* and elsewhere. If discourse, as we have seen, distributes subjects and objects, institutions are "places of visibilities…that distribute light and dark, opaque and transparent, seen and non-seen."[137] Institutions are as exterior to subjectivity as discourse, but institutional exteriority remains irreducible to the discursive. When speaking of visibilities and statements, we are not speaking of words and things, but of their historical *a priori*. We never speak directly of what we see, nor do we see what we speak of, because the historical *a priori* for the said is distinct from that of the seen. Yet the seen and the said do enter into relation: "And yet the unique limit that separates each one is also the common limit that links one to the other, a limit with two irregular faces, a blind word and a mute vision."[138] Only at this limit does a kind of crossing and mutual conditioning occur.

Deleuze helps us see that neither discourse nor the non-discursive serves as a *formal* condition for the other. Rather, each domain develops according to a set of historical, immanent conditions that overlap partially but not totally. An example clarifies how this mutual conditioning of autonomous domains works. Take the medical doctor, who can produce any

[136] Webb, *Foucault's* Archaeology, 136.
[137] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 57.
[138] Ibid., 65.

number of documents, such as lab reports, test results, or notes on an examination, and have those documents entered, physically or, now, digitally, into a system that allows for their retrieval, comparison, etc. What the doctor produces counts as a statement by virtue of the doctor's subject position, its reference to a medical object, its engagement with the field of statements surrounding it, and its materiality (even, presumably, if only sonic). As such, it participates in the formation of medical discourse. Yet the political practices that gave rise to doctor's offices and hospitals opened up "new fields for the mapping of medical objects (these fields are constituted by the mass of the population administratively compartmented and supervised, gauged according to certain norms of life and health, and analyzed according to documentary and statistical forms of registration…)."[139] Documentary forms of registration especially make up a physical archive upon which medical discourse can operate. Political practice conditions discourse, then, by opening up new fields into which discourse can spread and supporting the materiality of statements. Still, it does not determine the shape that medical discourse takes. What the doctor can say depends on the rules of discourse formation. According to Foucault, "medical discourse…is articulated on practices that are external to it, and which are not themselves of a discursive order."[140]

If political practice supports discursive practice, discourse likewise supports political practice. Discourse, in the form of documents, furnishes institutions with an important part of the knowledge that they need to regulate activity. Yet discourse does not determine the shape that institutional practices take. Nowhere is the importance of the document to power more evident than in the case of the examination. As Foucault argues, the techniques of discipline call for more than the division of spaces and composition of masses of elements to reach their shared

[139] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 163.
[140] Ibid., 164.

goal. Discipline also requires *training*. Three keys to training are hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and the examination.[141] Hierarchical observation turns the visibility of each individual into a means of coercion. Hence spaces like military camps, hospitals, and schools become organized or perforated in such a way that the goings on within them are visible from certain internal points. Those points allow a privileged few to watch what is happening within an institution at any time. However, they also allow for the watchers to be watched. Observation is then both continuous and reversible, so that the supervisors themselves are also supervised by the many. The effect is surveillance that is distributed throughout an institution.

Such surveillance is coercive only if it is coupled with a standard of comparison, the "normal" or "norm," against which each observed individual is evaluated. This norm is at once legislated by regulations, and drawn directly from the observable (e.g., how long it should take to perform an exercise cannot be properly legislated unless it is known how long it usually takes to perform the exercise). Thus a norm is to a certain extent a "regularity that is also a rule."[142] To perpetual observation, normalizing judgment adds the element of perpetual comparison. Normalizing brings about group homogeneity, but it also "individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render differences useful by fitting them one to another."[143]

Hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment are symbiotic but distinct disciplinary techniques. The examination unites the two in a single technique.[144] For this reason Foucault places the examination at the heart of the procedures of discipline, and says that it

[141] Ibid., 170.
[142] Ibid., 179.
[143] Ibid., 184.
[144] Ibid., 184.

combines "the deployment of force and the establishment of truth."[145] The examination is thus at the limit where power and knowledge come face to face. It encompasses many visible forms, including the medical examination and the military parade. All of these forms accomplish a curious reversal: whereas sovereign power was visible as it was exercised on invisible subjects, the examination is the invisible exercise of power, in its anonymity and ubiquity, on subjects that it makes visible.[146] Crucially, the examination *records* individuals by means of the document. In Foucault's words, "the examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them."[147] Those details about individuals that observation makes stand out are written down and collected. They are then submitted to four techniques that allow them to have a normalizing function. First of all, discipline requires that enough documents be collated and compared to determine norms in the first place. Second, it requires that documents about individuals who had become visible by means of the examination can be retrieved out of a general register. Third, it calls for a means of tracing the individual over time, from document to document. Fourth, it requires that each document be placed in relation to large numbers of other documents. To these ends, institutions developed a variety of techniques to store, compare, and retrieve documents.

By means of these processes, documentation opens up the possibility of describing individuals as individuals—turning individuals into objects of knowledge. As Foucault says, "*The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case'*: a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge

[145] Ibid., 184.
[146] Ibid., 187.
[147] Ibid., 189.

and a hold for a branch of power."[148] Thanks to documents, individuals can be made to stand out from a field of comparable elements. Documentation further allows for the study of each individual over time—lending each her own temporality as an object of knowledge. Foucault points out that the examination effectively makes every individual an object of "biographical accounts."[149] By collecting the results of successive examinations, institutions can trace the disciplinary development of each individual. In an echo of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault says of disciplinary writing that it "is no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use."[150] That is, the writing that emerges as an accompaniment to the examination is not fodder for future historians to interpret or compare, as traces perhaps preserved accidentally, but they are to put into service in the present as a means of correcting or training individuals to accord to a norm.

4.3 Documents and Visibility

The figure, or what Foucault calls the diagram, of disciplinary power's functioning is the Panopticon. Foucault cites Jeremy Bentham's description of a Panopticon in which a central guard tower can see into all of the prison cells arranged around it in a circle. The tower can be occupied intermittently, or not at all, because the possibility of always being seen makes inmates behave as though they are always being watched. As Foucault puts it, "the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[151] Because of the permanent possibility of being watched, the inmate assumes the role of watcher for himself. He thus becomes a sort of self-ruler, a self-

[148] Ibid., 191.
[149] Ibid., 192.
[150] Ibid., 191.
[151] Ibid., 201.

legislator, who enforces in himself the rules determined by the disciplinary mechanism. The Panopticon induces the individuals whom discipline constitutes and trains to take over the task of maintaining themselves in that constitution and training. This is the most profound meaning of the term subjection. If observation and training combine to produce individuals, their ongoing operation generates subjects who take over the work that this observation and training set in motion. Thus power functions automatically and, in fact, in a decentralized manner. It is this kind of subjection Foucault has in mind when he says the best line he ever says, "the soul is the prison of the body."[152]

Bentham's Panopticon is the figure of disciplinary power, but disciplinary power by no means needs physical Panopticons to function. Rather, "the Panopticon…must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men."[153] Foucault argues that Bentham himself conceived of the Panopticon in general rather than specific terms. General panopticism demands the transformation of specific panoptic enclosures into "a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert."[154] This extension of discipline from discrete enclosures to society at large happened obviously in some ways, as with the extension of the regulations of the armies of William of Orange to all European armies.[155] It also happens more insidiously. Disciplinary institutions themselves increase as their role becomes the production of productive individuals rather than the confinement of undesirables. Along with this expansion comes the expansion of the scope of institutions. Schools "must also make it possible to supervise the parents, to gain information as to their way

[152] Ibid., 30.
[153] Ibid., 205.
[154] Ibid., 209.
[155] Ibid., 209.

of life, their resources, their piety, their morals."[156] Of course, the establishment of centralized police also directly extended discipline to all subjects of a state.

When the figure of the Panopticon is separated from any particular instance of a Panopticon (of which there are still several), it becomes clear that documents serve a panoptic function. In many ways it is easy to see how the "turning of real lives into writing" is ultimately a panoptic procedure.[157] Most people have never lived or even spent time in an actual Panopticon. However, most people have been subjected to examinations whose purpose was to render them visible in certain regards. Furthermore, most people are accustomed to navigating a web of identifying documents in their daily lives. I have my driver's license in my wallet. I have credit and debit cards there too. I have a passport and a social security card. Thanks to the development and dissemination of documentary techniques, these various cards have their corresponding places in registers and databases, and can be used to retrieve a wide range of information attached to my identity, including criminal, credit, and geographic histories. Thus I have various principles of visibility with me at all times. Likewise any trip to the doctor or hospital not only opens up information about all past trips, but is included in my ongoing medical record. In other ways I am under a perpetual documentary threat as well. At this moment I am still a student, and so I have by now an enormous record of academic performance that continues to grow. If I have checked out a book, which book and when is part of a file attached to my identity. Finally, in a development too significant and too extensive to fully explore from a Foucaultian perspective in this dissertation, my phone now knows my location at all times (and perhaps even my voice and everything that I've said while it was nearby), and keeps a detailed record of my location. So while I am not being watched at all times, I am

[156] Ibid., 211.
[157] Ibid., 192.

nonetheless always identifiable in any number of ways, and even my whereabouts over any period of time are easily retrievable. All of this contributes to my subjection, because it fosters in me a sense that, wherever I am, whatever I do is documented, which encourages me to discipline myself. More than that, though, documents bind me to a narrative of my life that can be laid open even in my physical absence. Documents thus serve to coalesce my identity and disperse that identity across a range of archives. Therefore, while documents do induce self-discipline, they also constitute a kind of duplicate individual that stands always open to institutions.

A recent growth of interest in documents and documentation among scholars across a number of fields testifies to the role of documents as visible artifacts. This interest has generated histories of documents as well as histories of early documentarians. Lisa Gitelman describes documents as "defined by the know-show function…the kind of knowing that is all wrapped up with showing, and showing wrapped with knowing."[158] Indeed, documents are written visibilities. She notes, too, that documents are often simply stored for future use: "they are flagged and filed away for the future, just in case."[159] Furthermore, for something to count as a document, according to Gitelman, depends less on its material makeup than on its ability to be mobilized.[160]

The characteristic of mobilization was one that Suzanne Briet seized on in her 1951 book, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*. Briet, who was known as "Madame Documentation," rejected earlier theories of documentation that embraced encyclopedic ideals. Instead, she saw documents as an important tool in achieving "global standardization" and "a resource for

[158] Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, 1.
[159] Ibid., 2.
[160] Ibid., 3.

industrial, 'scientific' production."[161] For Briet, the purpose of such social phenomena as documents is the creation of a perfectly industrialized society, in which humans and the documentary knowledge about them are subsumed to the ends of mechanized production. Briet, in other words, saw documents as nothing more than written visibilities that could be mobilized in the service of production.

In a further curious transference or crossover, the British Museum Reading Room, which opened in 1857, employs a panoptic design, with a raised central area for the staff and reading spaces radiating star-like toward circular walls (the Library of Congress also has a similar design).[162] Although this makes the activities of readers in the reading room easy to police, it also represents an interesting shift in the status of documents themselves. As Patrick Joyce points out, "There was…considerable attachment to the idea of all the books being on open display," and "This involved the books themselves returning the gaze of the reader in all the majesty and color of their massed ranks."[163] It is as though the presence of written knowledge itself calls for discipline, and could likewise serve to discipline others, as if books were themselves eyes. The British Museum Reading Room is then a kind of hybrid site where the play of visibilities meets the play of sayabilities. In fact, the history of the development of bodily discipline closely parallels that of the library. Books already make up a kind of corporeal analogue, with their headers, footers, and spines. Like prisoners, in the time of punishment they too were few in number and confined to, often chained to, dungeons. As punishment shifted to discipline and discipline proliferated, books proliferated and emerged into the light. As the work of Suzanne Briet makes plain, books, like bodies, became enlisted in the service of production.

[161] Day, "Totality and Representation: A History of Knowledge Management Through European Documentation, Critical Modernity, and Post-Fordism," 728.
[162] Joyce, "The Politics of the Liberal Archive," 42.
[163] Ibid., 43.

This enlistment called for its own kind of disciplining, by which order was imposed on books in the form of new cataloguing systems and standardized printing methods. Books themselves came to be the objects of a kind of discursive disciplining, a phenomenon of particular importance wherever books were about people.

To have one's life recorded in a book is no longer a rare privilege, as Foucault notes, but a mundane activity that facilitates comparison. Therefore books have to be grouped and ordered in such a way that preserves their visibility. Hence the "massed ranks" of books in the Reading Room, standing at attention in rows like soldiers on parade. Through this kind of discursive disciplining, one can feel judged by the very thing that serves as a tool for judgment, the lives amassed in rows of books standing in as the judging eyes of observers. People are inclined to be silent in libraries without more than this external prodding. The techniques by which documents about the living are arranged and displayed, techniques which constitute a discipline that parallels that of the discipline of the living, make documents stand-ins for the living people to which they are yet perpetually bound. The shape of the British Museum Reading Room testifies to the culminating point of the growth of documentary practices: documents about individuals come to be identified with the living individuals they represent.

4.4 Discipline and Psychiatric Discourse—Pierre Rivière and Louis Till

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the penitentiary Panopticon was "a system of individualizing and permanent documentation" as much as a system of surveillance.[164] The biographies created by documentation "establish the 'criminal' as existing before the crime, and even outside it."[165] That is, the biography makes it possible to search for evidence of an

[164] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 250.
[165] Ibid., 252.

individual's latent criminality in the record of their training. This disciplinary development, however, generates a new problem for power. To locate the root of a crime in something other than a free, subjective decision, even if the root remains part of the criminal's nature, is to diminish responsibility for the crime. Criminals now appear as caught up in something beyond their conscious control, which only complicates the work of discipline. To manage this new domain of criminality, penal discourse enlists psychiatric discourse, and together the two form "the notion of the 'dangerous' individual, which makes it possible to draw up a network of causality in terms of an entire biography and to present a verdict of punishment-correction."[166] Here we see that the written visibility of the document forms a link between the discursive and the institutional. What discipline develops is thrust into discourse, where it must be accounted for, and this accounting then rebounds onto disciplinary techniques, which struggle to adapt to discursive notions set loose in their midst.

This two-way eruption—of the institutional into the discursive and the discursive into the institutional—is best understood in terms of truth. With the advent of disciplinary biographies and dangerous individuals, truth becomes an issue of paramount political importance. This is because knowing the truth is necessary for the proper administration of life. According to James Bernauer, "No longer is it simply a matter of establishing who committed the crime."[167] This knowledge would be useful only in removing the criminal from society, the task of prisons of the past. Now, "Knowing the law is insufficient when there is knowledge of act and man available to guide the measures that should be taken toward the criminal on the basis of which his rehabilitation may be achieved."[168] Bernauer cites Pierre Rivière's memoir of his parricide as an

[166] Ibid., 252.
[167] Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 152.
[168] Ibid., 152.

example of the kind of document that led to discursive work aimed at exposing Rivière's underlying psychiatric truth. That work was bound up with ongoing attempts at designing corrective punishments.

It is the status of Rivière's biography, and especially the fact that it is an autobiography, that interests me the most. Foucault led a seminar on Rivière in 1972, which led to the publication of the dossier of documents related to his case, including his memoir, and several accompanying essays. Pierre Rivière murdered his mother, sister, and brother on June 3rd, 1835 in the village of La Faucterie, France. He lived in the woods for a month before being arrested on July 2nd, 1835. He then wrote an account of his crime between July 10th and July 21st, 1835. It is this memoir that generated so much medical and legal interest. To me, Rivière's memoir invites a comparison to Raymond Roussel's autobiographical *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Both men wrote explanations of their previous actions under deadly circumstances. In fact, like Roussel, Rivière planned to kill himself after his memoir was written, but he did not carry that plan out. The obvious difference between the two memoirists is that Rivière killed three other people. Yet this alone is not enough to explain psychiatric interest in his work. Doubtless the fact that his book was taken up by psychiatric discourse while Roussel's was relegated to discourse on literature reflects the growing institutional concern for the management of life rather than the assignation of guilt. Rivière's memoir is situated in a position of potential utility in the search for the truth about crime and criminals, and from the perspective of power its mobilization in this regard might lead to prevention of future crime as well as the treatment of Rivière himself.

The fact that Rivière wrote his own account of his crime, apparently unprovoked, makes it stand out amongst other, similar documents implicated in psychiatric and criminological

discourse. It seems, in fact, that it is specifically the autobiographical character of Rivière's book that brought it into relation to psychiatric discourse, and made it a point of psychiatry's entry into the penal institution. From Rivière's perspective, this must have been a cruel irony, since ending his life was one of his goals, but his memoir contributed to his receiving a life sentence rather than death. Other, non-autobiographical documents may reveal an individual's criminal tendencies, but none of these are as useful for discipline as the autobiography. In fact, in the absence of some form of documentary autobiography, power may revert to a purely repressive role.

To illustrate this point, I'll contrast the case of Louis Till, the father of Emmett Till, to that of Rivière. In 1943 Louis Till chose to enlist in the army, rather than go to prison, after he violated a restraining order against him held by his former wife, Mamie, Emmett's mother. He was stationed in Civitavecchia, Italy, where in 1944 he was accused of the rape and murder of an Italian woman and the rapes of two other Italian women. The army's Criminal Investigation Division composed a file on Louis Till, which includes a narrative of the crime, and transcriptions of various interviews in which people testify to Till's guilt, and Till's death certificate. Needless to say, there are serious reasons to doubt the veracity of the testimony against Till, but that is not my point in raising the case. My point is that in this case, documentation was mobilized for purely repressive reasons. In fact, in an insidious development of documentary biography, Louis Till's file contributed to the miscarriage of justice in the Emmett Till case. After Emmett Till's murderers were acquitted of murder, Federal officials pressured Mississippi to convict his murderers of something, anything, mostly to save face for democracy in the eyes of the world. Emmett's murderers were about to be tried for kidnapping when Louis Till's file was leaked to the press, and those charges were dropped. The fact that the

father had been hanged for rape and murder meant that his son would not have justice for his murder.[169] Here biography takes on a repressive role that becomes virtually hereditary.

One thing that is missing from Louis Till's file is anything from Till himself. John Edgar Wideman, who's *Writing to Save A Life: The Louis Till File*, excavates the file, wonders, "What if the person who prepared the Till file to be read by others had decided not only that Louis Till's voice must be heard, but that it must be heard first." He goes on, "Voices recorded in the file have been orchestrated to engage in conversation solely among themselves, a conversation condemning Till by excluding his voice, a conversation not acknowledging, let alone pondering the meaning of Till's silence."[170] Wideman's title indicates that his excavation is also an effort to restore Till's voice, and thereby to restore Till's life to some degree also. If Rivière's case is any indication, Till's voice may well have saved his life, if only by making him an object of rehabilitative discipline.

The absence of Till's voice can be explained in part by the nature of his (alleged) crime. In "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual,'" Foucault argues that domestic crimes, and in particular those that involve the killing of parents by children or the killing of children by parents, were the crimes that attracted the interest of psychiatrists. This is because, according to Foucault, they appear as crimes against nature.[171] Rivière's crime fits this bill, while Till's does not. However, the intrusion of psychiatric discourse into judicial processes is not confined to familial crimes. Foucault's own example at the beginning of "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual'" makes this evident. There, Foucault recounts a case in which an accused serial rapist faced questioning from a judge regarding his self-analysis and mental

[169] Wideman, *Writing to Save A Life: The Louis Till File*, 12.
[170] Ibid., 111.
[171] Foucault, "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual'," in *Power*, 181.

attitude towards his actions. He had confessed to the crimes, but the man did not respond to these questions. Nonetheless his lawyer asked the court, "Can one condemn to death a person one does not know?"[172] In the case of Louis Till, the answer was clearly yes.

There are probably many interrelated reasons why no effort was made to know Louis Till. One reason may have been rooted in racial notions of hygiene. This would have been especially ironic, since notions of public hygiene are bound up with the intrusion of psychiatry into government. Foucault argues that psychiatrists became interested in crime as a kind of madness just as concern for the maintenance of populations spread. Psychiatry addressed itself to social "dangers" that threatened current living conditions as well as future descendants.[173] We are well acquainted with the theories of racial hygiene such thinking spawned. Those racial theories were not isolated to Europe, and even though the United States has its own peculiar history of racism, it is easy to see how some notion of racial hygiene played a role in Till's case. As a black man Till immediately stood out as a principle of otherness that would be suspect no matter what the crime. Furthermore, Till stood accused just as WWII was ending and Eisenhower was eager to have all outstanding cases of crimes committed by Americans against Europeans resolved (which fact John Edgar Wideman returns to repeatedly). So, despite the concern for population security and the need to know the motivations of criminals, Louis Till's usefulness lay not his being punished-corrected but in his sacrifice as a scapegoat.

More generally, though, and perhaps specifically amongst more homogeneous populations, efforts to know criminals proliferated, trickling down from the monstrous who committed crimes against nature to the run-of-the-mill delinquent. Foucault attributes this spread to the development of the concept of mental illness in the 19th century, which concept

[172] Ibid., 178.
[173] Ibid., 184.

recasts madness as evolutionary and "polymorphous." Now no matter what the crime, "in every case one might suspect a more or less serious perturbation of instincts or the stages in an uninterrupted process."[174] The possibility of mental illness underlying any criminal act opened up any and all criminals to medical questioning. Such questioning relied on participation by the criminal or case under questioning. Motives and states of mind had to be known so that mental illness could be confirmed or eliminated. Therefore the examination began to require self-examination or explanation. The intrusion of psychiatric discourse into juridical processes eventually led penal institutions to induce prisoners to produce their own biographies.

Such production is nicely illustrated by the "autograph" produced in a maximum-security prison in Papua New Guinea. According to the social anthropologist Adam Reed, this document accompanies an intake form, or warrant cover, that is part of a prisoner's record, and is therefore kept alongside other documents pertaining to each individual prisoner, including "classification reports, parole forms, transfer memos, punishment records, drafted appeals, and letters to prison authorities by kin."[175] What the intake form lists is certain basic information, including name, age, home village, the results of medical examinations, next of kin, and what possessions the prisoner had when he arrived at prison. The autograph copies the form of the warrant cover, but prisoners fill this out themselves. It also adds several new criteria, such as "favorite food," "favorite drink," "comrades," "happiest moment," "worst moment," "gang," "admired gang," and "girls I like."[176] Thus prisoners entering this jail auto-document aspects of their own psychology. What is not clear from Reed's essay is whether prisoners are forced to fill out this document, or whether they do so spontaneously. Either way, though, the fact that they routinely

[174] Ibid., 191.
[175] Reed, "Documents Unfolding," 158.
[176] Ibid., 162.

fill out “autographs” with candid responses indicates the broader success of disciplinary spaces. If the filling out of the autograph is spontaneous, it shows that prison is automatically understood as a space where the truth about oneself is produced and documented. From the perspective of the prison, such a document makes the prisoner’s motivations available for examination, and might reveal further avenues of management, especially if the answers point to incipient criminal madness.

4.5 Sexuality and Power

The irruption of psychiatric discourse into juridical processes accompanied the growing concern for the heath and management of populations. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault names this new concern *biopolitics*. This concern called for knowledge of an individual’s psychiatric truth so as to discern and manage dangers to the species. We saw above that it was not enough to know the nature of a criminal’s crime and the fact that that criminal committed the crime. The penal system now needed to know details about the criminal’s motives and mental state, to know the truth about the criminal, so as to determine the proper means of correction. When applied to an increasingly broad range of cases, this penal development becomes a new field of disciplinary concern. Biopolitics takes as its task the management of life in all its facets. It therefore intensifies the importance of norms according to which individuals ought to be shaped. Because it is essential to the continuation of a population, sex becomes a focal point for biopolitics. Just as disciplinary power induces the production of biographies to discern latent criminality, so biopolitics induces the production of sexuality to discern those instances of deviance that threaten populations. That sex began to assume such importance is in one sense surprising since it means, as Foucault notes, “we have arrived at the point where we expect our intelligibility to come from what was for many centuries thought of as

madness."[177] Yet the connection between sex and madness in fact explains why sex became that which had to be known. If psychiatry and the judiciary came to see madness as that singular threat to populations—a threat that could operate through, and unbeknownst to, otherwise responsible agents—and sex is a locus of madness, then it follows that sex is that which has to be known and disciplined.

To this end, Europe in the 19th century saw the formation of what Foucault calls a *scientia sexualis*, or a science of sexuality. This science gave a more or less unified from to the widespread efforts to discover the truth of sex. The chief tool of this science, its scalpel or examination room, was the confession. In confession, as in the document, we see another of those sites where discourse and power touch at their limits. "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession."[178] The confession is to the biopolitical management of sex what the statement of motive is to the disciplinary management of criminality. In the case of the confession, the penitent willingly produces sexual discourse and adopts a position of subordination (e.g., the confessor speaks as part of an examination that will lead to treatment; he speaks because it is good for him). So, like the document, the confession is an institutional technique used to produce knowledge that will contribute to the more complete management of life.

Of course, the confession has its roots in Christianity, but its contemporary form represents a significant shift in the purpose of its practice. In Christianity, confession means "to

[177] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 156.
[178] Ibid., 61.

tell everything in order to efface everything."[179] One confesses to no longer be bound by or to one's wrongs, whatever they may be. In disciplinary society, the role of confession is reversed. Now, one confesses in order to compose and preserve the truth about oneself and enter or keep oneself in a relationship of training, both of oneself by oneself and of oneself by others. With Christian confession, a discourse on sex was certainly produced, but it was allowed an ephemeral quality, since what was confessed was effaced through the confession. With psychiatric and medical confession, a discourse on sex is preserved and added to indefinitely, creating an archive.[180] Insofar as it is recorded, in the hands of a disciplinary society confession serves to fix individuals in the web of their own biographies just as documentation does.

If it was not clear from Foucault's discussion of prisons, it is clear from his discussion of sex and confession that power is productive. Earlier, we saw its production of self-governing individuals who brought themselves into accord with norms shaped according to industrial needs. Here we see its production of sexuality, or the essential truth of the individual that infiltrates all activity and must be bent toward more and more specific norms. Sexuality is produced, not discovered, for the simple reason that it arises discursively. Here is an obvious point of consistency between *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The History of Sexuality*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault treats discourse as and when it occurs. This position leads him to abandon the notion that discourse points beyond itself to entities or phenomena. Rather, what can be said is conditioned by the rules of discourse formation. In *The History of Sexuality* he treats discourse the same way. The discourse on sexuality does not point beyond itself to an underlying, actual sexuality (or sex) that finds its expression in language. Instead, the discourse on sexuality, insofar as it is a discourse, conditions itself and proliferates statements on

[179] Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," in *Power*, 166.
[180] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 63.

sexuality. This is by no means to say that sexuality isn't real. As Foucault says, "sexuality is a very real historical formation."[181] It is to say that the real comes out of the discursive and the power relations that relate to it.

In this way *discourse* on sexuality produces sexuality, but as we have seen there is more to the story. Through its techniques of confession and the document, these two-way streets connecting institutions and discourse, power incites the discourse that produces sexuality. So it is no less true to say that *power* produces sexuality. Likewise, *discourse* produces the lives of criminals and dangerous men. But it is no less *power* that produces those lives. Here, then, we encounter a crucial point in Foucault's studies of prisons and institutions. On the one hand, it seems as if there is simply confusion about what is actually causing anything to be produced. On the other hand, it seems as if, in fact, power lies beneath or behind discourse, so that Foucault's endeavor to treat discourse as independent and developing according to autonomous, immanent conditions has to be abandoned. However, neither of these views is correct. As to the second view, we have already seen that Foucault takes discourse to be autonomous while not totally historically independent. In the case of the production of sexuality, this means that institutions can incite a discourse, but the actual unfolding of that discourse, the statements that actually exist within it, is conditioned only by the rules of that discourse. As for the charge that Foucault confuses what causes sexuality to be produced, a response to it requires a better understanding of power itself.

For Foucault, power is related to institutions. However, it is not restricted to or isolated in any one institution. This is made apparent by the contours that Foucault's own studies take. Prisons are obviously sites of power, but then again so are hospitals, schools, and psychiatrists'

[181] Ibid., 157.

offices. Therefore it would be wrong to say that any one institution possessed power alone. Yet it would also be wrong to say that power is possessed by a number of dominating institutions. This is because the exercise of power is not limited to institutions. The example of surveillance makes this plain. Surveillance is the purview of the prison, but it is not restricted to prisons. Prisons are rather a microcosm, even a purified form, of a surveillance that is diffused throughout society. While prisons played a role in that diffusion, they do not direct it, nor can they control it, nor can they recall it.

Moreover, the example of the confession indicates that disciplinary power works through a variety of relationships, and that the poles of ruler and ruled in these relationships are not clear-cut. Power works through the one who confesses as much as the one who hears the confession. That is, "the confessional discourse cannot come from above…but rather from below, as an obligatory act of speech…under some imperious compulsion."[182] The imperious compulsion comes from the side of the dominator in this relationship, but it works to extract a truth that it does not hold. In the setting of the confession, the truth is on the side of the one who confesses. In the confessor-penitent relationship, the truth is then put to work to shape the penitent. So, although there is yet compulsion at the heart of a power relationship, disciplinary power does not function without the dominated person's participation in power. Indeed, ultimately such power aims to transfer, to a great extent, the locus of domination to the dominated herself, in the form of the internal watchful eye that panopticism works to instill in everyone. However, where the discovery of possible, lurking madness is at stake, which is related to sexuality, the internalization of surveillance can never be complete, for if the one who watches is also the possibly mad, the madness may not be discovered. Therefore the technique of confession

[182] Ibid., 62.

requires a perpetual relationship of confessor-penitent where sexuality is continuously said, observed, and regulated to the greatest extent possible in a communal setting.

The root of the difference between sovereign power and disciplinary power is, again, disciplinary power's need to know the truth of individuals. Where sovereign power is content to legislate from the top down, or from a seat of knowledge that discerns right and wrong, and which judges according to actions alone, disciplinary power concerns itself with the causes of transgressive actions. In disciplinary society, legislation regarding actions does still come from the top down, but the increasing knowledge about those to whom legislation applies feeds back in to what is legislated. For example, as certain fields of sexual knowledge solidify, laws about which genders can vote, or whether people of the same sex can marry, change. While disciplinary power aims to shape individuals according to norms, the norms themselves are drawn from the wealth of knowledge that disciplinary relationships produce. The importance of the examination and its accompanying documentation is evidence of this. As Foucault notes, part of the importance of the documentation accompanying the examination is "to determine averages, to fix norms."[183] Thus the norms that disciplinary power works to bend people towards are generated by the subjects that discipline constitutes. While norms aren't laws, they are nonetheless related to laws, and legislation tends to amend laws that have fallen out of sync with evolving norms. Even from the standpoint of legislation, then, the advent of disciplinary power means that the relationship between dominator and dominated begins to exhibit more reciprocity than it had in the pasts of kings.

For these reasons, Foucault makes several hypotheses regarding power. He says, first of all, that power is not held, as by a sovereign, but "exercised from innumerable points, in the

[183] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 190.

interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations."[184] This hypothesis stems from the fact that the exercise of power is spread across institutions, with no one institution fully able to control power. Of course, people can find themselves in positions of domination over others, and so hold power in a sense. However, anyone in such a position is already bound up in a network of power relations, and might just as easily find themselves in a dominated position. In any case, power works equally through the dominated and the dominating.

Foucault also says that power relations "are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter."[185] This is to say that the effects of discipline are to be found in a range of relationships, and in fact that power in part structures these relationships. Yet these other relationships also shape the aims of discipline. Foucault goes so far as to say that relations of power "are the internal conditions" of the "divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums" that occur in the relationships in which relations of power are immanent. Power is that within a relationship that generates an inequality, but it is the inequalities within relationships that dictate what power does next.

The immanence of power to a number of relationships helps explain Foucault's assertion that "Power comes from below."[186] Where disciplinary power is concerned, the dominated and the dominating are mutually dependent. Furthermore, through the increased production of knowledge, power's effects are reflected in legislation. To say that power comes from below is to emphasize these points and identify power with a wide range of relationships in which the lines between dominated and dominator are blurred or reversible. Furthermore, "Major

[184] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 63.
[185] Ibid., 94.
[186] Ibid., 94.

dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations."[187] The mobile relations of force that constitute power give rise to the formations with which the term power is typically associated, and not vice versa.

These propositions lead Foucault to his most radical proposition concerning power: "Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective."[188] This follows from what Foucault's investigations of discipline and sexuality have so far turned up. Power aims at creating productive individuals and safeguarding a population by fixing individuals to a truth about themselves that must constantly be confessed. So power has aims, or is intentional. Yet these aims can't be understood as coming from the decision of a subject, or even of a number of subjects working together. They arise out of the relationships that constitute power. Foucault's move here hearkens back to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Just as discourse produced the rules that produced discourse, power constitutes the relationships that constitute power. That is, the aims of power come out of a set of conditions that power has created, and those conditions shape the relationships that work towards those aims. As those relationships develop, those developments are in turn reflected in the aims of power. Foucault accords a privilege to local politics that is evidence of this. According to Foucault, "the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed (the local cynicism of power), tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their conditions elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems."[189] The interplay of local tactics generates the comprehensive systems of power, and by extension the aims toward which they work.

[187] Ibid., 94.
[188] Ibid., 94.
[189] Ibid., 95.

On Dreyfus and Rabinow's reading, "the fact that individuals make decisions about specific policies or particular groups jockey for their own advantage" does not mean that "the broader consequences of these local actions are coordinated."[190] Rather, local tactics connect and recombine according to possibilities generated by those tactics themselves. Again, the comparison to the rules of discourse formation is illuminating. Just as heterogeneous discursive formations, in their perpetual transformation, form and break relations with each other, which relations in turn condition which further transformations and relations are possible, so local tactics reveal certain combinations and exclude others, and out of these combinations and exclusions new combinations and exclusions appear, and so on. However, while the rules of discourse formation are immanent to discourse, Foucault claims that local tactics find their conditions elsewhere. This elsewhere, though, is the comprehensive systems that local tactics produce. In this way the self-conditioning of power relations is complete. Tactics produce relations which produce systems which in turn condition what tactics appear at the local level. So, just as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* displaced the discursive subject, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* displace the subject of power into a self-conditioning network of relations. This displacement is best captured by Foucault's line, "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."[191]

In a final, surprising hypothesis on power, Foucault declares, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[192] One thing Foucault means by this is that resistance is a

[190] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 187.
[191] Ibid., 187.
[192] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 95.

necessary foil of power, and so is in that sense integral to power's functioning. Since power is to be thought in terms of force relations, it makes sense that a force requires an opposite force to act on, or more precisely, that power would not be power as we know it, with multiple relations and institutions, if there were no opposite force to call forth power's action. On this view, an undisciplined person amounts to a point of resistance that power works to counter.

Because every power relation involves a pole of resistance, resistance is just as dispersed as power. In fact, Foucault describes resistance in language very similar to the language he uses to describe power: "one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds."[193] When put like this, resistance sounds like a kind of parallel or, indeed, Bizarro power that functions much like power itself. It would doubtless be wrong to say that resistance simply *is* power or is identical with power. If Foucault thought this his question would be, in an echo of Deleuze, why power inaugurates its own resistance. Yet this is not his question. His aim is to grasp power in its autonomous functioning and identify those points where it may be resisted. Nonetheless, the image of Bizarro power is a useful one. It suggests possible relations or aims that local, tactical relations open up but do not actualize in institutions or comprehensive systems. Resistance operates along these lines. Furthermore, if these possibilities are actualized in resistance and begin to condition their own possibilities, as local tactics condition systems, which in turn condition local tactics, then it is reasonable to suspect that they would intersect or come into relation with power's own tactics at multiple points. So the image of resistance that I propose here is one of counter-tactics proliferating and

[193] Ibid., 96.

developing alongside, underneath, and around power's own proliferating tactics, and crisscrossing the latter.

According to Beatrice Han, Foucault's analysis of power and discourse in *The History of Sexuality* improves upon his analysis of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* because it avoids a "multiplication of explicatory entities."[194] With *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault "shows himself now more faithful to Ockham's razor by only using a minimal number of new notions."[195] This is true at face value. Where *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is an extensive statement of method and is at pains to differentiate its approach to discourse from other approaches, which involves a seemingly endless elaboration of interrelated concepts, *The History of Sexuality* devotes only a cursory, suggestive section to method. However, *The History of Sexuality* is best read as an addition or supplement to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, or further elaboration of concepts that are to be taken as related, even if only at their limit, to the concepts worked out in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Therefore it is a mistake to say that Foucault applies Ockham's razor. If anything, his work on power represents a further complication of his work on discourse, piling complexity on complexity and multiplying the lines of thought's pursuit.

I argued in chapter 2 that the work of discursive transformation occurred through discursive production, and could be carried out by the subjects constituted and distributed by discourse. Such discursive practitioners can participate in their own constitution, albeit on the grounds of already having been constituted in a particular way. However, chapter 3 exposed the limitations of engagement with discourse alone, and revealed the need for an engagement with the institutions on which autonomous discourse depends. We can now see that the nature of such

[194] Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, 137.
[195] Ibid., 137.

an engagement is not at a great remove from the activity of the discursive practitioner. If resistance is not in a relation of exteriority to power, and in fact functions as power does, but through a different network of connections, then it has the capacity to alter power relations at those points where power and resistance intersect.

A kind of dispersion is at play in power relations as well, just as it is in discursive transformation. Power relations indeed form heterogeneous temporalities, which modify each other through their contact. For example, the slow time of the prison encounters the time of psychiatry and mental experience in a relation of mutual modification. Where discursive transformation called for exposure to other temporalities, so resistance to power calls for the formation of new relations that modify ascendant temporalities.

Furthermore, resistance should be thought at the level of practice, not least because power should be understood in relational terms and as actions on actions. So the resister, like the discursive practitioner, will be a type of practitioner. However, where discursive transformation is effected through the further practice of discourse, resistance to power is not merely the further practice of power. Rather, it is the activation of those possibilities that power presents but does not itself take up. Because of its intimate relation to power, resistance will borrow certain tactics, in modified form, from power. For instance, resistance, like power, will rely on documentation, but employ it to different ends. For this reason, resistance can be thought as hijacking power's methods, and its ends can be thought as counter-discipline. This is not to say that resistance functions destructively. Counter-discipline is still a type of discipline, but it works to constitute bodies and selves other than power has constituted them.

The document's central role in the developments of discourse and power, and its place at the limit where the two touch, makes it the tool whereby the discursive practitioner can resist

power as well. This chapter began with an explanation of how certain practices insert writing into institutional functioning. The writer of resistance can use similar practices to turn counter-discourse into counter-discipline, and avoid being relegated to the merely literary. Foucault gives us an example of what a writer or resistance might look like in his edition of the memoir of Herculine Barbin, and it is to this memoir that I now turn.

4.6 Herculine Barbin

In a manner similar to the collection and publication of Pierre Rivière's memoir and accompanying legal documentation, Foucault edited and published the memoir of Herculine Barbin in 1978, along with medical reports about her case, some newspaper clippings about her, some of her letters, and a fictionalized version of her story. Barbin's story amounts to a microcosm of the workings of disciplinary power, medical discourse, and nascent resistance. S/he was born November 8th, 1838 in Saint-Jean-d'Angély and named Adélaïde Herculine Barbin, although she was usually called Alexina (I'll refer to her as Herculine most often, and I'll use the pronouns "her" or "she" for her, unless another pronoun is more appropriate given the turns of her story). Raised in a very religious family, she forms several intimate attachments with her childhood friends, including at the boarding school where she studies to be a teacher, and especially to the daughter of her host family, Sara, in the town of her first teaching assignment. From a very young age, she experiences pains related to her anatomy, but the doctors that she sees about these pains cannot find a solution, and councils her to simply wait and see. In part because of her confusing genitalia, her relationship with Sara causes her immense guilt, which is exacerbated by the insults of a confessor. A different, more sympathetic confessor advises her to become a nun, even though he suspects that the details of her anatomy would permit her to live as a man, at the cost of an extraordinary scandal. Not liking this

suggestion, Herculine continues with her life, until a worsening of her pain prompts her to return to the realm of medicine. Utterly scandalized by the examination, the doctor she sees recommends to her host family that she be sent away immediately. After yet another confession which prompts yet another medical examination, Herculine leaves Sara and her teaching position. She turns herself in for more medical examinations which suffice to have her sex legally changed from female to male. Now legally a man, Herculine takes the name Abel and, dejected and alone, bounces between jobs in Paris. Herculine's memoir ends with him planning to sail to the United States aboard the *Europe.* However, he kills himself in Paris in 1868.

Herculine is in many ways the product of disciplinary power relations. As she tells us at the beginning of her memoir, she is 25 when she writes it. She therefore brings to bear on her story the kind of hindsight of which a 25 year old is capable. Even so, she claims to have been conscious that she was somehow different or abnormal from a very young age. If she is to be believed, as a child she was already a burgeoning self-regulator who measured herself against established norms. Hence, childhood "did not exist for me. As soon as I reached that age, I instinctively drew apart from the world, as if I had already come to understand that I was to live in it as a stranger."[196] Her own self-understanding of her strangeness only deepens as she moves through the spaces of women's education. She describes her feeling of difference in those spaces variously as shame or "inexpressible uneasiness."[197] When she boards at a convent while she studies to be a teacher, she again has an "instinctive" awareness of difference: "Something instinctive disclosed itself in me, seeming to forbid me entrance into that sanctuary of virginity."[198] Spaces such as schools and convents, which require visibility and work to establish

[196] Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*, 3.
[197] Ibid., 25.
[198] Ibid., 26.

homogeneity, place before Herculine a barrier that she cannot surmount. These spaces and institutions make Herculine stand out as irreparably different. They also place in Herculine the notion that identity is fundamentally tied to sex and anatomy, which in turn opens certain possible behaviors and roles and forecloses others. She internalizes her inability to be a "normal" girl or young woman as guilt or shame, and as her love for Sara deepens, she interprets her place in Sara's life as one of usurpation.[199] She does not fit the role of woman, but neither does she fit the role of man. As she says repeatedly, the strangeness she feels comes from having no place, which we hear as no discursively or institutionally determined place. Finding herself in these spaces and relations, she wonders, "how was I to get out of that frightful maze?"[200]

Throughout her life, Barbin is drawn to religious institutions, and the confession in particular is an exercise to which she attaches the utmost importance. She says, "I could not conceal the truth from the man who, here below, occupies the place of God—the confessor." For her, the truth of her sex appears as an essential truth that must be confessed. It furthermore plays an important part in determining who she is. Accordingly, she looks to the confession as a solution to her predicament. That is, she sees in the confession a chance to fit, or to expel the sense of strangeness that afflicts her. Although what initially drives her to confession is the sense that something fundamental about her being is fixed to her sex, she seeks in confession a way out of her indeterminate place.

Unfortunately for Herculine, confession has the effect of exacerbating her indeterminacy and of irrevocably tying her to her sex as her defining feature and that which calls forth the operation of legal and medical discourses and institutions. This is due largely to the fact that the confession was, in the 19th century, shifting from its religious practice to medico-juridical use.

[199] Ibid., 52.
[200] Ibid., 52.

Herculine's initial confessor merely berates her, but does not insert the truth about her sex into legal discourse. Neither does her more sympathetic confessor, who tells her to become a nun. Yet neither do these confessors offer her the kind of escape that she seeks, and she finds herself returning again and again to the disciplinary spaces where sexed identity determines one's place and possibilities.

Only when she submits to examination by a doctor, which examination she understands as a kind of confession, and only when her examination is recorded and inserted into medical discourse, does her problem find a kind of resolution. Her doctor, in fact, makes the link between medicine and confession explicit. He tells her, "Here you must regard me not only as a doctor but also as a confessor. I must not only see for myself, I must also know everything you can tell me. … I must be able to answer for you with complete assurance…before the law, which will appeal to my evidence."[201] Medical practice sets about to make visible Herculine's body, so that it can know her characteristics and make comparisons to other known characteristics. This making-Herculine-visible leads, of course, to several invasive and uncomfortable experiences. For instance, during one examination, she tells us, "In his exploration, he no doubt pressed upon the spot, for I gave a piercing shriek, at the same time pushing him away vigorously."[202] This encounter, a sort of vivisection, is repeated at least three times before medical practice is satisfied that Herculine has become sufficiently visible.

Accompanying this making-visible is medical documentation that translates this visibility to the discursive register and allows medical statements to be made about Herculine. This documentation offers a thorough description of Herculine's anatomy, as well as descriptions of the procedures of the examinations themselves, which match Herculine's description of her own

[201] Ibid., 78.
[202] Ibid., 68.

pain and recoil. In the context of medical discourse, the documentation on Herculine, the results of her medical examinations, are immediately put to use to identify what her sex is, the truth about her sex, as well as to place her in comparison to others like her. During her first examination, her doctor is unable to reconcile the visible and the discursive, so "Sentences escaped from his throat by fits and starts, as if her were afraid to let them out."[203] However, as more visibility is collected in documentary form, a discursive determination regarding Herculine's true sex can be made. Hence we read, "We can now conclude and say: Alexina is a man, hermaphroditic, no doubt, but with an obvious predominance of masculine sexual characteristics. In its essential features, his history is almost the exact reproduction of a case that is related by Marc in the article "Hermaphrodite"…."[204]

The documentation about Herculine then enters into relation to legal discourse. In fact, in keeping with her penchant for confession and her desire for some way out of the maze entrapping her, Herculine presents herself to a prelate and brings with her the "voluminous report" of her doctors.[205] Before legal discourse can determine her legal status, though, it requires further medical examination (of the kind described above) and further medical documentation. Finally, the convergence of medical discourse and legal discourse produces a new statement: "in conformity with the report to which [Herculine's court-ordered medical examination] led, the civil court of [Saint-Jean-d'Angély] ordained that a rectification be made on the civil registers, which meant that I was to be entered there as belonging to the masculine sex, and at the same time I was to be given a new first name…."[206] So, after all, Herculine escapes her indetermincay. Yet the result is that she exchanges a maze of uncertain power

[203] Ibid., 69.
[204] Ibid., 128.
[205] Ibid., 87.
[206] Ibid., 89.

relations for one that singles out her sex as the root of her identity, then sets about constructing for her an identity around voluminous medical documentation that serves as her biography. In other words she becomes chained to a discursive determination of those very features whose indeterminacy had heretofore left her without a place or role. Her fate seems to be one of escaping the frying pan to fall into the fire.

Yet the existence of Barbin's memoir suggests a third option, an option of discursive resistance or of counter-discipline, through which the techniques of disciplinary power are turned against the fixing of identity and used instead to work oneself out of that identity. Like Pierre Rivière, Herculine writes her own story. Also like Rivière, she does so with an eye to death. We frequently hear from Herculine pleas for her death such as, "Oh, death! Death will truly be the hour of deliverance for me! Another wandering Jew, I await it as the end of the most frightful of all torments!!!"[207] Her memoir is in this light a kind of suicide note. One reading might be that suicide is an ultimate form of transformation, and her memoir helps her accomplish that.

However, her memoir is discursively transformative as well. Both Rivière's and Herculine's memoirs end up taking their places in the broader medico-juridical discourse. Although they work, in the discourses they become part of, to cement the relationship between legal discourse and psychiatric or medical discourse, both writers submit themselves to a transformative production that is beyond their control. In that sense their work amounts to a sacrifice. In turning their lives into writing, Rivière and Barbin expose themselves to unforeseen and unforeseeable developments. Moreover, their writing is not relegated to the discourse on literature, as Roussel and Sade's works are, because it is taken up by and works to recondition a

[207] Ibid., 93.

discourse bound up with power relations and the production of individuals. Which is to say that their writing remains at the level of the discourses to which it directly relates.

Barbin's memoir suggests another use of documentation as well. This use is letter writing and the forging of a relationship that, while mimicking in some ways a power relationship, nonetheless resists power's aims. Amidst the turmoil of her various confessions and examinations, Herculine notes, only briefly, that she wrote frequent letters to Sara. She says that, after breakfast, "I would go and write down my intimate thoughts of each day, my impressions, my regrets; they were all intended for Sara, who for her own part sent me regularly once a week a long letter that I devoured in the silence of my nights."[208] Unfortunately, she does not divulge details about her thoughts, impressions, or regrets, nor does she relate what Sara had to say in response. Perhaps these were more or less idle love letters. Perhaps Herculine and Sara offered each other mutual council. We know that the two had discussed running away together.[209] Perhaps their letters imagined their future together. In any case, Herculine and Sara's relationship was above all one of *friendship*, in which what is written by one is taken up by the other and developed in a written response.

In an interview from 1981, published as "Friendship as a Way of Life," Foucault says of homosexual relationships, "The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex" but to ask, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?"[210] It is obvious that Herculine's letters to Sara were a reprieve from the unrelenting search for the truth of her sex, a search in which she participated and which she in fact precipitated. Their letters back and forth can be seen as a kind of mutual exposure in the form of

[208] Ibid., 63.
[209] Ibid., 52.
[210] Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, 135.

self-documentation. This exposure, furthermore, forges something new. The purpose of Herculine and Sara's letters was not to fix their identities, but to wager identity. Accordingly, if disciplinary power seeks to determine one's identity so as to better mold productive individuals in a regulated, hygienic society, friendship is counter-disciplinary because, through techniques shared with discipline, it exposes one's identity and works, at the level of conditions, to alter what one is.

We know the outcome of the search for the truth of Herculine's sex. What remains to be explored is the possibility opened by her friendship with Sara. Here we see two people who are constituted discursively (as either a woman or one who has no place) and emerge from a network of power relations with their attendant techniques. So constituted, the two enter into a relationship that takes up and continuously modifies these determinations. Their efforts rebound on the broader play of power relationships and rules of discourse formation, and are rebounding still on these relationships and rules. Herculine's case thrusts the problem of the intersex onto medical discourse and the constitution of disciplinary spaces. Yet this rebounding or conditioning, in their case, cuts short their friendship. The key to Foucault's ethics, as I see it, is to maintain such ongoing, transformative friendships. It is to use the tools of discipline to undo disciplining. It is to use these tools on oneself as one has been constituted to see and be otherwise, to dissolve the hegemonic effects of identity, and to make possible new and different statements and ways of being. Reflection on these practices leads Foucault to ancient ethics and the care of the self.

CHAPTER 5. SELF-WRITING AND COUNTER-DISCIPLINE

5.1 Introduction

Archaeology revealed the way in which the subject can become the site of discursive exposure, generating new statements that bring heterogeneous discursive formations into contact with one another and alter their rules of formation. Such alteration promises effects that go beyond the merely subjective, since Foucault takes statements to be like mathematical functions, where a change in the value of one variable necessarily changes the values of other variables involved as well. Furthermore, since discursive formations are, to continue the mathematical analogy, higher-order functions in which statements act as variables, a change in the value of a statement will change the values of other statements in the same formation. Therefore new statements not only redistribute subject positions or enunciative modalities, they redistribute the very objects that discourse constitutes.

However, the promise of discursive transformation is cut short by the institutions on which discourse, in its autonomous unfolding, nonetheless depends. Institutions work to make bodies visible so that they may be disciplined and their usefulness maximized. Although discipline develops according to conditions that aren't those of discourse, it nonetheless folds discourse into its operation at certain points. In this way, disciplinary power brings itself into contact with those discourses that promote its aims, and renders those that threaten it inert, or at least leaves them to operate in a vacuum. Radical writing that shows the limits of established discourses and works to transform them at their limits is often thereby neutered, as in the cases of Raymond Roussel and the Marquis de Sade, whose works end up assigned to the space of literature, from which they are unable to reconnect to those discourses that give rise to them.

The potential effects of radical writing are further warded off by the kinds of subjects that disciplinary power produces. The self-regulating subjects that come out of institutions are unlikely to be seduced by the apparent madness of radical literature because they have been taught suspicion of the unproductive and the irrational to the extent that they have thoroughly internalized reason's exclusions. Still, writing's transformative potential is not completely lost or captured. Because the subjects of discipline are called to perpetually produce the truth of their sexuality, and to expose it to medical, psychiatric, and legal discourse, they are equipped with disciplinary methods that can be readily deployed for counter-disciplinary purposes.

One key to unlocking counter-discipline's possibilities is to take the self as an object of one's writing, as discipline trains us to do anyway, but to insert that writing into relations that subvert the aims of discipline. Herculine Barbin provides the model for this kind of writing, not least because her friendship with Sara, which violated institutional proscriptions, was in part carried out through mundane letters that nonetheless had a confessional tint. Such writing amounts to a kind of discursive exposure. What one can say about oneself is limited by the discourses in which one finds oneself positioned. However, as one writes oneself to others, and as others write back, what one can say of oneself transforms, until one contests the limits of one's discursive position. Furthermore, if one develops friendships that subvert the aims of discipline, even while preserving the techniques of discipline, one can shape oneself, and others, differently. This opens the possibility of the formation of new social structures, which might connect to and foster new discourses. In this way writing, or a specific kind of writing on the self, can bring about the deep transformations that eluded the radical writers of fiction.

This chapter will explore the possibility of self-writing as counter-discipline through the lens of Foucault's last published works, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of*

Sexuality and *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, as well as several lectures Foucault gave on the theme of the care of the self. These works represent a new direction in Foucault's research. In them he modifies his original vision for a history of sexuality, turning now to a study of ancient ethical practices and their relation to subject formation. As striking as this shift in Foucault's project is, it does not come out of the blue. For one thing, his work on sexuality led him to the question of the subject's relation to herself as a subject of sexuality and as an ethical subject. This problem was already evident in *Herculine Barbin*, but Foucault did not (and could not) fully address it in his introduction to her memoir and related documents. However, the problem spurred him to explore earlier eras than he had in his other studies. He turns now to societal forms on the extreme discursive fringe of our own societal forms in order to discover something about our contemporary ways of relating to ourselves. Furthermore, his works on archaeology and genealogy have led him back, late in his career, to a term he abandoned early on: experience. Now, he is prepared to revive the term experience, albeit in a local sense, in order to explain the subject's relation to itself.

In what follows I will first explain his return to the term experience. Then I will develop an exposition of his understanding of ancient ethics. According to Foucault, ancient ethics emphasized subjects' self-formation as ethical agents over the articulation of elaborate moral codes. Several related concepts encompassed this formation, including the care of the self, training or exercise, mastery, moderation, and self-knowledge. I will explain how Foucault sees all of these practices as related and, above all, social. I will also contrast ancient self-formation with disciplinary society's constitution of subjects. In the last section I will turn to writing explicitly, pointing out several instances in which writing plays a central role in ethical self-formation and transformation. Self-writing plays three roles as an ancient technology of the self.

It serves as an external impetus, something like an artificial observer, for self-mastery. It serves as a means of fostering reflection on fragments drawn from the broader ethical discourse and helps a subject embody certain precepts. It exposes the subject to others, who serve as both external observes who induce self-mastery and guides who can suggest improvements to a daily routine. Overall, self-writing takes over the work of producing a biography, but it does so in order to make the self different from what it has been, not to display a coherent self that can be better regulated. Furthermore, the set of writing practices related to the care of the self produce a discourse on the self, or multiple local discourses on the self, that, like any discourses, have implications that go beyond subjectivity. If similar practices are undertaken in modernity, they hold the promise of broader social transformation.

5.2 The Return of Experience

The second and third volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, both appeared in 1984, eight years after the first (and 6 years after *Herculine Barbin*). In that eight years, Foucault's project changed dramatically. Whereas he had envisioned several volumes of his history, including volumes on the "hysterization" of women's bodies, and the "pedagogization" of children's sex, what we get with *The Use of Pleasure* is a foray into ancient ethics, or an exploration of how sexuality was constituted in ancient Greece. In explaining his project's new departure, Foucault returns to a word that has not appeared in his work since *History of Madness*: experience. Of his broader history of sexuality project, he says, "What I planned…was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity,

and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture."[211] From the point of view of the relations between fields, this assertion makes perfect sense. Foucault's work on power shows how discourse and disciplinary norms reinforce one another, and how they constitute disciplinary subjects. From the point of view of Foucault's work as a whole, though, the return of the term experience signals that we are at a crucial point in his research. In *History of Madness* Foucault is openly concerned with the experience of madness. However, he sees his own use of the language of experience there as too totalizing, and his readers have pointed out that it keeps him linked to the phenomenological tradition that he opposes.

With Foucault's late revival of the term experience, though, there is no question of its totality or uniformity. Archaeology argues at length for the local and relative nature of discourse, and genealogy does the same for power. In Deleuze's terms, discourse and power "do not set universal conditions."[212] Instead, "the conditions are never more general than the conditioned element, and gain their value from their particular historical status."[213] If what power and discourse condition is, ultimately, experience, the experience that they condition is always local. This is what Foucault's language of conditions of *actuality* means. Conditions are historical insofar as they transform with what they condition. They are neither atemporal nor independent from their conditioned to the extent that they have their own, global history. Neither are they capable of being traced back to an origin. For Foucault, conditions make possible the actual, but they do not determine it, and they are susceptible to action on the order of the empirical. Experience is always only a crystallization of mobile elements that is bound to re-

[211] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, 4.
[212] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 114.
[213] Ibid., 114.

form again and again. For this reason there is, strictly speaking, no structure of experience, but only structures of experiences.

Foucault also uses the term experience in *History of Madness* to indicate a de-subjectifying experience of the limits of the structure of experience. Such a limit-experience can be taken to imply an outside of both the discursive and power relations. However, the plausibility of such an outside is thrown into doubt by both Foucault's archaeology and his genealogy. It would be wrong to think that an originary, non-discursive and unmediated experience of madness may be recovered, for example. Still, the notion of the outside can be taken as a kind of regulative idea. While the discursive and power relations both condition everything that can be thought and seen, they both nevertheless have their limits, and it is at those limits that they can be contested and re-worked so that what is thought and seen can be thought and seen differently. A limit implies something beyond the limit, and the outside refers to this beyond, although what is beyond discourse and power cannot be thought, because to think it would be to place it within discourse and power relations, and therefore to render it no longer beyond the limits of discourse and power.

Perhaps, in evoking experience again in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault wishes to re-activate this notion of a limit-experience as well. In fact, writing *The Use of Pleasure* was something like a limit-experience for Foucault. He says that, given his three-part understanding of experience, he was equipped, theoretically, to investigate how fields of knowledge are correlated, and how normativity operates. Yet he was not prepared to investigate the self's relationship to itself, or forms of subjectivity. Just as Foucault had to develop somewhat new methods and vocabulary when he turned from the discursive to the non-discursive and excavated the non-discursive in its positivity, he again has to develop a new approach to the remaining

domain of subjectivity. Of his new work he says, "There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one's way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and venture out a ways from there…. Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above. The journey rejuvenates things, and ages the relationship with oneself."[214] Here Foucault enacts the very relationship that he will go on to describe: the relationship of the self to the self. It is ironic because it involves a kind of distance—the self is able to take a view on itself, and to critique itself.

This depends, of course, as Beatrice Han has pointed out, on the self's ability to *recognize* itself, and she sees vestiges of transcendental philosophy in Foucault's reliance on the notion of a self that can recognize itself here. However, it is just as likely that the self that recognizes itself is the product of power relations that install some form of soul—the watchful internal eye that, in the case of disciplinary societies, largely makes discipline a matter of a self-relationship. Yet the question arises as to how this internalization of watchfulness is possible without there being a prior structure of recognition available, waiting to be activated one way or another. To this question Foucault might reply by standing on his position vis-à-vis actuality as opposed to possibility. In Deleuze's words, "power-relations can be affirmed only by being carried out, so the relation to oneself, which bends these power relations, can be established only by being carried out."[215] To speak of a latent capacity for recognition illegitimately reverses the priority of power-relations. Only on the basis of having-been carried out can a self-relationship be abstracted in thought from the power-relations that sustain it. Deleuze casts this thoroughly relational understanding of the self in terms of the fold. He says, "as a force among forces man does not fold the forces that compose him without the outside folding itself, and creating a Self

[214] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 11.
[215] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 102.

within man."[216] Indeed, selves are what they are by virtue of the force-relations that constitute them. But this means that the selves that force-relations constitute themselves exert force, or fold forces, forcing them to realign.

Foucault refers to taking a view on himself. This may in fact be heard literally: he may have re-read his own writing. Where disciplinary power works in part by producing biographies and turning man into a biographical animal, resistance to that power can involve turning biographical practices to different ends. Herculine Barbin's memoir opens the possibility of combining biographical writing techniques with the establishment of friendships that form tactical networks to counter power's strategic networks. Taken together, these techniques amount to a reconditioning through exposure to difference. In his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault alludes to the philosophical importance of exposure when he says, "[philosophy] is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it."[217] This is the meaning of the *essay*, which Foucault ties to the Greek term *askēsis*, or "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought."[218] Foucault's reflection on his philosophical life should be understood as part of an *askēsis*. He is taking stock of where he has been and where he is now, not so that he can discover any lurking madness that calls for a program of control, but so that he can expose himself to other forms of thought and think differently. In the case of *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of the Self*, and the (just published in France) *Confessions of the Flesh*, Foucault opens his work to that of antiquity to see what might emerge from the encounter. Thinking differently is thus more than a merely

[216] Ibid., 114.
[217] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.
[218] Ibid., 9.

personal endeavor. It involves philosophy or thought itself as a critical practice that transcends the personal.

Foucault goes even further, in fact, when he ties thought to being itself. His new program of research will analyze what he calls *problematizations*. He says, "It was a matter of analyzing, not behavior or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies,' but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed."[219] The object of study for these new works will be the way in which certain behaviors or modes of thought became problems calling for further work, both practical and theoretical, as well as the various practices that made these problems appear as problems. This is essentially an ontological investigation, according to Foucault, since being appears to thought as problematic. In Deleuze's words, being for Foucault is not apodictic, but problematic.[220] It is therefore dynamic—*becoming* as much as *being*, if being is heard in the sense solidified by Western metaphysics. To think is necessarily to problematize, then, and to participate in being's becoming. Foucault locates *askēsis* within thought because it takes the self as a problem, and in addressing this problem thinks other ways of being, with implications that extend from the self to society and beyond.

Foucault's choice of antique ethical practices as a domain of research also has a genealogical explanation. Despite its insistence on the production of biographies, disciplinary society leaves us ill-equipped to make our self-relationships problematic by taking ourselves as objects of reflection and sites of work. Barbin's memoir demonstrates this point. Her search for the solution to her existential dilemma led her to particular nodes of power and discourse (the church, medicine, the courts) that exert so much influence on our constitutions. She avoids

[219] Ibid., 11.
[220] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 114.

developing instead her friendship with Sara and the counter-disciplinary possibilities it presents. She experiences herself as a problem, but she lacks the resources to work on herself and address herself as a problem. Edward F. McGushin sums up the self's modern predicament nicely when he says, "discipline, biopolitics, and normalization paradoxically institute a powerful self-neglect…precisely by saturating space and time, our bodies and desires, with techniques, discourses, and relationships which have the goal of taking care of us…."[221] This situation is all the more paradoxical because discipline demands a thorough accounting of the self. In effect, discipline has taken over the work of *askēsis*, adapting ancient techniques to new ends, but hollowing them out at the same time. In order to both explain how the experience of sexuality came to be what it is in modernity, and to excavate techniques that may be deployed in resistance to that experience, Foucault turns to the initial development of those practices by which the self came to recognize itself as a subject of desire.

5.3 Ancient Ethics and Subject-Formation

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault explains the difference between contemporary and ancient morality in terms of the codification of morality as opposed to the development of moral conduct. He distinguishes three aspects of morality: a moral code, behavior in relation to that code, and "the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up that code."[222] The latter two are separated by the scope of the behavior concerned. Foucault gives an example about marital relations. He says that given "a code of sexual prescriptions enjoining the two marital partners to practice a strict and symmetrical conjugal fidelity, always with a view to procreation," there will be "many

[221] McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis*, xx.
[222] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 26.

ways…to practice that austerity, many ways to 'be faithful'."[223] Moral behavior means adhering to this conjugal fidelity, but it also includes the behavior surrounding this adherence. In other words it includes how one comes to view and relate to oneself as an ethical subject.

This relationship is in turn multifaceted. It can involve things like mastering desires, seeing oneself as an heir to a spiritual tradition, employing various techniques to measure one's conduct, and working toward a more general mode of being, such as mastery of the passions.[224] Such moral behaviors or "practices of the self" (*askēsis*) are a necessary part of morality according to Foucault, although some moral systems may place less emphasis on them. Modernity places less emphasis on *askēsis* and much greater emphasis on the elaboration of and adherence to codes. However, other systems, such as those of antiquity, emphasize the development of the self as an ethical subject while leaving moral codes relatively undeveloped and unspecific.

To make his case that antiquity placed the moral emphasis on *askēsis*, Foucault examines several ancient texts related to *aphrodisia*, or "pleasures of love," "sexual relations," "carnal acts," or "sensual pleasures."[225] He finds that they include at most a very general prescriptive framework. For instance, "Astrippus himself advised that, while it was all right to 'use' pleasures, one had to be careful not to be carried away by them."[226] The moral prescription is above all not to be carried away, or to abandon oneself to a potentially excessive force. Sexual activity becomes an object of moral concern because it is likely to lead to such excess. The texts on *aphrodisia* say little more than this with respect to prohibitions. This is because "the goal of moral reflection on the *aphrodisia* was much less to establish a systematic code…than…to

[223] Ibid., 26.
[224] Ibid., 26-28.
[225] Ibid., 35.
[226] Ibid., 50.

define a style for what the Greeks called *chrēsis aphrodisiōn*, the use of pleasures."[227] As long as one met the rudimentary criteria of avoiding excess, one was left to develop oneself as an ethical subject in any number of ways.

Of course, the goal or telos of ethical development was *sōphrosynē*, or moderation, but ancient morality took moderation as an ongoing task that called for significant work on the part of each individual. Where disciplinary power and biopolitics take great pains to regulate sexual activity, and so impose a kind of moderation from without, they do so without concern for the subject's relation to herself as an ethical subject. Disciplinary power may rely on surveillance to make each person a self-regulator, but that self-regulation only extends to the behaviors prohibited by an extensive code of conduct. Beyond that, institutions continue to demand confessional biographies so that they may double down on the regulation of individuals who ostensibly regulate themselves. Power in modern society is thus very involved in promoting certain moral behaviors, but only to the extent that specific prohibitions are not violated and principles of madness are exposed and regulated. By contrast, ancient morality calls on each person to regulate themselves more thoroughly, by developing techniques to master themselves. Hence ancient texts often define moderation in terms of mastery, or *enkrateia*, which refers to "the domination of oneself by oneself and to the effort that this demands."[228]

According to Foucault, the Greeks cast *enkrateia* as a martial struggle of the self against its own appetites. He says, "to form oneself as a virtuous and moderate subject in the use he makes of pleasures, the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the 'domination-submission,' 'command-obedience,' 'mastery-docility' type."[229] Just as a soldier

[227] Ibid., 53.
[228] Ibid., 65.
[229] Ibid., 70.

who seeks to dominate an opponent has a better chance of doing so if he is better trained, so a moral struggle with oneself calls for training or exercise. *Askēsis*, for the Greeks, was heard above all in this sense. It was the training or exercise of the self that allowed one to maintain command of oneself. Xenophon makes reference to *askēsis* in his defense of Socrates when he argues, "if one does not exercise one's body, one cannot sustain the functions of the body; similarly, if one does not exercise the soul, one cannot sustain the functions of the soul, so that one will not be able to 'do what one ought to do nor avoid what one ought not to do'."[230] Therefore Alcibiades is not a victim of Socrates, but of neglecting his (moral) self-training. *Askēsis* is thus related to the broader *epimeleia heautou*, or care of the self, that was a foundation of Greek social and political life.

Although Foucault does not point this out directly, his description of ancient ethics reveals that selves emerge out of the particular relations of forces in the ancient world in a manner somewhat similar to how they are constituted by modernity. In fact, if disciplinary society creates a soul that is the prison of the body, ancient society appears to create an even more confining soul that is constantly involved in a more elaborate fashion in reigning in the body. However, while it is true that ancient society demands a more thorough self-relationship, the focus on a self-relationship opens more possibilities of becoming than disciplinary society affords. Furthermore, behind the demand for self-training and self-mastery lies the notion that the appetites are enslaving. To master the appetites is to free oneself from the enslavement that characterizes the tyrannical person. In a loose sense disciplinary society and ancient society demand that each person become their own private prison. However, what the ancients imprisoned, or rather subdued, were appetites that threatened to themselves become the

[230] Ibid., 72.

imprisoners and to keep bodies in a flat state of the perpetual satisfaction of wants. Individuals in disciplinary society imprison any unproductive, differential, or transformative drives and thereby keep themselves in a flat state of uncritical productivity. Although the comparison between types of souls is fraught because it can only happen from the perspective of disciplinary society, the ancient care of the self has the advantage of opening transformative possibilities. If Spinoza says we don't yet know what bodies can do, the work of freeing them from appetites, rather than bringing them into strict accordance with norms, stands a better chance of letting us find out.

Disciplinary society requires of each individual that they produce the truth of their sexuality. This truth becomes attached to each person like an inescapable shadow, and it allows institutions to cast a wider normalizing net by identifying and managing threatening principles of madness before they manifest in criminal action. Individuals in disciplinary society are thus in a relationship to the truth of themselves, they come to know themselves, but that self-knowledge acts as an anchor or impediment to any interesting development, thought, or ascetic undertaking. The paths down which disciplinary self-reflection can go are carefully delimited—power has too much invested in the constitution of reflective individuals to allow them to swerve and re-constitute themselves otherwise. Indeed, disciplinary society works to bar thought itself from its own critical reflection. It's a wonder philosophy has persisted through its increasing bent toward productivity.

Ancient society also asks people to cultivate a relationship between themselves and the truth. However, ancient society does not think self-knowledge as an inalienable truth that will always demand institutional regulation. Nor is it necessary to confess self-knowledge in order to shed the confessed self. Self-knowledge is not extolled as a good in itself, either. Rather, it is

thought as a necessary element in the formation of oneself as an ethical subject. According to Foucault, "One could not form oneself as an ethical subject in the use of pleasures without forming oneself at the same time as a subject of knowledge."[231] The connection between ethics and knowledge is evident from Socrates' argument that the immoderate are always ignorant as well. They choose, as everyone does, the course that they think most advantageous. If they choose wrongly they do so because they don't know better. On the other hand, if one knows the best course of action, one would always choose to follow it. Where moderation is concerned, if one can be brought to see that moderate life is the most harmonious and therefore the most advantageous, one will also know the need for a knowledge of the self. Self-knowledge is necessary to live a moderate life because one has to know the desires and appetites that exist within oneself, as well as one's strengths and weaknesses, in order to know how to bring them under control. However, this kind of self-recognition and self-knowledge is not apodictic, as it becomes for Descartes. Rather, it requires, as the quotation above indicates, that the self form oneself as a subject of knowledge. In other words, self-knowledge requires work on the part of the subject. One must first work to know oneself, to become familiar with oneself as one is, in order to undertake to gain mastery over oneself.

Foucault mentions the *epimeleia heautou*, or the care of the self, in the context of *askēsis* in *The Use of Pleasure*. He elaborates on the concept of the care of the self in his 1982 lecture series at the Collège de France called *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. There Foucault notes that the notion of *epimeleia heautou* was often paired with *gnōthi seauton*, know yourself. He cites passages from the *Apology* in which Socrates characterizes his role in the city as one of encouraging citizens to take care of themselves. For example, when asked what he would say to

[231] Ibid., 86.

those he meets if he were not condemned, Socrates says he would ask anyone "are you not ashamed for devoting all your care (*epimeleisthai*) to increasing your wealth, reputation and honors while not caring for or even considering your reason, truth and the constant improvement of your soul?"[232] Socrates also says that if he is convicted, the Athenians will lose the only person who encourages them to care for themselves, and at his sentencing he says he deserves reward for "trying to persuade [an Athenian] to care less about his property than about himself so as to make himself as excellent and reasonable as possible."[233] Self-knowledge, Foucault thinks, is only valuable in the context of the care of the self. He says, "the *epimeleia heautou* is indeed the justificatory framework, ground, and foundation for the imperative 'know yourself'."[234] Self-knowledge then, serves the function of aiding oneself in caring for oneself.

Furthermore, in the same lecture Foucault defines the term spirituality as "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth."[235] If one is to know the truth, including the truth about oneself, then one must undertake certain practices that grant access to the truth. It is not enough to possess a certain structure of subjectivity to know the self. In fact the subject must transform the self to gain the truth. This thought, that the truth is not self-evident, or a matter of undeniable clarity to a certain kind of consciousness, hearkens back to Foucault's criticism of Husserl. The clarity and distinctness of mathematical truths don't guarantee their certainty. Rather, the unfolding practice of mathematics does. Likewise the truth of the self is not a matter of self-evidence, but is shaped by the practices that the self undertakes.

[232] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 5-6.
[233] Ibid., 6-7.
[234] Ibid., 8.
[235] Ibid., 15.

Foucault strengthens this point when he says that, given the view that truth requires a transformation of the subject, "It follows from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or transformation of the subject."[236] The language of *access* to the truth is not even quite correct, then. What Foucault thinks is at play in ancient practices of the self is the very constitution of the truth. The truth should not be thought as awaiting discovery, and in fact it makes no sense to think of truth in itself. Here Foucault hearkens back to his writing on Sade, where he argues that Sade's own writing was a practice by which the truth of desire was established rather than revealed. In writing, Sade takes up a certain discursive formation and reworks it, not so that it is free for its own truth, or that its truth is set free, but to reduce the truth of desire to the discourse through which it moves. In ancient philosophy Foucault discerns a similar operation. The self undertakes practices to discern the truth about itself, which means that the self reduces the truth of the self to these practices, and attaches truth to the movement of these practices. Where some aspect of the self such as the appetites is concerned, this means that appetites aren't there awaiting to be aroused, but they emerge out of practices, such as eating or sex, that later become their focus or the objects of their desire. Further practices then attune the self to these appetites, and present tactics for mastering them, which mastery amounts to an ongoing process of reconstituting their truth.

To capture the practical nature of reflective knowledge, and, indeed, reflective constitution of the truth of the self, Foucault uses the language of conversion. In the passage above Foucault says that truth requires the *conversion* or transformation of the subject. In *The Care of the Self* he enumerates several practices of the self. He then says, "The common goal of these practices of the self, allowing the differences they present, can be characterized by the

[236] Ibid., 15.

entirely general principle of conversion to self—of *epistrophē eis heauton*."[237] He continues: "this conversion implies a shift of one's attention: the latter must not be dissipated in an idle curiosity, either that of everyday agitations [or] of absorption in the lives of others."[238] One way in which conversion can be heard, then, is as the development of some method of attunement to the self. The self can convert itself to itself and come to know itself simply by monitoring its activities, paying attention to what it does, and thereby coming to constitute the truth of itself. Part of the care of the self, then, is the development of practices that allow the self to view itself and to track its behaviors, thoughts, and appetites.

So, according to Foucault's understanding of the ancient emphasis on the formation of ethical subjects and the practices it entails, to form oneself as an ethical subject requires exercise or training, or *askēsis*. *Askēsis* aims at *enkrateia*, or the mastery of the appetites. Through training one will be better equipped to subdue the appetites, as a soldier subdues an enemy. *Enkrateia*, in turn, functions in support of moderation. Ethical self-formation calls for exercise of the self to master the appetites and foster moderation. To train oneself well, though, calls for self-knowledge. Knowing ones appetites, for instance, will allow one to develop the appropriate exercises to strengthen oneself against the appetites. Taken together, all of these elements make up the care of the self, *epimeleia heautou*, or the ongoing work of making oneself excellent. However, to know oneself in order to better train oneself also requires the development of practices that form the self as a subject of knowledge. These practices bring about a conversion of the self to the self. Yet the development of these practices calls for its own *askēsis*. One has to train oneself to continuously monitor oneself. There is an apparent circularity to the care of

[237] Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 64.
[238] Ibid., 65.

the self, then. It is not immediately clear how one is to train oneself to know oneself if one has to know oneself to train oneself.

This circularity need not undermine Foucault's reading of ancient ethics, though. Two key points show a way out of this problem. One is the social nature of the care of the self. The other, related point, has to do with the mechanics of regimens that facilitate self-knowledge, control, and transformation. Although one of the chief criticisms of Foucault's ethical works, advanced by philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Thomas McCarthy, and Richard Wolin, is that Foucault advocates an anti-social program of self-fashioning, this is in fact far from the case. The social nature of the care of the self is crucial to its ability to get off the ground in the first place, let alone function at all. The care of the self is a labor. A variety of social relations sustain this labor. According to Foucault, "Around the care of the self, there developed an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together."[239] Communication related to the care of the self took many forms. We have seen already that Socrates took himself as a kind of spiritual director who encouraged people to pay attention to the development of themselves. Spiritual direction formed an important part of the care of the self, a phenomenon that was common enough to be mocked. Foucault notes that Lycinus, aged 40, teases Hermotimus, 60, asking him to act as his crutch and lead him by the hand in his spiritual development.[240] In addition to Plato and Socrates, Seneca and Plutarch address their work to their fellow men seeking counsel in self care. Foucault brings up the point that men, not just boys, sought spiritual direction to show that the care of the self

[239] Ibid., 51.
[240] Ibid., 49-50.

was a lifelong task, not merely the province of the young.[241] However, it serves to illustrate as well the ongoing importance of spiritual direction, which is a necessarily social encounter.

Beyond spiritual direction, "There are the meditations, the readings, the notes one takes on books or conversations one has heard, notes that one reads again later…."[242] One finds oneself already in a social milieu, and, even if one has a friend who serves as a spiritual director, one can supplement that direction with snippets from the broader social world. Even private reflection on what one has heard or read is social at its root, because the raw material that one reflects on has been furnished from without. There were also of course the various philosophical schools, and the philosophers who counseled emperors. Galen recommends seeking out anyone of good reputation for help in curing the passions.[243] This emphasis on spiritual communication amounts to "an intensification of social relations."[244] To care for oneself means looking to the social world that surrounds one in order to develop the practices that allow one to know and train the self. One does not just set off the ascetic circle *ex nihilo*. Rather, one finds oneself always in a social milieu, and as one begins to discern some spiritual need, one seeks council where one can to begin to form oneself as an ethical subject. Such a social intensification can begin at any age, and it continues as long as one remains concerned with self care.

Further evidence for the importance of some form of social guidance to the care of the self comes from ancient texts on regimens of health. The notion of regimen emerges out of ancient medical thought. According to Foucault, regimen was "a whole art of living" centered on certain practices that regulated some aspect of health.[245] A regimen is therefore "dietetic"

[241] Ibid., 49.
[242] Ibid., 51.
[243] Ibid., 53.
[244] Ibid., 53.
[245] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 101.

rather than therapeutic because, like what today we might call preventative medicine, it does not repair an injury but seeks to sustain general health. Several texts offer broad guidelines as to what regimen should cover. Book VI of the *Epidemics*, for instance, prescribes a regimen that covers "[physical] exercises, foods, drinks, sleep, and sexual relations."[246] Diocles suggests a regimen that follow the course of a day.

In keeping with the ancient emphasis on subjective ethical formation rather than the development of extensive moral codes, these texts are vague and leave the elaboration of a regimen up to whosoever endeavors to undertake one. As Foucault puts it, "dietetics was a technique of existence in the sense that it was not content to transmit the advice of a doctor to an individual, who would then be expected to apply it passively."[247] A variety of texts could transmit the need for and basic form of a regimen, but they could not supply the details of a regimen, as today's doctors might prescribe a medicine for an ailment. Rather, one's regimen had to be worked out individually, "properly adjusting itself to time and circumstances."[248] To know what regimen to follow one had to know something about what was good for oneself, what kinds of foods were agreeable, when one had the most energy, etc. As in the case of spiritual direction, such knowledge was to be sought with the aid of one's social surroundings. "It was of course necessary to listen to those who knew, but this relationship was supposed to take the form of persuasion."[249] In other words, a wealth of accepted wisdom was available concerning regimens of health, but to implement that wisdom called for a process though which a subject came to know what worked best for himself. A doctor would not simply tell a patient what to do, either. He would explain why someone should try one practice and not another. A doctor

[246] Ibid., 101.
[247] Ibid., 107.
[248] Ibid., 107.
[249] Ibid., 107.

was another kind of spiritual guide who helped one establish a regimen and assisted in one's own self-care and self-knowledge.

5.4 Writing and the Care of the Self

The care of the self is a social undertaking, then, and while it is in a circular relationship to knowledge, the importance of social relations to the care of the self explains how one might enter this circle. It is with the help and guidance of others, and of certain guiding texts, that one begins to know and labor on oneself. However, what remains to be seen is what, specifically, a set of practices that make up the care of the self might look like, beyond simply paying attention to oneself. Across *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* Foucault enumerates a range of practices of the self. These concern anything from when and what one should eat during each season to what type of physical exercise would keep a man strong enough to produce vigorous offspring yet help him avoid overexertion. What's more, Foucault traces various practices and their modifications from the Greek period through the Roman period and into early Christianity. While some practices stay the same, the reasons given for their importance vary. For instance, vigilance about one's appetites is equally important for the Greeks and the Romans, but while the Romans emphasize self-mastery and self-possession, they use the language of self-combat less often. One technique emerges as common to several practices across these periods, though. That technique is writing. Although neither the Greeks, Romans, nor Christians argue that writing is intrinsically beneficial to the self, or somehow directly promotes moderation, it nevertheless features prominently in several practices that are integral to the care of the self.

We have seen above that certain texts formed a set of loose guidelines for the care of the self. How one took up these guidelines or suggestions depended on individual circumstances as well as the details of one's self-knowledge and perhaps the influence of a spiritual director or

friend as well. In this way writing is at the root of the care of the self in general, in part facilitating entrance into the ascetic circle. Texts advocating particular ascetic (which here should be heard in its connection to *askēsis*) practices or regimens are among the conditions for the care of the self. Of course, the care of the self is more than a set of discursive practices. *Askēsis* is bodily as much as, if not more than, it is discursive. However, because they are documentary in form, the texts to which aspiring ascetics might refer bridge the gap between the discursive and the visible. Just as disciplinary documents partially condition the operation of institutions and their distributions of visibilities, so ascetic texts play a role in directing reflective attention to particular bodily functions.

Beyond this broad function, writing also serves as an aid in becoming and remaining vigilant about one's actions. Xenophon's Socrates, for example, advocates "self-observation, accompanied—significantly—by taking notes."[250] Socrates says, "Everyone should watch himself throughout his life, and notice what sort of meat and drink and what form of exercise suit his constitution, and how he should regulate them in order to enjoy good health."[251] The importance of self-knowledge is clear, and it is important as a means to an end: good health, in this case. Self-knowledge comes from the practice of observing oneself. This means attention to the details of one's daily existence. It also means making comparisons between, for instance, various forms of exercise. Conceivably, this can all take place in the absence of writing. It is easy to remember, without writing it down, what foods have made one sick (e.g., Portuguese octopus), or what exercises one likes. However, writing can amplify the attention one pays to oneself. The disciplinary practice of the examination turns real lives into writing in order to gain detailed and easily comparable information about individuals, and thereby better regulate their

[250] Ibid., 108.
[251] Ibid., 108.

behavior. Self-writing works in the same way to a remarkable degree. To write down details about one's daily life allows for finer-grained comparisons across time. As part of a daily regimen, Diocles recommends attention to "the absolutions and massagings of the body and the head, the walks, the private activities and the gymnasium, lunch, napping, and another round of walking and gymnasium activities, oiling and massage, dinner."[252] Keeping notes on the self in the performance of these activities facilitates daily or broader comparisons with previous iterations. Such comparisons might help one see that one should eat earlier or later, or walk less or more, faster, slower, at a different time of day, etc. Furthermore, writing notes on the self will allow one to better track the tendencies or appetites that one's activities constitute. Comparing self-notes across time might reveal a tendency to favor napping too much. This might inspire the ascetic to endeavor to spend more time in other activities. It has become common for professional athletes to make meticulous recordings of themselves as they train, so as to better discern their own tendencies, positive or negative, and develop or correct them. The fine grain of these recordings, and of the movements they record, is astonishing. For instance, quarterbacks and basketball players record themselves to study how quickly they release a pass or a shot. The self-recording that Socrates advocates is of this nature, only it extends to all of one's activities. It is a technique of self-discipline that is free of disciplinary power's aims.

If writing facilitates self-visibility, it also helps establish the self as both watcher and watched. Indeed, if panopticism is successful in establishing individuals as self-regulators by perpetuating the threat of constant visibility, self-writing can play a similar, auto-optical role. In an essay called "Self Writing," Foucault points out Athanasius' argument in the *Vita Antonii* that says notes on the self can serve in the stead of an outside observer, and can therefore induce the

[252] Ibid., 102.

feelings of shame that lead to corrective behavior. Athanasius says, "let us each note and write down our actions and impulses of the soul as though we were to report them to each other; and you may rest assured that from utter shame of becoming known we shall stop sinning and entertaining sinful thoughts altogether…. Let the written account stand for the eyes of our fellow ascetics."[253] If the ordered rows and hushed silence of libraries hint at a kind of reversal, where documents containing the lives of others themselves become the watchful eyes of others, here that reversal is made explicit. In fact, in the case of self-writing, the document comes to play the role of both watcher and watched as much as those roles are played by the self who carries out the writing. Notes on the self let the self see the self in fine detail and determine what actions need modification. The same notes also see the self that writes them, and encourage the mastery of the self, but from without. Thus self-writing accomplishes a quadrupling of the self, doubling the watcher-watched doublet.

Writing plays a more explicitly discursive role in self-constitution as well. If discourse transforms through mutual exposure of heterogeneous discursive orders, self-writing can work to expose the self to the broader discursive world. To this end, Epictetus thinks of self-writing in terms of meditation, in which the self exercises thought "on itself that reactivates what it knows, calls to mind a principle, a rule, or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and in this manner prepares itself to face reality."[254] In the case of this kind of writing, what one wrote down was not what one observed about oneself, but snippets from the surrounding world of discourse that one wanted to incorporate into oneself and one's way of being. According to Foucault, this was the ethical use of *hupomnēmata*. *Hupomnēmata* were "account books, public

[253] Foucault, "Self Writing," in *Ethics*, 207.
[254] Ibid., 209.

registers, or individual notebooks serving as memory aids."[255] The ascetic would use them to record things overheard, seen, or read that might be useful for one's formation as an ethical subject. These writings would then become the basis for reflection, used as a resource in case one faced a particular problem, or in general as framework around which one could construct one's ethical behavior. As Foucault says, the *hupomnēmata* were more than just memory aids, "They constitute…a material and a framework for exercises to be carried out frequently: reading, rereading, meditating, conversing with oneself and with others."[256] One used the *hupomnēmata* to figure out how to apply truths from the broader discursive world to one's own life. They were a site of exposure, in which a self confronted and grappled with discourse. The self endeavored to figure out how to bend the advice it collected to fit its particular situation. It did so with the intent of changing itself by incorporating the discourse within itself as a guide for action. Thus, as Foucault notes, while the use of *hupomnēmata* was transformational, it was not purifying in the way Christian confession was. Here writing works to internalize an external discourse, not to externalize and expiate an internal discourse.

The internalization of discourse occurs in three stages. These are "the limiting effects of the coupling of writing with reading, the regular practice of the disparate that determines choices, and the appropriation which that practice brings about."[257] Reading is important to the ascetic because *askēsis* requires some form of guidance. Just as one cannot initiate the ascetic circle without help from the social world, so one cannot generate individually the principles by which one ought to live. Reading is important as a means of amassing as much accrued ethical wisdom as possible. However, reading alone does not accomplish the accrual of wisdom, in part because

[255] Ibid., 209.
[256] Ibid., 210.
[257] Ibid., 211.

the amount of books available for reading can become distracting. According to Foucault's reading of Seneca, "excessive reading has a scattering effect… By going constantly from book to book, without ever stopping, without returning to the hive now and then with one's supply of nectar—hence without taking notes or constituting a treasure store of reading—one is liable to retain nothing…."[258] Writing therefore forms a necessary accompaniment to ethical reading. It allows one to select from what one has read and focus one's thoughts on those useful pieces of advice one has found. It thereby wards off agitation and distraction, and allows the self to form around some relatively stable points rather than scattering across virtually infinite readings.

However, while the points around which one might form oneself are stable in comparison to the wealth of disorganized reading one might encounter, they are not fixed as the results of successive examinations in a disciplinary biography will later be fixed. One's stock of useful writings drawn from the discursive world is subject to perpetual modification. This modification is accomplished through the continuous exposure to heterogeneous discourses. The ethical use of *hupomnēmata* does not aim at complete and coherent understanding of a school or oeuvre. Epictetus points out that, from an ethical standpoint, it does not matter if one has read all of Zeno or Chrysippus. What matters is whether one can extract from one's familiarity with a text its local truth and its circumstantial value.[259] In Foucault's formulation, "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."[260] Furthermore, broad reading is more beneficial than narrow, concentrated reading. In one letter,

[258] Ibid., 211.
[259] Ibid., 212.
[260] Ibid., 212.

Seneca refers to himself as a scout, willing to journey to an enemy's camp in search of ethically valuable information.[261] The ascetic ought to bring himself into contact with as many discourses as possible to find what might be useful for his self-formation.

Here the discursive role of self-writing is most apparent. Self-writing accomplishes the kind of repeatability that is peculiar to statements. Of the statement, Foucault says, "it is endowed with a certain modifiable heaviness, a weight relative to the field in which it is placed, a constancy that allows of various uses, a temporal permanence that does not have the inertia of a mere trace or mark, and which does not sleep on its own past."[262] In other words, the statement may be repeated, but repetition always involves new conditions and transformation, however slight. Self-writing in the form of the use of *hupomnēmata* resituates a piece of writing and turns it to new uses, often placing it alongside what may have once appeared as disparate and incompatible pieces of writing that, due to the circumstances, now appear close and related. Thus, in the context of the self at the very least, the repetition and recombination of the already said opens the possibility of new formations.

Pierre Hadot criticizes Foucault's reading of the stoics in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. He sees Foucault's interpretation of the use of the *hupomnēmata* as backward looking, or oriented toward the past, because it emphasizes the already said. According to Hadot, *hupomnēmata* functioned instead as a means of concentration on the present. He says, "Stoics and Epicureans had in common an attitude which consisted in liberating oneself not only from worries about the future, but also from the burden of the past, in order to concentrate on the present moment; in order either to enjoy it, or to act from within it."[263] By contrast, Hadot finds

[261] Ibid., 213.
[262] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 105.
[263] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 209.

in Foucault's reading, "the refusal of a mental attitude directed toward the future, and the tendency to accord a positive value to the possession of the past."[264] However, as I have argued above, Foucault *does* see the use of *hupomnēmata* as a guide to present action. Certainly, the *hupomnēmata* collect the already said, but they are supposed to help one address a variety of present situations. Far from being a glorification of the past, what is written down is preserved only insofar as it might prove useful in the present. Foucault's understanding of *hupomnēmata* is precisely as a tool to "act from within" the present.

The recombination that the *hupomnēmata* bring about and the new formations that they can constitute appear on the page, but they also appear in the life and body of the ascetic. The impetus for the collection of disparate discursive scraps is ethical self-formation. So a perceived situational utility guides their collection. What unites a collection of statements in the *hupomnēmata* is their usefulness for a living person. Furthermore, for the *hupomnēmata* to actually be useful the advice they transmit needs to be translated into the actions of the ascetic. Seneca likens this process to the collection of honey or the digestion of food. He says, "We should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us. … Let us loyally welcome such foods and make them our own, so that something that is one may be formed out of many elements."[265] On the one hand, then, the collection of discursive fragments transforms those fragments. On the other hand, it binds them together to form a new unity. Both results may be attributed to exposure. A self collects discursive fragments from heterogeneous discourses and exposes them to each other in a novel situation, and the self who collects the fragments exposes itself to them. As in digestion, diverse elements are separated from their native provenance and mixed together with a human body in

[264] Ibid., 209.
[265] Foucault, "Self Writing," in *Ethics*, 213.

order to create something new: still the recognizable human body, but that body re-invigorated and sustained. Thus, whereas both disciplinary writing and self-writing turn real lives into writing, self-writing should also turn writing into real lives. According to Foucault, "writing transforms the thing seen or heard 'into tissue and blood' (*in veres et in sanguinem*). It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself."[266] Through the practice of recording and reflection that the *hupomnēmata* assist, the ascetic comes to embody the principles he has found and digested, so that he carries them forward into his life.

As always, though, the self-alloy created through the use of *hupomnēmata* ought itself to be subject to continued vigilance and exposure. To this end, spiritual letter writing becomes an important technology of the self. It serves one function that is similar to that of the *hupomnēmata*, which is that in the act of writing something like advice to a friend, one also reviews the very principles of one's own action. In fact, Foucault cites an instance in which Plutarch sent his own *hupomnēmata* to Fundamus, because he did not have time to compose a more organized letter.[267] However, because they are social, the letter sent might be met in return with some advice from outside. So letters can be both a method of broadening one's exposure to more and perhaps heretofore unknown discourses and of receiving spiritual direction.

The most important function of letters, though, is manifesting the self to another, which manifestation is mutual. In this way letter writing combines both the self-visibility that note taking on the self promotes, and the pedagogical effects of the *hupomnēmata*. It places one's body of writing in an ongoing dynamic encounter. Seneca thanks a friend for his letters, saying, "I never receive a letter from you without being in your company forthwith. If the pictures of our absent friends are pleasing to us…how much more pleasant is a letter, which brings us real

[266] Ibid., 213.
[267] Ibid., 210.

traces, real evidence of an absent friend! For that which is sweetest when we meet face to face is afforded by the impress of a friend's hand upon his letter—recognition."[268] Like a disciplinary biography, a letter to a friend opens one's life, in a virtually bodily way, to outside observation. It is a surrogate face to face encounter that has the two-fold effect of promoting honesty and diligence in one's regimen (the letter is all the more effective as a form of self-documentation because it will be displayed before the actual eyes of the friend) and opening the self to observation from several vantages (the self in writing the letter and the friend in reading it). The perspective of a friend may be valuable in the improvement of a regimen because the friend may point out areas for improvement that the ascetic had missed.

The letter itself takes the place of the face of the letter writer. Especially if the letter contains advice on how to form oneself ethically, the letter can place its recipient under the surrogate gaze of a tutor. Thus, letters are reciprocal in this sense too. Both letter writer and recipient are observed observers, and therefore they should be prompted to modify their behavior accordingly. For this reason Foucault says, "The reciprocity that correspondence establishes is not simply that of counsel and aid; it is the reciprocity of the gaze and the examination."[269] Letters allow the self to examine itself and be examined by others. They exerting a social pressure on their recipients to behave at least as well as the sender.

The examining function of letters meant that letters often contained detailed accounts of daily minutiae. These accounts better allowed the self to examine itself through writing, and they more fully opened the self to the gaze of another. By making a ritual out of writing such letters, the writer was able to keep a constant and assisted vigilance on himself. Marcus Aurelius wrote such letters to his friend and advisor Fronto. In one from 144-45 AD he writes,

[268] Ibid., 216.
[269] Ibid., 216.

> Hail, my sweetest of masters
>
> We are well. I slept somewhat late, owing to my slight cold, which seems to have subsided. So from five a.m. till nine I spent the time partly in reading some of Cato's Agriculture and partly in writing…. 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 Novius and elsewhere—but by swallowing honey water as far as the gullet and ejecting it again. … What do you think I ate? A wee bit of bread, though I saw others devouring beans, onions, and herrings full of roe. We then worked hard at grape-gathering, and had a good sweat, and were merry and, as the poet says, *still left some clusters hanging high as gleanings of the vintage.* After six o'clock we came home. … So we had supper after we had bathed in the oil-press room; I do not mean bathed in the oil-press room, but when we had bathed, had supper there, and we enjoyed hearing the yokels chaffing one another. After coming back, before I turn over and snore, I get my task done and give my dearest of masters an account of the day's doings….[270]

This letter nicely captures several aspects of self-writing's importance for the care of the self. First, it highlights the reading that Marcus Aurelius is doing, and includes some quotations. So Fronto can see that Aurelius is reading widely and bringing what he reads to bear on his own life, down to paying attention to the difference between gargling and swallowing honey water. Aurelius also is sure to note his own abstention at lunch, while perhaps unfairly commenting on other's eating habits. He goes on to include in his letter the very writing of the letter, as if to reassure Fronto that he has remembered to reflect on his daily activities. By including a list of mundane activities in his letter, Aurelius is asking Fronto to comment or advise Aurelius where

[270] Haines, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto: Volume I*, 181.

his routine might be improved. He is placing his entire day under the eye of an outside observer and opening himself to correction.

One thing that is conspicuously lacking from this letter is any explicit reference to sexuality. Aurelius is tender towards Fronto, but does not mention any sexual behavior nor express any worry about either the discourse or the practice of sexual identity. One might argue that, unlike Herculine Barbin, Aurelius was secure in his sexual identity, both discursively and practically. This objection, though, assumes that Aurelius is living in a discursive and institutional milieu that is similar to Barbin's—a milieu that attached a great importance to sexuality and a stable gender identity. However, Aurelius' letter reveals that this is not the milieu in which he lived. The absence of sexual discourse here helps demonstrate Foucault's point that the intense discursive production of sexuality is a modern phenomenon. It also promises that the elevation of sexual discourse is not inevitable. Although Foucault turned to ancient ethics as part of his history of sexuality, and although he is able to explain how ancient practices formed subjects in relation to themselves as sexual subjects, he also finds concerns that extend beyond sexuality to a range of problems having to do with everyday life.

In letter writing, self-writing, and the use of *hupomnēmata* we see the constitution of an entire discourse of the self, or rather of several discourses of the self. These discourses transform, as all discourses do, through the continued production of statements. As one writes about oneself, what one can say about oneself changes, to the point that, eventually, the self that one wrote first is no longer recognizable. Again, like any discourse, these transformations occur with the support and interplay of the non-discursive. However, this support is not institutional in the modern sense. The ancient discourses of the self are sustained by local interpersonal relationships, and their archives are held in the minds and homes of a few individuals.

Nonetheless, like discourse, in general, self-discourse has implications that go beyond subjectivity. If discourse constitutes and distributes subjects and objects and governs their relation, and if it accords certain subject positions the authority to make statements concerning certain objects or domains (e.g., doctors can make authoritative statements about disease, whereas patients often cannot), the ancient discourse of the self, in its local and widely distributed form, has the capacity to make new objects appear or old objects appear differently, and to redistribute authority. Hence the decentralized and ad-hoc approach to medicine that the emphasis on regimen and moderation reveals. Ancient self-discourse constitutes disease and the discourse surrounding medicine differently. It gives those concerned with their health the discursive leeway to make statements about their regimens and the regimens of others. Because the focus of self-writing is predominantly to make visible daily bodily life and open it to correction or alteration, self-writing has a lot in common with disciplinary technologies. However, because self-writing is not bound up with modern institutions, it does not share the aims of the modern functioning of power.

Although there is no question of returning to ancient practices or simply reviving them in modernity, it is not a stretch to see that they present a counter-disciplinary possibility that may yet be activated in the present. In the case of someone like Herculine Barbin, the development of a kind of modern discourse of the self with the accompanying relationships that sustain it would allow an individual constituted as a subject by disciplinary power to remake that subjectivity. The issue for a future Barbin would not be one of identifying the truth of her sex and submitting to medical or legal determination of the space she may occupy. It would be one of working against how she has been determined to create the space to accommodate her. This is not to say that a discourse of the self would allow someone to simply abandon their constitution. Even an

ancient discourse of the self is grounded in prevailing discourse. Ascetic self-writing does not involve just saying anything about oneself and asserting it as true. Nor does it allow for the abrupt contradiction of what one previously had asserted. It is rather a painstaking and attentive practice of constitution and transformation.

A contemporary self-discourse could only develop according to the conditions set forth by contemporary discourse. The selves involved would therefore be the subjects of sexuality, gendered, and disciplined in various ways. Furthermore, the workings of discourse and power are such that they will encounter, take up, modify, and incorporate whatever counter-disciplinary practices of the self may emerge today. This is in part the hope of such practices. Edward McGushin describes this uptake of practices of the self in terms of the formation of new "systems of actuality."[271] However, that hope must be accompanied by a perpetual critical vigilance. No system of actuality will be free of the strategies of power. Like Foucault, we must continue to ask what is going on now. We must also be prepared to revise and revisit our thought as new forms of discourse, power, and subjectivity arise.

[271] McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis*, 287.

CONCLUSION

My guiding question throughout this project has been how the care of the self can bring about transformative effects that go beyond the personal. As I noted in my introduction, a lecture on the care of the self as a project of personal aesthetics led me to this question. Pierre Hadot claims, and I am in agreement with him on this point, that Foucault's exploration of ancient ethical practices was more than history. It was meant to suggest ways of living in the present, or at the very least to have practical relevance for modernity. One way of understanding this contemporary relevance is in terms of a project of self-aesthetics that finds a modicum of freedom from within a network of power relations that have a largely determining effect. That is, if modernity is characterized by power relations that produce individuals who are themselves productive and self-regulating, one way of asserting control over oneself is to make oneself a work of art. On this view, Foucault excavates ancient ethics to find the conceptual tools adequate to this mode of self-relation. The reasons for his return to ancient Greece and Rome are twofold. On the one hand, ancient practices called for a mode of self-relation that can be construed as self-aesthetics. Detailed attention to the self was paramount to the ethics of both periods, and forming oneself as an ethical subject was a prerequisite for participation in public life. This self-attention may be adapted to modernity if it is seen as a way of resisting how one has been constituted by taking over the task of producing oneself. Foucault's comments about Baudelaire in "What is Enlightenment" seem to present this as the task of ethics. On the other hand, Foucault argues in *The Order of Things* that the Age of Man makes morality impossible. This is because man is either motivated by unconscious forces that elude his understanding, or, in coming to understand these forces, he becomes a sovereign chooser who can pick values that

no longer have motivating force.[272] Ancient ethics open the possibility of a retrieval of morality because they do not take man's finitude as the condition of possibility of all knowledge. By emphasizing the production of a self according to one or another loosely defined ethical codes, ancient morality avoids the trap of interminably searching for unconscious sources of motivation. It likewise is not arbitrary choice because it does not presume total self-clarity. Certainly, self-knowledge is key to the care of the self, but that knowledge is not a complete accounting of what the self is. For the Greeks, self-knowledge is a recognition of one's soul as a reflection of God as well as an awareness of the bodily appetites that threaten one's rationality. Furthermore, because one shapes oneself in relation to practices and discourses drawn from the social world, one's choices aren't arbitrary. While I think it would be wrong to say that Foucault thinks ancient ethics can be revived wholesale in modernity, the modern adaptation of the care of the self would share key aspects of ancient practices. One central feature would be the importance of elaborating oneself in relation to shared social knowledge.

However, as I have noted, to understand Foucault's ethics as a program of self-aesthetics is to leave him open to criticisms that self-aesthetics is either a retreat from politics or that it leads to fascism, since all moral norms are subordinated to the personal-aesthetic. While I think that there are many reasons that these criticisms fail, I have nonetheless argued that the practices that make up the care of the self aim beyond the personal in a way that prevents these criticisms from arising in the first place. A further reason for situating Foucault's ethics within his broader critic-transformative project is to address a question that arose at the aforementioned lecture. That question was, "What if I don't want to change my life? What if I am content the way I am?" This question raises the issue of moral motivation again, but frames it differently that Foucault's

[272] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 328.

own critique of morality in modernity. If the care of the self is taken as merely a matter of personal-aesthetic elaboration, it is perfectly legitimate to ask why anyone should undertake such a project. Someone who asks this question can even grant to Foucault that modern selves are the products of power and are therefore the instruments of power's aims as well. As long as they are personally happy, so what? The care of the self as a project of personal aesthetics has obvious allure for those marginalized individuals who seek a means of contesting, on whatever scale, the forces that dominate them. For those who do not feel this domination as domination, the care of the self may not be alluring. Yet if the care of the self is taken as integral to thought itself, then the question of why one should care for oneself in the ancient sense that Foucault reactivates is more readily answered. If one thinks, has any critical impulse, or aspires to the philosophical life, then one should consider Foucault's ethics seriously. For Foucault, ethics is not whimsical self-creation but a key component of the very activity of thought. While this interpretation of the importance of Foucault's ethics may in fact deter as many potential adherents as it wins, it nonetheless deepens the scope of his project and poses a challenge to contemporary philosophy.

I have argued that Foucault's ethics is a culminating point in his broader critical project. I have made my case by focusing on the example of writing, a practice to which Foucault devotes considerable attention throughout his career, and one which features prominently as a technology of the self. Like Foucault's archaeological and genealogical works, his ethics is critical because it addresses the conditions that constitute reality. Still, although Foucault is indebted to the critical tradition of Kant, he takes phenomenology to be one of his primary intellectual targets. Because phenomenology takes the subject as the transcendental condition of possibility of experience that is also at the same time an empirical object amenable to study, it gives itself the never-ending task of seeking to gain knowledge of the transcendental through the

empirical that the transcendental conditions. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault argues that the conditions that shape discourse are immanent to the discourse that they shape. Therefore as discourse transforms, so do its conditions. In this way, he situates conditions alongside the conditioned in such a way that their exchange is reciprocal. From an epistemological standpoint, one may discover the conditioning relations that allow a particular statement to appear without setting off an interminable, circular search.

Dispersion emerges as an important notion for archaeology. According to Foucault, discursive formations are temporally dispersed. This means that each discursive formation temporalizes itself, and that the temporalities of discursive formations are often heterogeneous. To think discourse as happening in time would be to posit a unifying, a priori temporality that, epistemologically speaking, would risk a return to the phenomenological search for an origin. By contrast, the temporalities of discursive formations are open and in a constant process of re-conditioning one another. It is perhaps a mistake to even speak of discourse, because "discourse" thought generally, or thought as a whole, is nothing other than a conceptual space in which self-conditioning and self-temporalizing discursive formations encounter other discursive formations, and where new conditions, and possibly new formations, arise out of such encounters. Hence dispersion should be taken in connection with another notion that is key for archaeology, albeit one that Foucault does not fully articulate. That notion is exposure.

The mechanism for discursive transformation is the continuous production of statements within discourse. This production is all the more transformative if it brings heterogeneous discourses into contact with one another. Although Foucault treats of subjects as akin to variables in a mathematical function, variables that are related to objects, prior statements, and other variables according to the statement-as-function, subjects may nevertheless exert

transformative pressure on discourse simply by producing statements. A nascent ethics is apparent here, since subjects, which are conditioned, finite, and discursively determined, nonetheless contribute to the conditioning or re-conditioning of that very structure that conditions them.

Any optimism about the ethical possibilities that discourse opens up should be tempered, though, when one considers the fate of those writers who have tried, through engagement with discourse, to transform that discourse through writing alone. I have taken two examples of such writers, Raymond Roussel and the Marquis de Sade, and shown that their work is situated at the level of discourse rather than pure language because it takes its cue from the realm of available statements and, through the creation of new statements, strives to alter discourse at the level of its rules of formation. However, what Roussel and Sade reveal above all is that the non-discursive corrals discursive transformation and prevents any radical shifts from taking hold. For this reason, both Roussel and Sade remain marginal figures associated with madness. That is, they are excluded from the discourses out of which their work emerges, and what they write is instead forced into the discourse on literature. Hence Sade's engagement with desire, for example, becomes merely literary, and its affronts to the discursively conditioned truth of desire become little more than a curiosity for future psychologists.

To have real transformative effects, writing has to assume a dual function—it has to be discursive and circulate in such a way that counteracts institutional neutering. Foucault's work on power reveals the ways in which documents already play a similar dual role. According to Gilles Deleuze, knowledge forms in two fundamentally irreducible registers—the discursive and the visible. These two registers do not overlap but touch only at their limits. Documents, I have argued, are one site at which the limit of the discursive meets the limit of the visible. Documents

are discursive because the statements preserved in them emerge according to the rules of discourse. They are also an important disciplinary technology that makes individuals visible. They are in effect written visibilities. As such they help power achieve its disciplinary aims by creating biographies to which individuals are fixed. These biographies reveal the extent to which someone has been disciplined or trained, what further training they might need, and what possible points of madness might lurk within them and call for further regulation. As disciplinary society demands ever more granular knowledge about individuals, individuals are fixed in an ever-expanding web of documentation. Furthermore, discipline induces individuals to produce much of this documentation themselves, or at least it induces them to confess details about themselves that are then documented and become part of their biographies. This is evident from the legal demand to know not just who committed a crime, but what their motive was. It is also evident from the medical demand that sexual details be produced, often and repeatedly, so that one's "sexuality" can be known and examined for possible madness and unproductive tendencies. So documents proliferate the discourse of individuality, as well as the medical and legal discourses surrounding individuals, and they contribute to the functioning of disciplinary power by attaching individuals to their biographies and rendering them visible in great detail.

Herculine Barbin's memoir points to the possibility of turning discipline's use of documents against discipline's aims. Her life reveals the difficulty of establishing a relation to the self amidst discursive and institutional determination. The details of her anatomy and her awkward situation in a boarding school, and later as the lover of a woman, elicit repeated religious and medical confession from her. These continue until the confluence of medical and legal discourse changes her legal gender from woman to man, and she lives unhappily as a man until her suicide. Although her story is tragic, she recounts her fraught self-relationship in

writing. This indicates that she, like other marginal figures, was constituted to produce an auto-biography and was already adept at the use of biographical techniques. Furthermore, her memoir reveals an unexplored avenue of self constitution. She recounts that she wrote frequent letters to her lover, Sara, and that the two planned to form a life together. Although she does not reveal what she wrote to Sara, or what Sara wrote to her, the fact of their correspondence reveals the possibility of rendering oneself visible to another, and vice versa, but for purposes other than those of discipline. Furthermore, exposure again appears as a transformative theme here, albeit one whose potential is not realized.

For Foucault, the important ethical question becomes how one might establish a relation to the self, which relation will itself relate to discourse and power. I have framed this question in terms of harnessing the auto-biographical impulse and the use of documentation in order to turn it to counter-disciplinary purposes. Foucault finds resources in ancient ethical practices for thinking through the problem of the self relation. Ancient ethics emphasized self-formation as an ethical subject over the elaboration of detailed moral codes that would govern behavior. To the end of ethical self-formation, numerous and varied practices emerged that allowed one to gain knowledge of oneself, and that allowed one to, in a social setting and with much support from others, gain mastery over one's appetites. Despite the variety of such practices, self-writing features as an important technology of the self in Greece, Rome, and the early Christian world. Just as documentation does in disciplinary society, ancient self-writing opens the self to visibility and establishes the self as an object for observation. However, in the case of ancient self-writing, it is not disciplinary institutions doing the observing. It is either the self that observes itself and works to train itself to master its appetites, or it is friends who observe the self and help direct the one observed in his or her own training. In this way, self-documentation becomes a

means of exposure to others and their wealth of ethical knowledge. Furthermore, because self-writing includes the recording of and meditation on ethical fragments drawn from the broader discursive world, self-writing is a means of exposure to social knowledge as well. By means of these exposures, the self shapes itself as an ethical subject. The self also, through its social relations, shares its own suggestions, strategies, and reformulated wisdom. In effect, self-writing creates an entire self-conditioning discourse on the self, in which what can be said transforms according to how what has been said is deployed both individually and socially.

Although Foucault does not relate what he discovers in ancient ethics to modernity, apart from saying that he hoped to explain how individuals were led to treat themselves as objects of a sexual hermeneutics, the practice of writing forms an important bridge between the ancient world and modernity. If ancient writing practices were adapted to the present, they would form an important point of resistance to power. Put in terms of the present, self-documentation is counter-disciplinary because it does not aim strictly at making individuals productive, nor does it compose biographies of individuals anchored by criminality and sexuality and interpreted only for those possible points of madness that call for regulation. Rather, self-documentation makes visible all of one's activities, alimentary, sexual, criminal, hygienic, etc. It then allows the self to regulate itself according to aims drawn from a localized sociality. These aims may be organized around productivity, but they may also be organized in terms of health, strength, mastery, renewal, dissolution and reconstitution, or any number of other ethical aims. Self-documentation is transformative in a robust sense because it works at the level of those conditions that constitute subjectivity. Discursively, self-documentation is transformative because it inserts new statements into a discourse. Their social circulation preserves those statements as statements within the discourse out of which they arise, and so they avoid the fate of being sealed off in the

discourse on literature. Where power is concerned, self-documentation takes the self as it is constituted institutionally as the raw material on which to work. It is counter-disciplinary in the aforementioned sense because it transforms this self. That is, having been constituted in a certain way, the self turns one disciplinary technology against discipline so as to open new possibilities for the self's life and the self's very being. By setting up new discourses and quasi-institutional structures in this way, self-documentation can effect a re-conditioning of subjectivity, discourse, and power-relations. Of course, as Ed McGushin argues, the work of such re-conditioning is never finished, and whatever new social forms arise ought to be subject to the same critique as current social forms.

Perhaps the most crucial point of this dissertation is that the self that works to transform itself at the level of the conditions that constitute it is neither a sovereign chooser, nor capable of simply declaring itself other than it has been constituted. It is not a sovereign chooser because, first and foremost, total self-knowledge is both impossible to attain, and not desired. It is impossible to attain because to attain it would require a complete view of the discursive and power relations that constituted the self. Such a view is impossible to attain because those very relations would be at play in whatever view one took of discourse and power. I have argued that the archaeologist is denied this total view of discourse, and so is the everyday person. The same goes for power relations, and for similar reasons. Total self-knowledge is not the aim of the care of the self, in any case, because the self does not give or confess an increasingly thorough accounting of its hidden facets, with an eye to regulating whatever is discovered lurking within. Rather, the self seeks to expose itself only insofar as it might transform itself. Therefore, the self seeks to know about itself only those things that will help it attain its ethical aims. Achieving transformation calls for work because the self is, in fact, constituted in one way or another. It is

useless to simply declare oneself free of that constitution, or to merely deny that one is what one is. Because discourse and power work the way they do, some things cannot be said, and some things cannot be done. That is, some utterances cannot count as statements because of their falsity, their character as non-sequiturs, etc. Likewise, some behaviors will be treated as sites of institutional correction. It is for these reasons that transformation calls for work that re-conditions the conditions that makes selves and the social world what they are.

David Hyder has argued that Foucault's archaeology succumbs to the same criticism that Georges Canguilhem leveled against Thomas Kuhn. Canguilhem's criticism is that Kuhn reduces normal science to a "user's choice" by making the normal that which is shared by specialists in an institution.[273] The problem with this is that it robs what is normal of any normative, or conditioning, power. Normal science becomes just a social fact rather than something that makes possible specific, actual practices and forecloses the possibility of others. As a social fact, normal science can change capriciously. On Hyder's reading, Foucault's archaeology faces the same problem as Kuhn's description of normal science because Foucault makes the conditions of scientific statements unconscious. If they are unconscious, according to Hyder, then scientists at best act *as if* they are following them. However, they cannot be shown to have real conditioning force.[274] That is, because Foucault's conditions are unconscious, there is nothing stopping a scientist from rejecting them, even rejecting them unconsciously, and making statements that are not conditioned by these unconscious conditions. Hyder's argument is, in short, another way of saying that situating conditions at the same level as the conditioned is to deprive them of their conditioning force. With such a move, it seems, anything goes.

[273] Hyder, "Foucault, Cavaillès, and Husserl on the Historical Epistemology of the Sciences," 126.
[274] Ibid., 127.

However, as I have argued, even immanent conditions are conditions, which is to say that they have conditioning force. Both Canguilhem and Hyder are wrong about their respective targets. Whether a social fact or unconscious, scientific norms restrict what can be done and said and still claim scientific status. In Kuhn's case, new practices or paradigms establish themselves only after long periods of time and with much effort and contestation on the part of scientists. Likewise, for Foucault, discursive transformation does not happen wholesale, but requires the gradual accumulation of new discursive relations that slowly begin to re-condition established conditions. As we have seen, such discursive transformation depends equally on the functioning of institutions and power relations. Furthermore, for Foucault at least, social transformation does not happen in such a way that a new social form is so distinct from a previous from as to be utterly unintelligible. Rather, whatever new form emerges does so out of the transformation of the conditions governing previous forms. While it is true that, on Foucault's picture, it neither makes sense to think of these transformations as part of a continuous or homogenous historical development, nor is it legitimate to claim to fully grasp a previous social form on the basis of a current social form, there nonetheless is connection enough between social forms to learn something about a present form by examining past forms. In this way, current conditions can be made conscious, or at least conscious enough that their transformation may be consciously sought. This is to say that transformation is not capricious, nor is a "user" confronted with multiple forms that she may choose between. Social transformation is possible only through a process of taking stock of where we are now, and of working on given conditions to remake them in such a way that they yield new social forms. Far from being solipsistic, this is the end of Foucault's ethics.

There remains the question of Foucault's improvement upon phenomenology. If one of the problems Foucault saw in phenomenology was the interminable search for the origin, or the never-ending program of research that sought knowledge of transcendental conditions in the empirical, then it seems as though Foucault has simply exchanged one interminable search for another. If we follow Foucault's critical project, with the transformative ethics it entails, then we will never be granted a moment's respite. We will be called to continuously observe and evaluate ourselves and our societies, remaining always on guard for those inescapable forces of domination that are our fate. This picture seems as bleak, if not bleaker, than the one painted by phenomenology. Its saving grace lies in its opportunities for thought. Where phenomenology resigns itself to a fruitless search, Foucault opens the possibility of a continual renewal. Phenomenology has become a popular target recently, particularly among the new realists, or object oriented ontologists. The new realists argue for a philosophical realism that takes objects seriously as objects. They reject what Tom Sparrow (and others) call the correlation of mind and world. According to Sparrow, all phenomenology ultimately holds that thought and being are a binary pair, which means that whatever *is* necessarily appears to thought.[275] Historically, this view results in a form of idealism that makes the subject the ground of being. This is, in part, because the real has to be bracketed, and things reduced to appearances structured by consciousness. We are effectively left only with things as they appear, not as they are. The new realists want to get to the things themselves. One of their goals in doing so is to revitalize thought, and proliferate mind-independent reality. Sparrow, though, recognizes that such an approach will not be attractive to everyone. Therefore he suggests Hegelian philosophy to those who aren't prepared to go the route of object oriented ontology, but find phenomenology equally

[275] Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*, 15.

unappealing. He suggests Hegel because Hegel's absolute idealism is about all things in the way that object oriented ontology aspires to be. Absolute idealism does not require any reduction or *epoché* because it absolutizes the correlation between mind and being. On this view, roughly, whatever is is equally thought, and is accessible as such. Something similar is going on in Foucault's critical project. On Foucault's view, there is nothing behind discourse and power. All that is is what the structure of experience constitutes. However, unlike Hegel, Foucault does not hold that the movement of this structure will resolve itself in absolute spirit. His philosophy therefore admits of an open-ended re-structuring of being. Where thought is concerned, this is as little restricted as anyone could want.

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