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“Precipitous existence”: The idea of the limit in Michel Foucault

Roy, Anindyo, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 1993

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"PRECIPITOUS EXISTENCE": THE IDEA OF THE LIMIT
IN MICHEL FOUCAULT

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"PRECIPITOUS EXISTENCE": THE IDEA OF THE LIMIT
IN MICHEL FOUCAULT

by

ANINDYO ROY

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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May 6, 1993

ABSTRACT

"PRECIPITOUS EXISTENCE": THE IDEA OF THE LIMIT
IN MICHEL FOUCAULT

Publication No. _____

Anindyo Roy, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 1993

Supervising Professor: Luanne T. Frank

A significant part of Michel Foucault's philosophy can be regarded as a sustained engagement with the notion of the "limit." Although this notion takes on a complex profile in Foucault, its basic functions can be identified as follows: beginning with *The Order of Things* and extending to *Power/Knowledge*, the limit serves to represent those historically specifiable boundaries that determine discourse, as well as a critical strategy that interrogates the epistemologies mandated by these boundaries. As critical strategy fundamentally related to an historical ontology, the idea of the limit is employed to describe the play inherent in any formation of discursive territory--the play of ever-multiplied terms in which no one term ever takes precedence. This study is concerned with identifying the forms and descriptive phenomena,

as well as the methods, processes, and modes of thought associated with these functions.

Chapter 1 examines Foucault's delineation of the historical formation of the Renaissance and Classical epistemes in order to highlight the role of the limit as a representation of the historical specificity of discourse.

Chapter 2 reviews Foucault's mapping of the Modern episteme in which he introduces the idea of "precipitous" thinking. By reconstructing the boundaries of modernist discourse and moving beyond them, Foucault is able to employ the idea of the limit as a critical strategy. Foucault extends the critical scope of this strategy in his analysis of the concepts of "death," "event," and "phantasm" as limit-setting entities in the essays in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Chapter 3).

Chapter 4 and 5 focus on Foucault's deployment of the idea of the limit in archaeology and genealogy. In these critiques, Foucault challenges the continuist, subject-centered status of historical epistemology and uncovers the capillary relations of power/knowledge that underlie the sovereign discourses of truth.

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ABBREVIATIONS

For the sake of convenience, I have abbreviated some of the key works by Michel Foucault in the following manner:

<i>The Order of Things</i> :	<i>Order</i>
"What is Enlightenment?":	WE
<i>The Archaeology of Knowledge</i> :	<i>Archaeology</i>
"Preface to Transgression":	PT
"Language to Infinity":	LI
"The Father's 'No'":	FN
"Theatrum Philosophicum":	TP
"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History":	NGH
<i>Discipline and Punish</i> :	<i>Discipline</i>
"Power/Knowledge":	P/K

INTRODUCTION

"PRECIPITOUS EXISTENCE"

In her recent work on the "ethical and juridical significance of the so-called 'postmodern' rebellion against 'metaphysics,'" Drucilla Cornell links the works of Theodor Adorno, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida to a common intellectual tradition she calls "the philosophy of the limit" (170). Clearly, the larger issues concerning the philosophy of the limit, which are addressed by Cornell, go to the very heart of the current debates concerning the relationship between "modernity" and "postmodernity" (8). What stands out most noticeably in these speculations is Cornell's omission of Michel Foucault, a philosopher who more than anyone else contributed most powerfully to our understanding of the limit. Throughout the work, Cornell makes no reference, not even indirectly, to him. The main purpose of this study is to argue that a significant part of Foucault's philosophy can be regarded as a sustained engagement with the notion of the "limit." My claim is partly underscored by the fact that the word "limit" appears ubiquitously in many of Foucault's major works, especially *Order* (1966), some key essays in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (1963-70), *Archaeology* (1969), and *Power/Knowledge* (1972-77).

Although some scholars have recognized the importance of the idea of the limit in Foucault, no present study adequately investigates its complex, evolving forms and functions. In her book, *Michel Foucault: Philosopher or Historian*, Clare O'Farrell states:

[There] is a question of an opposition between a world view based on the belief that we are discontinuous and continually changing historical beings, and a world view which posits a small number of general principles valid for all times and places. Which view or which combination of these views most accurately describes the reality of existence? Foucault's own solution to this problem was to write a *history of the limits*, of that edge between orderly and historical systems society imposes upon the world (the Same), and that which is outside, or beyond that order (the Other). (Foucault, vii)

O'Farrell suggests that by writing a "history of the limits" Foucault was seeking a way out of the impasse created by two mutually exclusive modernist world views--the structuralist and the historicist, both of which appeared to be caught in their own binary modes of explaining identity and difference. But the larger concerns of O'Farrell's book lie elsewhere. Her main interest lies in exploring the more specific historical questions regarding the influence of the historians of

discontinuity, namely Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, on Foucault's thought. The question of the limit appears only as an incidental concern; having introduced the idea, O'Farrell fails to take it up again. Gary Gutting's *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* is a comprehensive study of Foucault's project of historical critique. Gutting asserts that Foucault's "intellectual métier, through which he develops all his ideas about philosophy, literature, society, and politics, is the history of thought" (1). However, in his account of Foucault's engagement with the history of thought, Gutting pays scant attention to the issue of limits. Similarly, the works of Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, Alan Sheridan, Pamela Major-Poetzl, Barry Cooper, Charles Lemert and Garth Gillan, Gilles Deleuze, John Rajchman, Mark Poster, Axel Honneth, and Manfred Frank, among others, although providing a rich and compellingly diverse assessment of Foucault, fail to pursue this issue in any meaningful way.

The word "limit" figures most prominently and extensively in *Order*, "Preface to Transgression," and *Archaeology*, but it continues to play a key regulative role in advancing the theoretical positions Foucault enumerates in "Nietzsche, Genealogy History" and *Power/Knowledge*. My study argues that despite its seeming simplicity as an idea, the limit takes on a complex, unthematized profile in Foucault's philosophy, and is delineated across a constellation of interrelated ideas, all crucially linked to Foucault's larger critical enterprise of advancing a

new historical ontology. The main purpose of this study is to show how the limit originates in a work like *Order* as both a historically specifiable entity and as a defining critical strategy that allows that specificity to be interrogated. As Foucault's critical philosophy continues to develop, both of these functions are subsumed within a larger, more comprehensive critical paradigm. In fact, beginning with Foucault's discussion of the modern episteme in *Order*, these two functions become mutually interdependent and the critical paradigm that arises out of this interactive relationship provides a singularly powerful view of Foucault's originality and power as a strategist of philosophical thinking.

As a historically specifiable entity, the limit points to those boundaries that surround discourse, making possible the identification of historical identity and difference, and of the territories they circumscribe. These limits operate both at the micro and macro level of discourse: they are the fundamental limit-setting conditions within which each discourse defines its own the sign system, but they also consolidate larger discursive territories and give rise to specific positivities. As critical strategy, the limit goes far beyond merely providing a synoptic view of the structures of discourse; as Foucault identifies these boundaries and reviews the systems of knowledge they circumscribe, he discovers that these boundaries often become the sites for questioning the nature and function of the bounded condition of knowledge. It is on these edges that the idea of

the limit functions as a critical strategy, enabling one to move beyond the regulated and regulating space of knowledge defined by these systems and allowing discourse to be seen in terms of the play of limits, a play of terms in which no one term ever takes precedence. Thus, in an important sense, the identification of particular limits leads to a disjoining of the seams that hold a discourse together, making possible the recovery of those complex alignments that undergird the latter's ontological being. More significantly, such a strategy of identification and dislocation reflects, and also concretizes, Foucault's attempt to define a kind of "precipitous thought," and helps to consolidate his epistemological challenge to the naturalized spaces contained by philosophical thinking, including those held together by the unquestioned alliance between scientific epistemology and philosophical ontology in the history of thought.

At the most general level, then, this study is concerned with identifying the forms and descriptive phenomena, and the methods, processes, and modes of thought associated with the idea of the limit, and with mapping out their multiple functions within the large and complex body of thought developed in *Order*, in *Archaeology*, in essays such as "Preface to Transgression," "Language to Infinity," "The Father's No," and "Theatrum Philosophicum" (*Language, Countermemory, Practice*), and in *Power/Knowledge*. I attempt to do this with the full knowledge that the rich and multi-faceted texture of Foucault's thought

cannot be reduced to a single, systematic dimension by being placed against an idea that is itself so mobile and multiple. Indeed, the different manifestations of the idea of the limit cannot be regularized or thematized in a rigidly linear manner, nor can this notion be characterized as originating from a single and pure source. Foucault's theories are too contaminated by the idea of the multiplicitous nature of history and the provisional nature of all critical thought to retain an idea in its pure, a-historical form. I want to suggest that the limit becomes a machine for moving one's understanding of Foucault into specific places; often, this is achieved through a series of recursive movements that become part of Foucault's intricate design of argument.

One recognizes that the idea of the limit is not unique to Foucault; its philosophical source can be located in the larger intellectual concerns that Foucault shares with the other radical thinkers of this century, including Heidegger, Lacan, Derrida, and the Frankfurt School theorists. Heidegger's critique radicalizes our understanding of Being by positing *Dasein* as something that "always already surpasses a boundary which stretches out in front of itself [and] accedes to a limit/nonlimit in terms of which a classical notion of the subject is disarticulated" (Rapaport 95). In his study of human subjectivity, Lacan enumerates the always-evasive limits between the Unconscious and Language as Law, limits that break and constitute the singularity of the "I." Derrida's thought plays

with the limits of "écriture," which are seen to mark and exceed the territory of the centered, metaphysical text and to give rise to the differential movement that itself constitutes meaning. Influenced by Marxism, the Frankfurt School theorists, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer, examine the epistemological and cultural implications of the "Enlightenment rationality" as it gave rise to the the boundaries that transformed that rationality into "instrumental reason" and empowered it to present itself as centered rationality.

The thought of the limit that informs the theories of these thinkers is, to a large extent, based on their mutually-shared problematization of "metaphysics," and on their understanding of how metaphysical thinking influences, structures, installs, and mandates specific boundaries for recognizing itself and positing its own truth. It should be noted that, because the ideas of the limit that propel the trajectory of thought and constitute the discourse on the problematics of philosophy and truth in each thinker are determined by their distinctive inscription within *specific* sites of metaphysics, the emergent philosophies of the limit are not isomorphous. The specific theoretical site from which Foucault initiates his historical inquiry into the limit in a work like *Order* is the "philosophical text" that, in a fundamental sense, has undergirded the semiotic systems of Western discourse. Like Heidegger, Foucault operates on and from the space of this text, but unlike the former, he situates it within the frame of a specific retrospective history. This

history is the site on which he contests the historical and philosophical bases of modern epistemology. Fredric Jameson's definition of the past explains the nature and function of this retrospective history: he claims that the past is that which "must begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question" ("Marxism" 157). History, as retrospectively posited, is a vital part of the thought of the limit in Foucault, leading to a historically positioned understanding of the boundaries that constitute history itself--an understanding that acknowledges that we are, indeed, historical agents marked by the difference that history introduces in the horizons of our epistemologies and in the objects posited by these epistemologies. The thought of the limit not only raises the question of historical difference, but also pursues the possibility of recovering how the knowledge of those differences emerge from the conditions of existence of discourse themselves. However, since these conditions are also regulated within the relatively mobile and unstable forms of finitude, they point to an order beyond a fixed epistemological center.

In the following sections I will provide the reader with a sense of the rich, diverse, and compelling nature of Foucault's thought of the limit by offering some key perspectives on this topic. The ensuing overview also represents the larger direction in which my study proceeds. Given its complex evolution, it is interesting to note that the idea of the limit takes root in a

rather interesting notion Foucault introduces in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), a work published before *Order*. The notion is that all epistemological domains are circumscribed by relations of boundaries across which the language and space of specific discourses are circumscribed. By exploring the links between the figures of pain and the surrounding body of pathological knowledge, this work describes the emergence of "medical knowledge" in the eighteenth century (*Birth* x-xi). Medical knowledge is both a function of a language and a space--"the space in which bodies and eyes meet"; the epistemological function of this language, by virtue of its alliance with this space, is to define "the relation of [the pathological] situation and attitude to what is speaking and what is spoken about" (*Birth* xi). The epistemological gaze is the *objectifiable* field of pathology; it is a gaze that comes into being by fixing boundaries between the knower and the "field" of the known. However, despite this underlying perspective, Foucault makes no conscious effort to further elaborate the idea of the limit in this work.¹

It is in the history of philosophical thought described in *Order* that this idea is articulated and developed with great complexity and precision. Attaining a breadth and range that has been rarely matched by any other single conceptual construct, Foucault's understanding and delineation of the idea of the limit in *Order* becomes the focus of a retrospective history, developing out of his fundamental concern to reveal the

"positive unconscious" of Western philosophical discourse (*Order xi*). This understanding rests on Foucault's identification of the boundaries that gave rise to specific inscriptions of discourse, referred to as "positivities." But the strategic use of the limit becomes evident when we realize that Foucault's critical purpose in delineating this "positive unconscious" of discursive formations is to go beyond seeing the limit as the principle of order and differentiation; it is to define a new status of the limit that radically exceeds this principle.

One can better understand the two functions by looking closely at the manner in which Foucault connects them in *Order*. He explains that the limit gives rise to specifiable territories that mandate specific discursive practices. These practices, in turn, mark the epistemological conditions within which the differences between discourses are known and projected on to an objectifiable field. In this way, Foucault is able to utilize the idea of the limit to introduce the problematics of historical understanding, so crucial to the formation of this history, and indeed, to the very possibility of positing this history. Thus the issue of historical understanding becomes the basis on which Foucault redefines the status of philosophical limits.

Foucault's main purpose in *Order* is to clarify that, since all knowledge systems are dependent on the play of limits within the positive unconscious, historical order is given to theoretical knowledge (*savoir*) in specific ways. Indeed, the

very act of positing a retrospective history in the present in order to know the past is determined by the existence of certain thresholds in which the position of the knowing subject is concretized. These thresholds always point to the space beyond the ordered systems of discourse, and in doing so, potentially subvert their self-enclosed nature and allow for the recovery of those strategic and "constructed" relations of practice which continually disrupt the assumed uniformity of philosophical epistemology. Not only does Foucault discern the common constructions within each epistemic formation as products of certain alignments of the limits of philosophical practice, but he also discovers that these alignments are often elided by philosophy. In fact, philosophy maintains its power to think itself only in relation to the truth that its neutral objectivity mandates.

The first two chapters concentrate on Foucault's history of philosophical discourse, specifically, on his plotting of the limits of the three epistemes--the Renaissance, Classical, and Modern, and on his identification of what they do and of the territories they constitute. Chapter one pays special attention to Foucault's detailed enumeration of the Renaissance and Classical epistemes in *Order*, and concentrates on his analysis of their dominant epistemologies as they are linked to their positive unconscious. As Foucault shows, the limits of discourse come into being, not within an uniformly universal or unchanging, isomorphous range of bodies of knowledge

representing life, labor, and language, but within the very conditions of their existence as "practices." In his analysis of the Renaissance episteme, Foucault highlights the role of the limit in establishing the conditions of similitude across which the entire continuum of the Renaissance world was held. Renaissance exegesis and the interpretation of texts were guided by the conditions of the world "fold[ing] in upon itself, duplicat[ing] itself, reflect[ing] itself, or form[ing] a chain with itself so that things can resemble one another" (*Order* 25-26). These practices had no place for a detached analytic epistemology, that only comes into existence in the classical episteme. In his analysis of the classical episteme, Foucault points to the role of the limit in defining the order of "representation," an order that ruptured the continuum of the Renaissance and installed a binary system in which the "analytic consciousness" became the epistemological center and the represented world became the ontological circle in which objects were ordered and named. The discursive practices of "speaking," "classifying," and "exchange," regulated the limits that the order of representation had instituted within the entire sign system of the classical episteme.

Chapter two reviews Foucault's delineation of the limits of the discourses of life, labor, and language within the modern episteme and demonstrates how the problematics of contemporary epistemology are brought into new critical focus at the site most familiar to modern thought--man. Such an approach

highlights the close relationship between Foucault's deployment of the limit as a descriptive entity and as critical strategy. Close attention will be paid to Foucault's analysis of finitude, including his speculations about the relationship of language to "precipitous thought," both of which will be linked to his larger critical enterprise of questioning the negotiated status of modern epistemology. In addition, Foucault's view of the human and the counter sciences as occupying a highly dynamic space within the order of modern finitude will be examined in the light of his theory that the limit is the locus of the unthought that modern thought always seeks to stabilize. He claims that, as critical strategy to be adopted by the post-modern consciousness, the limit points to a "void"-- a "precipitous" edge--that, even as it disrupts the certainties of modern epistemology, leads to the "renewal" of the "process of thinking" outside the philosophical continuum (*Order* 236). In short, this void is a strategic site beyond the limits of modernity, but it is not an empty space or "lacuna," but a new threshold condition, which Foucault contends, frees thought from the rigid limit-setting boundaries of philosophy (*Order* 300), and allows for the tracking of the endless play of limits within the larger domain of culture. Here, in the final sections of *Order*, the thought of the limit is carried to the point where the stabilizing forces exercised in philosophy are finally disrupted, leading the way for a radical reconceptualization of

the very foundations of historical and philosophical epistemology.

Chapter three assesses four essays from *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, namely, "Preface to Transgression," "Language to Infinity," "The Father's No," and "Theatrum Philosophicum," in order to investigate how Foucault's questions concerning modernity, and the thought of the limit that it mandates, take specific shape as he gradually abandons the retrospective historical perspective of *Order* and settles on disrupting the modern philosophical assumptions of humanism by speculating on the notions of "death," and "event." As commentaries and meditations on the works of writers like Bataille, Blanchot, Artaud, and Deleuze, these essays constantly problematize the idealist notion of the limit as a static line of binary differentiation. Once again, by deploying the idea of the limit as a strategy, Foucault realizes the inherent mobility and play within philosophical thought, thereby opening up the possibility of transgressing such thought and establishing new identities within its enclosures.

Returning to the problematics of the historical reconstruction of modern philosophical discourse--especially the human sciences--chapters four and five review the theories of archaeology and genealogy, where the question of the limits of epistemology raised in the concluding section of *Order* is amplified and developed along new lines. In *Archaeology*, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," and *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault

takes account of the precipitous relationship between the conditions of present knowledge and the positivities within which the objects of knowledge are brought into being. These objects are now defined as "history," and "power." He, thus, interrupts the traditional, continuist status of historical epistemology as well as its complicitous relations with the philosophical imperatives informing the discourses of "power" and "individual right." This leads to a radical re-questioning of the received historical and philosophically-conceived "ontologies" of culture. It becomes increasingly clear that the questioning of ontology is itself made possible by, and makes possible, a certain understanding of the idea of the limit, suggesting that the limits of discourse are both determined by and determinants of the powerful sites of culture, and that while they give rise to culture's objective being and determine their epistemologies, the power formations within discourse are reciprocally responsible for the form and distribution of limits.

Both archaeology and genealogy, pose questions about historicity and the relations of power underlying the cultural formations of truth and reason, ideas that had remained inadequately developed in *Order*. Providing a series of coordinates across which one can read off and better comprehend Foucault's larger questions regarding the epistemologies of culture, such interrogation is a continuation of what Foucault himself initiated in his historical study of the modern episteme and the modern human sciences. His position that *what we know*

is also the *limit* of what we know, and that *how* we know is also the *limit* of how we know unfolds in new and interesting ways in Foucault's archaeological and genealogical critiques. Not only is history a plural site where a culture recognizes its objects and gives meaning to them, but this plurality reflects the power of interrelated schemas and discursive settings to establish the "truth" of that history.

As chapter four attempts to show, archaeology posits the idea of historical a-priori, where the limit-conditions inherent in historical understanding always oppose the principle of cohesion within "the philosophy of history" and "the rationality or teleology of historical development" (*Archaeology* 11). History is a highly ramified and reticulated discourse, structured by relations between different "series, divisions, differences of level, shifts, chronological specificities" (*Archaeology* 10). This reticulated history shows that historical differences have their own, distinctive origins, and cannot be subsumed under a unified and teleological continuum. Such an approach transforms a history that "was secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject" (*Archaeology* 14) to a history in which one "define[d] a particular site by the exteriority of its vicinity" (*Archaeology* 17). In fact, this "exteriority" is not a function of a simple binary opposition between the inside and the outside, but is a conceptual figuration of the conditions in which the economy of

binarism is instituted. Foucault takes up this problem in his genealogy.

Chapter five deals with Foucault's genealogical critique, where he reconstructs the binary limits within the humanist discourses of sovereign power and right by defining the "counter-memory" of history. By re-situating the limits of these discourses within the multiple productive and reproductive domain of "power/knowledge," he radically alters their centered, idealist constitution. Such a critical move also reconstitutes the ontological status of culture, revealing it as a body marked as a discursive entity and making that ontology a site of contestatory power. As Foucault asserts in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol.1:

[W]e must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies. . . We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (100-101).

In *Order*, Foucault had identified the limits of humanist discourse, and thereby disrupted its natural seamlessness. In his genealogical critique, a similar disruption provides the

condition of possibility for a new "politics of truth" (*Power/Knowledge* 131). In seeking to define the new politics of truth, Foucault appears to be concerned with elaborating the possibility of making the ever-expanding and mobile nature of the limit the basis for an new understanding of the "capillary" function of power in the constitution of truth, an understanding that, in the words of Charles Alteiri, allows "difference [to be] understood in terms of productive activity bound to real social forces" (*Canons* 2). By bracketing the philosophical and epistemological authority of "truth," genealogy reveals the productive reciprocity of power and knowledge that lies at its surface. As a way of concluding this study, I shall offer some brief comments on "post-colonial theory"--both as its status as theoretical discourse is understood in relation to the limits of the broadly-defined discourse of "post-modernity" and "post-structuralism," and as it is seen to undertake the revisionist task of re-situating the historically instituted limits of colonial authority within cultural texts.

The preceding section provides an overall and generalized perspective on the critical issues central to the thought of the limit in Foucault. My own approach can be best described as a combination of textual explication and critical reading. My understanding of Foucault, generated through a close reading of his works, has often been complemented by the insights of many of his major critics. My purpose in this study is not to discount the strength and complexity of their studies, or to

take up contrary positions. By identifying what I regard to be the challenging problems of identifying and understanding Foucault's thought of the limit, I have attempted to track the different facets of its evolution with a degree of consistency I did not discover in any current study. The perhaps irritatingly persistent enclosure of words like "philosophical text," "culture," and "difference" in quotation marks is not intended to suggest that they are only figments of a textual imagination, but rather, that they are resolutely non-unified concepts, the products of relative relationship of powerful discourses in current criticism.

NOTES

¹ Structured by the limits established between the knower and the known, the "politics of the gaze" is a recurring concern in Foucault's works. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault elaborates the functioning mechanism of the panopticon in the disciplinary system of surveillance by returning to this idea: "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the seeing/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything, without ever being seen" (201). However, Foucault refuses to see this dyadic relationship as a manifestation of fixed binary power relationship--between the controller and the controlled. As he states, "There is no risk. . . that the increase in power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny; the disciplinary mechanism will be democratically controlled, since it will be constantly accessible 'to the great tribunal committee of the world'" (207).

² Herman Rapaport points to a similar critical move in Heidegger's history of Being. He observes that in the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics, "the recovery of the distinction presencing/present is that which takes place only by attention to the trace of the distinction which has been obliterated when presencing appears as something present" (25). As it evolves within the retrospective history, Foucault's idea of the limit appears to be closely related to the task of excavating the boundaries of history, an action itself brought into play by the recovery of the presencing/present distinction in philosophical discourse.

CHAPTER I
LIMITS OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE:
THE RENAISSANCE AND CLASSICAL EPISTEMES

Introduction

The idea of the limit that Foucault introduces in *Order* is key to the work's larger critical and historical scope. On the one hand, Foucault's historical task is to identify and describe those parameters that circumscribe particular discourses, those differentiating boundaries that regulate the form and function of signs that form the matrix of these discourses. Foucault also suggests that these circumscribed discourses are historical in nature because their limits are regulated by specific historical practices. This leads to the idea of the limit functioning as a critical strategy: as Foucault identifies these boundaries and reviews the epistemologies that are installed by the positive unconscious of discourse, he discovers that these boundaries often function as strategies across which an entire arena of epistemology is constructed, and that such objectification is the very condition within which the space of knowledge is regulated. Therefore, as a larger strategical principle, the idea of the limit represents an epistemological challenge to the way in which these discourses establish their conditions of knowledge.

Indeed, although limits of discourse are historically specific and can be identified and described, the "notion" of the limit underlying the recovery of the boundaries of discourse cannot be located within the static boundaries of philosophical epistemology where the relation between the subject and object is always already determined, but within those heterogeneous sites where the knowledges created by the philosophical discourses of the West are constantly negotiated by the discontinuities that are inscribed within their "positive unconscious." In other words, the idea of the limit points to those fundamental dynamics present within historical order as "bounded"--a condition that generates its own epistemological mandates--marking those differences across which philosophical truth articulates itself in the world of objects.

In *Order*, Foucault explains that the idea of the episteme rests on an order or a "positivity" whose conditions of possibility can only be described in terms of itself. But the self-determining status of this order is necessarily dependent on the existence of rules that are regulated by the positive unconscious, rules that cannot be acknowledged by philosophical epistemology. Indeed, this elision is crucial to maintaining the sovereignty of philosophical epistemology. One of the main purposes of Foucault's history in *Order*, then, is to delineate the discontinuous movements that lie within the order and coherence of philosophy, making possible a discursive understanding of the processes through which the limits of the

positive unconscious determine the territories of discourse in each episteme and create and sustain the very possibility for philosophy to objectify itself and stand as "truth." By mapping out and tracking the function of this positive unconscious, Foucault delineates the epistemological dynamics set into motion in these epistemes. This is clearly one of the major concerns in Foucault's analysis of the three epistemes.

One of the ways in which Foucault identifies the limits of discourses is by explaining how they give rise to certain territorial activities within the epistemes. Territorialization is the effect of limits securing the coherence, consistency, and predictability of philosophical truth within the epistemes. But, as Foucault's analysis of the three epistemes demonstrates, the coherence of each epistemic formation is specific to its own positive unconscious, operating within the scenes established by their individual discursive practices. It becomes increasingly clear that Foucault's attempt to delineate the territorial activities of each episteme is linked to his critical purposes of evaluating the larger epistemological dynamics set into motion within these epistemes.

First, by analyzing how the territories of discourse in each episteme function in relation to the presence or nonpresence of an analytic consciousness, Foucault raises the question of the constructed nature of epistemology. The analytic consciousness appears to be the prime determinant of the differentiating processes associated with the activity of

the limit, processes that are translated into specific epistemologies. He contends that, unlike those of the classical and modern age, the territorial matrix of the Renaissance episteme was not defined by an epistemological order that rested on the presence of an analytical consciousness. Rather, the entire continuum of signs, linked together by the complex forms of similitudes, enabled the world to fold in upon itself and form "a chain with itself" so that things could resemble one another." The "visible mark for invisible analogies" (*Order 26*) was itself the basis of the exegetical attitude of the Renaissance. This attitude did not (and could not) rupture the line between the presence of signs and the relations of similitude that connected them.

The classical episteme, on the other hand, deployed its limits in order to separate the world and the text; these limits gave rise to specific modes of analysis that were discursively linked to an analytic consciousness. By splitting the sign into two, and by making the relationship between them the basis for the transparency of the sign itself, the positive unconscious of the classical episteme fractured the continuity between the world and the text. Classical consciousness was empowered by virtue of its ability to ensure the binary separation of the world and the text. On the other hand, as Foucault later demonstrates in his analysis of the modern episteme, the latter consolidated its epistemological power by installing an "analytic of finitude" and by defining a

consciousness that located itself within this knowledge of finiteness. "Man" was posited as the object and subject of this knowledge. This form of humanist consciousness was radically different from that of the classical episteme because the latter was not regulated by the notion of man as a finite, historical being. Rather, the analytic consciousness of the classical episteme has its epistemological authority secured through a transcendental, yet exterior, relationship with the binary sign system, on which classical representation rested. An anthropologically constructed "man" had no place in this epistemological order because the limits of classical discourse could not posit such an entity within its discursive systems.

It is clear that the classical and modern epistemes constructed their epistemologies in relation to their territories in different ways. The positive unconscious of the modern age constructed its epistemology by positing a density within its sign system, a density that captured the reality of its historical becoming, which also gave rise to a paradoxical transcendental-yet-finite epistemological function--the human subject. With this larger context in mind, I will attempt, in this chapter, (1) to study Foucault's delineation of the limits of the Renaissance episteme and to clarify the relationship between the existence of such limits and its exegetical attitude; (2) to trace Foucault's delineation of the limits of the classical episteme and to clarify how these limits establish the territories of classical discourse and secure

their epistemological imperatives. My discussion of the discourses of the classical episteme also brings into focus Foucault's questions about the nature of classical epistemology as it gets defined by its alliance with a critical, analytic consciousness that is made possible by the very constructed nature of these discourses. In this context, it is significant to note Foucault's larger questions about the very nature and function of this consciousness in propelling the critical impulse that leads to the Enlightenment: What are the reasons for the primacy of analysis in the classical age, and what is its relationship with the rise of criticism, and to the newly-constituted presence in the modern discourses of the human sciences and critical history? How do the acts of individuating discourses, sustained both in the classical and the modern epistemes, become the site for a post-modern understanding of the discontinuous operations of knowledge.¹ Both these questions are significant to an understanding of the trajectory of Foucault's thought of the limit as it develops out of the initial questions concerning philosophical limits in the Renaissance and the Classical epistemes.

The Renaissance Episteme and the Function of Limits

In chapter two of *Order*, Foucault contends that the Renaissance episteme constructs a "vast syntax of the world" by establishing a continuum of resemblances or similitudes. In

this schema, "different beings adjust themselves to one another" by sharing a highly dynamic set of relationships that are determined by the network of adjacencies. Within "this semantic web of resemblances" (*Order 18*), the limits of beings are constantly negotiated by proximity, analogy, emulation and sympathies. Thus the stability of the Renaissance sign system is ensured in these paradoxical relations of identity and difference, relations in which the limits of beings are identical with the plethora and density of the region in which they are placed.

Consequently, the Renaissance episteme is not territorialized as a field of analysis. In other words, its sign systems are ordered in such a fashion that only allows the "and/as" relationship between the world and the text to be maintained in the form of an un-territorialized "primal text." Resemblance, the informing idea of its sign system, holds together the "form of signs as well as their content" (*Order 42*). Therefore, even though the sign system is ternary--composed of the formal domain of marks, the content indicated by them, and similitude that connect the marks to the things designated by them--these elements are constituted as one. It is this kind of *coincidentia appositorum* that characterizes the play of limits in Renaissance thought and that determines its exegetical attitude.

Within this order of *coincidentia appositorum*, the being of language depends on its ability to reflect this unitary

condition. Language exists in its primitive being as a stigma upon things. But this unique and ineffaceable existence is not static. As Foucault explains, one of the prime forms of Renaissance discourse is "commentary," whose conditions of possibility are regulated by this *coincidentia oppositorum*. Commentary offers new shapes to the given signs, and fulfills the infinite hermeneutic potential by presupposing the existence of the "text" of those signs that are manifested universally in the play of "sympathies," or within the affinities shared by them. Exegesis deciphers these affinities by "play[ing] through the depths of the universe in a free state" (Order 23), and since these relations "are no more than forms of similitude, . . . to know must therefore be to interpret" (emphasis added; Order 32). These relationships do not territorialize the world as a text whose being rests on the "knowledge" of difference, but rather on acknowledging the thick continuity of the world and securing the field of exegesis within this continuity.

Thus, in the Renaissance, language and text share a relationship in which there is no need to situate each in its own space by marking the limits of the two regions. Moreover, as Cousins and Hussain note, the exegetical attitude rests on the assumption that "texts are not made up of language" but that "language is a text to be deciphered like anything else" (Order 32). Like the text of the world, the resemblances in language function within a "plethoric" knowledge system (Order

30). In such a condition, resemblances point to orders of similitude that cannot be identified by difference, but by the "accumulation of all the others" (*Order 30*). This condition is identified by Foucault as the order of the Same: since resemblance links signs to what they refer to, it "resides in both the mark and the content in *identical fashion*" (*Order 30*; my emphasis). Such symmetrical alignments of identity secure an epistemology that "condemn[s] itself to never knowing anything but the same thing, and to knowing that thing only at the unattainable end of an endless journey" (*Order 30*). This epistemological enclosure--at once static and dynamic--effectively acts as a mirror, providing reflections of the micro and macro dimensions of nature in the interplay of duplicated resemblances, allowing the visible and the invisible to be held together without contradiction, and pointing to a "greater" world that defines "the limit of all created things" (*Order 31*).

In examining this exegetical systematicity of the Renaissance, Foucault discovers the multiple layers of its discourse, all of which point to the larger unity of its sign system. The limits of Renaissance philosophical discourse do not function as elements in ordering difference or in securing an analytical consciousness that is separate from the observed world. The continuities and breaks of these limits are part of the universal text of the Renaissance. The epistemology of the Renaissance retains its vital connection with its ontology, and

does not set up limits between the two in order to secure an independent space for either one. It is in the classical episteme that the links between the two are fractured, and this is reflected in the rise of "discourse" and "criticism." The world and the text come to occupy two regions that are linked by the order of the same operating throughout the space of differences that are introduced by the binary and transparent sign system. Not surprisingly, then, "analysis" acquires its regulative force--both as the condition of possibility for the institution of a theory of representation, as well as for the legitimization of the classificatory forms of grammar, natural history, and wealth. The differences inscribed in the very conditions of these classified discourses are constitutive of territoriality. Although the classical episteme does not construct grammar as man's language, natural history as man's biological being, or wealth as man's labor (these are the products of modern discourse), the very fact that these domains reflect the order of classical epistemology reveal the complicitous relations between classical discourse and its epistemology.

**The Classical Episteme and
the Function of Limits**

Foucault's analysis of Velazquez's painting, "Las Meninas," in chapter 1 of *Order*, highlights one of the central concerns of the book: that the relations between epistemology

and representation are crucially linked to the dynamic interplay of limits within the epistemic order. If, as Foucault asserts, "there exists, in this painting by Velazquez, the representation as it were, of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us," there is "in the midst of this dispersion. . .an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation" (16). I interpret this to mean that the limits between the visible and the invisible, and the representable and the non-representable, are the effects of the very epistemological conditions that are determined by the binary nature of the classical sign system. The very continuum that this binary produces is subject to the split between the knower and the known, and between the world and the text. This split is also the transcendental distance between them.

As the limits of this space of knowledge are defined by Foucault, it becomes clear that the positive unconscious of the classical episteme lies within the discursive operations of grammar, natural history, and wealth--their syntax and analytic domains. Governed by a sign system that lends itself to the form of tabular analysis, these discursive operations reveal the ways in which the analytic practices of classicism are closely linked to order of representation. By developing a systemic view of these practices, Foucault reveals the discontinuities underlying the unity of these formations. In the following pages, I shall proceed to track the manifold

ramifications of these discursive operations by exploring the modes of analysis that are institutionalized within the discourses of classicism, the links between the different territories, and the function of language within the system of representation. My larger purpose of engaging in such an exploration is to better understand how the idea of the limit functions as an epistemological strategy.

Analysis is the *method par excellence* of the classical age; it is an important legitimizing tool that determines, and in turn is determined by, the great classical projects of mathesis and calculus. Walter J. Ong, in his extensive study of the rise and evolution of the Ramist "method" in the discourse of post-renaissance Europe, argues cogently how "method" serves as a kind of "precision instrument," not simply to discover a pre-existing order, but to order reason itself. In its many manifestations, method spans over and regulates a diverse area that includes dialectical thinking, issues of judgment, and classroom mnemonics, and finally extends itself into the new empirical sciences of the Enlightenment (see *Ramus* 171-213). Method makes possible a new configurative space of discourse in which spatiality acquires a central organizing principle that enforces a system of discovering "truth." By the very manner in which they are deployed, many of these methods define the parameters of this spatial field, which in turn lead to a specific figuration of thought itself. Ong does not, however, deal with the discursive field of the underlying

theory of representation and semiotics that governs the epistemological base of the classical episteme. In his close study of the order of classical representation, Foucault unearths the multi-layered surfaces of the theory of representation and probes into the formation of those structures that lend themselves to analytical discovery.

In the classical age, Foucault tells us, signs no longer inhabit the infinite World as Text (as they did in the Renaissance), but find themselves occupying the "confines of representation, in the interstices of ideas" (*Order* 67). Signs are no longer deployed to interpret the marks of the infinite and providential text of the Renaissance, but to "order" those beings that seemed dispersed in the profusion of their representations. In order to transform the diversity of signs into relations of equality, the whole region of limits was reconstituted by classical thought. The first regulatory move was to establish a "taxonomia"--a "table" of identities and differences that would stabilize what appeared to be discontinuous representations. In other words, for the classical episteme, the world of affinities and sympathies ceased to offer a continuous mode: the hermeneutic and exegetical system could no longer provide a viable epistemological system. Continuity had to be redefined across the new possibilities offered by the the limits of the binary system. Temporality had to be refigured in the form of a uniform spatiality, which would provide the region in which the

continuum of things could be exhibited and the gaze of analysis guaranteed a kind of unmoving singularity.

It is in this manner that the representative function of the sign came to be instituted and "exercised by the visible with regard to itself" (*Order* 227). Foucault calls this phenomenon "spectacle-en-regard," as his analysis of *Las Meninas*, in *Order*, demonstrates so effectively. The gaze out of which the painting functions constitutes a "condition of pure reciprocity manifested by the mirror looking and being looked at" (*Order* 14). As David Carroll observes, the representative status of the contents of the painting is maintained in its direct congruence with the status of the reflexive gaze at the scene, or "everything is reflected back onto itself within the closed space constituted by the mirror reflecting the outside in and the inside out" (*Paraesthetics* 66). Created out of a complete and perfect cycle of representation, this gaze embodies in its singularity the symmetrical principles of identity and difference on which the sign system of the classical episteme is grounded.²

The structuration of the taxonomia, in which signs could be analyzed by establishing relations of identity and difference, is itself based on the principles of (1) proximity and difference, and (2) adjacency and separateness, both spatial in their constructions. Signs maintained their kinship by being defined in their relations of order within this permanent area. Though the sign itself came into being through the

establishment of an arbitrary relationship between the signified and the signifier (as opposed to the Renaissance where similitude operated as the connecting link between signs and their marks), the gap that marked this arbitrary space was regulated as the stable difference between objects and their representations, a difference that was naturalized as the space of the taxonomia. In fact, the dissociation of sign and resemblance itself gave rise to the need for "probability, analysis, and combination and the justified arbitrariness of the system" (*Order 63*). It was in the confines of the limits of this arbitrary system that classical thought deployed its for

origins and calculability; to the constitution of tables that would fix the possible combinations, and to the restitution of a genesis on the basis of the simplest elements; it was a sign system that linked all knowledge to a language, and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial symbols and operations of a logical nature. (*Order 63*)

Thus, classical "analysis" establishes its "history" in the alignments instituted by the discursive practices of its positive unconscious, and within the ensuing order that leads to the development and institutionalization of the projects of "mathesis" and a "genetic analysis." It is important to recognize that as "projects," they become the legitimizing tools of reason and rationality that the late Renaissance was

attempting to institute, of which Bacons' the great "instauration of the sciences" in *Novum Organum* is a clear example.

Mathesis represented the project of an universal science of measurement and order, both made possible by the binary relation of the sign. Unlike the Renaissance, the order of things does not any longer guarantee a continuously mediated understanding of the relation of the sign to its content. Rather, as Foucault points out

the relation of the sign to the signified now resides in a space in which there is no longer any intermediary figure to connect them: what connects them is a bond established, *inside* knowledge, between the idea of one thing and the idea of another. (my emphasis; *Order* 63)

Crucial to this "bond" is the very structure of the binary arrangement, which is predicated on the fact that "the sign is a duplicated representation doubled over upon itself" (*Order* 65). Ideas serve as signs within a space in which representation can be repeated without exceeding or violating itself in any manner:

An idea can be sign of another, not only because a bond of representation can be established between them, but also because this representation can always be represented within the idea that is representing. Or again, because representation in

its peculiar essence is always perpendicular to itself, it is at the same time indication and appearance: a relation to an object and a manifestation of itself. (Order 65)

In these very significant sections of *Order*, Foucault indicates the reach and extent of the theory of representation as it emerges to insert itself into the very structures of sign systems and within the relationships between objects and the "things" they signify. Emphasizing the doubling over process intrinsic to the formation of this order, Foucault marks the arenas in which analysis assumes a leading role in consolidating and verifying the truths of classicism.

The project of "genetic analysis" deals with the complex system of signs that are constituted from a field of specific elements. The need to discover the "ideal genesis of the complexity of things" regulates this form of analysis, and is realized in fabricating a language "which is capable of naming what is elementary"--a "language of calculation" (Order 62-63). With the rise of mathesis and genetic analysis, classical thought arranges the limits of its epistemological space in a manner that guarantees the arrangement of the new sciences of order: representation of words (general grammar), representation of beings (natural history), and representation of the needs to which wealth is related (analysis of wealth).

General Grammar, Natural History, and Wealth

Foucault's analysis of the discourses of grammar, natural history, and wealth provide a compelling view of the manner in which the territories of classical discourse get circumscribed by the play of limits within the order of representation. He notes that classical thought presents an apparent paradox in its approach to language: though language exists as the over-spanning reality, in a sense, it is also eliminated from the episteme. In other words, language is irrevocably predicated on its functional ties with the theory of representation, and is, in fact, the means by which representation masters difference. As Foucault notes, "discourse is merely representation itself represented by verbal signs" (*Order* 81). Reduced to the status of "pure discourse," language offers itself to classical analysis in the continuous space of representation. In other words, the limits of representation determine the boundaries of language in its relation to the world. Language's temporal dimension, which makes it essentially discontinuous, is regularized spatially through the employment of signs based on the order of identities and difference on a synchronic table. Time is no longer allowed to allot languages their places: "it is languages that unfold representations and words in a sequence of which they themselves define the laws" (*Order* 89).

One of these laws is the law of simultaneity. Classical analysis plays the crucial role of introducing simultaneity and

then representing it in the table of verbal order. The regularization of space takes place as language defines its relation between the "successive and the contemporaneous":

It is to thought and to signs what algebra is to geometry: it replaces the simultaneous comparison of parts (or magnitudes) with an order whose degrees must be traversed one after the other. It is in this strict sense that language is an *analysis* of thought: not a simple patterning, but a profound establishment of order in space. (*Order* 83)

In this significant passage, Foucault points to the emergence of a new epistemological domain in which language itself becomes a mode of analysis, constituted in its complete and singularly symmetrical relation with the theory of representation. It is in this domain that the possibility of a "universal language" takes shape, a language that does not attempt to institute a primitive and pure speech, but looks at the present and towards a future of language as it becomes the medium that "would have the ability to provide every representation, and every element of every representation, with the sign by which it could be marked in a univocal manner" (*Order* 84). The totality of what is representable is the world of the "Encyclopedia" (*Order* 85) as well as the absolute world of discourse.

Classical sign system is analytical: the double inscription contained in all dyadic sign systems is subjected

to the absolute, totalizing, and harmonizing influence of this universal language. The most common mode of classical analysis in the region of grammar is "criticism," whose function is to comprehend how languages accomplish their task of representation. However, against the background of an "absolute" Encyclopedia, "the task of criticism is to open a space of difference whose function is simply to reinforce the power of representation across which human beings constitute intermediary forms of a composite and *limited* universality" (emphasis added; *Order* 86). Some of these forms are "alphabetical encyclopedias, pasigraphies, polyvalent lexicons, and rational encyclopedias." They represent the possibility of isolating limited universality in the form of specific totalities, without fracturing the power of Discourse as a total phenomenon. The "partial characters" (*Order* 86) of these projects are legitimized through language that represents the sole and singular condition of universality within the different orders.

One of the most significant implications of this notion of universality in the classical episteme can be traced to the new configuration of "knowledge" and "language." With knowledge completely encircled by Discourse, classical thought places the forms of knowledge in a region where they "support one another, complement one another, and criticize one another incessantly" (*Order* 86). One has to bear in mind that the latter is conducted only through a complete and simultaneous

movement, subsuming the difference of time itself. Foucault suggests that in classical thought the sciences assume the position of "well-made languages" because in them "the chain of knowledge [is] made visible in all its clarity, without any shadows or lacunae." Such a status of language also allows classicism to conceive of a history of knowledge that is based on discerning the larger patterns of order in the midst of the chaos of texts produced and the words spoken, and on recovering in them "vocabularies," "syntaxes," and "sounds of their language" and the "discursivity of language" (*Order* 87).

In the interplay of language and thought within the order of classical representation, what emerges so powerfully is the notion that language represents thought in exactly the same way as thought represents itself--in the pure space of the Same. Caught up in the movement of simultaneity, the sign designates by virtue of its being-as-sign, which, as Manfred Frank points out, "dissolves the necessity for re-presentation in favor of the immediate self-presence of something present" (125). Self-presence precludes the necessity of inserting any real difference in the dyadic order of the sign since this difference is always coded in the structure of the Same. The history of knowledge, the study of syntax and word-inflections, the compiling of encyclopedias are all subjected to a similar ordering of the same:

And language exists in the gap that representation creates for itself. Words do not, then, form a

thin film that duplicates thought on the outside; they recall thought, they indicate it, but inwards first of all, among all those representations that represent other representations. The language of the Classical age is much closer to the thought it is charged with expressing than is generally supposed; but it is not parallel to it; it is caught in the grid of thought, woven in the very fabric it is unrolling. It is not an exterior effect of thought, but thought itself. (*Order 78*)

The self-sufficiency of thought in the classical episteme is a condition imposed by the primacy of representation in the order of the Same, which is also the order of discourse that remains transparent to itself. The manner in which the limits of this thought are spatialized across an undifferentiated continuum is directly reflective of classical thought's suppression of difference: by being caught up in the singular and mutually exchangeable sites, thought and language overcome their differential spaces and find themselves inscribed within a homogeneous fabric.

The primacy given to "nomenclature" in the classical age points to a similar tendency--of placing the "name" in the region of the "Same." Foucault asserts that "[t]o name is at the same time to give the verbal representation of a representation, and to place it in a general table" (*Order 116*). As a privileged entity, the name functions within the "quadrilateral

of language"--of designation, derivation, articulation, and attribution--indicating the continuous movement of thought in the order of the Same where differences reinforce each other in pairs, and all the gaps introduced in the movement gathered together in a uniformly spatialized table.

As designation, language asserts its primacy as the naming of things : "it affirms being from within itself; and yet it could not exist as language if that word, on its own, were not, in advance, sustaining all possibility of discourse" (*Order* 94). Bringing together the representation of being in language and the representative being of language, the verb "to be" relates all of language to the representation it designates: "to speak is at the same time to represent by means of signs and to give signs a synthetic form governed by the verb" (*Order* 95-96). Derivation is the process of semantic displacement paralleling the movement of language from its roots. Articulation, the analysis of language into its grammatical elements, makes it possible to arrange words as representations of representation and to duplicate experience. Attribution is the basic act of discourse that locates the name in language by affirming its identity and specifying its differences. In other words, as James Bernauer notes, classical thought advances a system through which it is possible to "discover a nomenclature that would be a taxonomy" (*Michel Foucault's* 73).

It is obvious how language in the classical age offers itself as a possible object of analysis. As a schema, language "is a rule that indicates how reason has to proceed in order to furnish its categories and concepts with signification and thus with reference to an object" (Frank 129). Constituted within the representative order of thought that determines a continuous space--the space of the Same--language sets the condition of possibility for analysis. As Foucault comments, "it is within language itself, exactly in the fold of words where analysis and space meet" (Order 112-13). This meeting of space and analysis in a common fold makes possible the classical notion of progress, and the positing of an "endless possibility" for thought (Order 113). If analysis becomes the endlessly repeatable, thus traversing the entire body of classical discourse, it can be universally installed as the tool of reason and rationality. Armed with this legitimizing tool, rationality allows language to stabilize the discontinuities of time in the specific differences of space. Rhetorical figures are employed to embody these specificities:

The progressive analysis and more advanced articulation of language, which enable us to give a single name to several things, were developed along the lines of [these] three fundamental figures so well known to rhetoric: synecdoche, metonymy, and catechresis (or metaphor, if the analogy is less immediately perceptible). (Order 113-114)

For the classical mind, the tropological space essentially parallels the figurative space in which all thought is posited. When language is "figured" within the order of the Same, words find their "locus, not in time, but in a space in which they are able to find their original site, change their positions, turn back upon themselves, and slowly unfold a whole developing curve" (*Order* 114). But the modes of analysis are able to contain this movement of language, ensuring that language arranges "into a linear order the scattered fragments represented" (*Order* 114-115). Because fragments have no place in the order of representation other than as regulated and totalized specificities, language is not allowed to exceed itself in any form. Its being is enclosed within the order mandated by representation.

Foucault's explanation of the dynamics of the four elements of the "quadrilateral of language" is vital to an understanding of the dynamics of the spatial relationships within the order indicated above. What stands out in Foucault's analysis are the possible relations between the different elements in this space. Of crucial significance are the forms of oppositions and reinforcements established between these nodes: their relationship can be defined in lateral pairs in opposition, or there can be diagonal relations between the opposing corners of the triangle (*Order* 115). In the calculus of such distances (diagonal or non-diagonal), the linear and cumulative relationships between articulation and derivation,

or between proposition and designation, form the basis of measurement. And it is through this calculus that the power of naming within the discourse of the classical age acquires its special status--of representing as well as providing the basis for analysis. Foucault amplifies this idea:

The first diagonal [between articulation and derivation] marks the progress of a language from the point of view of its specification; the second [proposition and designation] the endless interweaving of language and representation--the duplicating process which is the reason why the verbal sign is always representing a representation. On his latter line, the word functions as a substitute (with its power to represent); on the former, as an element (with its power to make combination and break them down). (*Order 116*)

An arbitrary system that is "precisely thought-out," therefore, serves as the basis of analysis in classical thought, making way for the installation of the sovereign act of nomination. Within the space of nomination, all differences are sublated and all "that has been crossed in order to reach it, is reabsorbed into it and disappears" (*Order 117*). Thus, the disappearance of language in classical thought, paradoxically (but not surprisingly), establishes the epistemological space of the classical age--or more specifically, as Foucault explains, leads to those conditions in which "language

become[s] the object of a period's knowledge," and determines "between what limits this epistemological domain" can be developed and sustained (*Order 119*).

Natural history is the second major project of classical mathesis. Organized in a form that correlates with the project of nomenclature, it attains to the position of a taxonomy: "natural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible" (*Order 132*). Two categories serve as the enabling constructs for the act of nomination: structure and character, both of which maintain their representative limits by providing a "language" in which the object can be analyzed in terms of their constituent elements. These elements are specified in terms of their form, quantity, manner of distribution, and magnitudes in relation to one another. Such elements of quantification predetermine where and how the gaze of analysis is going to be directed, and to what specific ends its epistemology is to be directed. Given structures gain their specificity not in their absolute individuality but by virtue of their membership within a system of "characters." In natural history, these characters are nothing more than "groups of identities selected to represent and distinguish a number of species or number of genera" (*Order 189*). This system is unlike that which comes into being in the nineteenth century because it is not an unmanifested or hidden system of possibilities, but a table that offers the space of classification. Such grouping, therefore, establishes the

continuous table--"the area of nature" in which the interplay of signs and representations is provided "with a temporal index that gives progress a definition of its condition of possibility" (emphasis added; *Order 189*). Furthermore, the natural being is recognized as limited by what is spatially distinguishable from it--thus the primacy of the table: "Method and system are simply two ways of defining identities by means of the general grid of differences" (*Order 145*).

Classical thought conceives of progress purely in terms of the infinite possibility of analysis that can be extended as far as the limits of the quantifying system can be sustained within the calculus of its modifications and changes. It is important to point out that the calculus itself serves as the an analytical tool in classical thought. In both natural history and the analysis of wealth, time is inserted into the calculus in such a manner that it does not, in any manner, violate the representative status of the object under consideration, even as the latter is connected with the processes of change and modification. Foucault provides us with an example from his discussion of how the modes of analysis within natural history are regulated by a specific exterior relationship with time:

[T]ime intervened only from without, in order to upset the continuity of the very smallest differences and to scatter them in accordance with fragmented localities of geography. (*Order 189*)

Foucault establishes the relationship of time to the process of analysis in the analysis of wealth by making a distinction between the latter and the former (relationship of time and to the order of natural history). Money, for example, cannot represent wealth without that power being modified from within, by time. . . time belongs to the inner law of representation and is part of it, but the modifications to which wealth is subjected to in its encounter with time does not interrupt the representability of wealth or its capacity "to analyze itself by means of a monetary system" (Order 189).

Since representability is inscribed in the very space of analysis (in fact *is* analysis), the calculus cannot exceed that order of representability in order to introduce any real differentiations into its table. As a matter of fact, these differentiations are subsumed under "differentials" (as opposed to "differences" in the grid of the table of natural history), so that specific increases and diminutions can be placed under the rubric of the calculus and regulated through the totalizing gaze of the eye.

In the classical age, "wealth" emerges as the domain and the "object of economy" within the system of analysis of representation, subjected to the same "rigorous and general epistemological arrangement" (Order 166). And, despite the fact that such analysis depends more on institutional practices

than on pure speculation (as in grammar or natural history), it grows out of what Foucault calls "the same fundamental ground of knowledge" (*Order* 168). Thus, with its epistemological space guaranteed, the analysis of wealth proceeds to establish "value" through the interplay of arbitrary relationship between "money" and a precious metal like gold. The preciousness of metals, in turn, is determined by the representative function of signs. Money is the "common measure between commodities and acts as a substitute in the mechanism of exchange" because its "material reality" is derived from the fact that that reality can be assigned a standard and unchanging form in the world of exchangeable diversities (*Order* 169).

Two specific movements are regulated in this form of analysis. One is based on the general theory of representation that Jean-Joseph Goux diagnoses as the basis of the system of barter that had its origin in the pre-classical age:

the replacing [of] what is forbidden, what is lacking, what is hidden or lost, what is damaged, in short, replacing with something equivalent what is not itself, in person, presentable. (Goux 9)

The other is the specific choice of representability: these objects (gold, silver) are favored for their "endless representation" (Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's* 74). The overall thrust of classical analysis of wealth is to insert this

capacity for endless representation into the exactitude of measurement--in the form of a "stamped coin":

[T]he nominal values stamped on the coins had to be in conformity with the quantity of metal chosen as a standard and incorporated into each coin; money would then signify nothing more than its measuring value. (*Order 170*).

Constituted as a "money-sign," the coin's "preciousness" as metal is governed by exogenous material conditions--imperishability and divisibility--that favor it as a choice for circulation. Also, as sign, the value of money as a substitute for exchange, depends on abundance or rarity, making money a commodity, too (*Order 171*). This attitude, informing the analysis of wealth in the classical episteme, differs sharply from the Renaissance's in which the intrinsic value of money was founded within the order of similitudes provided by "providence." The notion of intrinsic value is displaced by the "development of a table of identities and differences in which a continuity of all wealth in the world, as elements in a system of exchange, could be represented" (Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's 74*).

By mapping out the general domain of the organization of the empirical spheres of grammar, natural history and wealth, Foucault is able to advance an understanding of language in the classical episteme, which is key to an understanding of his thought of the limit. He argues that the structuring

principles of "the quadrilateral of language" serve as the basic modelling force in the "theoretical signalization" of natural history and the "practical utilization" of monetary signs (*Order* 202-203). He states that in setting up the conditions of possibility for the existence of such discourses, the model of the quadrilateral acts as the enabling force of a totalizing analysis in classical thought. The relationships established in these domains between designation, derivation, articulation, and attribution fulfill the epistemological requirements of the general theory of representation:

The order of wealth and the order of natural beings are established and revealed in so far as there are established between objects of need, and between visible individuals, systems of signs which make possible the *designation* of representations one by another, the *derivation* of signifying representations in relation to those signified, the *articulation* of what is represented, and the *attribution* of certain representations to certain others. (my emphasis; *Order* 203)

With its constitution and manifestation solidly ungirded in the transparency and the self-evident status of representation, the order of classical thought legitimizes its modes of analysis within its infinite parameters. These parameters are then deployed to regulate and rectify any possible errors of reflection that might take place in the process of analysis--

especially in the region of grammar. As Foucault observes, in grammar, the movement between designation and derivation can often be rendered problematic by the intrusion of "shifts of imagination," and the movement between articulation and attribution can be disturbed by errors of reflection. But by positing the idea of a universal language on the horizon of such movements--the idea of the encyclopedia and the dictionary--classical thought attempts to control these possible errors. Both the dictionary and the encyclopedia become the sites of a perfect language system that can effectively "compensate for the imperfection of real languages" (Order 204).

In the distinction between "real languages" spoken by man and the institutional inscriptions of natural history and analysis of wealth, Foucault discerns a gap between the spontaneity of the former, which can potentially exceed the control of human institution, and the regularity of the latter that always remains fixed within the boundaries of human control. It is within the context of classical thought's attempts to overcome "the perils inherent in spontaneous languages" (Order 205) that the need for the encyclopedia and the dictionary become relevant. The need to control specific languages by exercising the harmonizing influence of a global language is inherent in the larger epistemic configurations of representation. Thus, representation is ensured its global

status in the face of its double inscription--as representation of representation, and thus made to bear the mark of the same.

In Chapter 2, I will study the effects of the rupture of the order of the Same in classical thought by the emergence of a sign system that deals with the densities of labor, language, and life. This density, understood in relation to "history," and the finiteness that this history introduces, surfaces at the multiple levels of modern discourse.³ Paradoxically, it is in these new conditions that modern thought is seen to slowly detach itself from its centered humanism and to move toward the threshold where it is confronted by its own fissures and its own unthought. Modern analysis is forced to reconsider its own historical allegiance with the order of the Same, and thus, steps into the region beyond the Same, from which there is no final recuperation. For Foucault, then, the emergence of modern non-transparent thought calls for a new approach to defining the limits of philosophical thought and the forms of analysis that these limits mandate. The possibility or impossibility of maintaining the forms of analyses of modern thought in the post-modern era are functionally dependent on the disruptive action of its own limits. Faced with such a condition, Foucault, who is himself situated on the limits of modern thought, identifies a "void" that he claims allows thought to move beyond the confines of modernity. This condition of void progressively becomes evident in the entire

arena of post-modern thinking as it abandons its historical allegiance with the order of the "same." Foucault characterizes this "void"--which I equate with the postmodern condition--not as the impossibility of thought or a "lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think" (*Order* 342). With the possibility of thinking revived once more, Foucault is able to offer a form of analysis that is constituted within the threshold of the limits of modern thought, and which, for the first time, breaks its bonds with categorical thinking and clears the space for a new epistemology of the postmodern.

NOTES

¹It is interesting that Foucault describes his own historical task as "deal[ing] with reality through things which are always, often, far from reality" (Foucault, "Interview [with Millicent Dillon]" 4). This remark clearly highlights Foucault's concern with seeing his own critical position and activity in differential terms. An understanding of the history of the limit enables Foucault to assert that a historical task can also be a questioning of history's limits, especially an interrogation of the "natural" limits that history offers to the philosophical gaze.

²Cousins and Hussain remark that "representation is not a mirroring, for the representation is within what is represented. Representation is thus always duplicated. A representation always represents another representation" (30).

³This epistemic shift is succinctly explained in Martin Jay's "In the Empire of the Gaze," 188-89.

CHAPTER II
THE LIMITS OF THE MODERN EPISTEME

Introduction

I wish to begin at the point where Foucault concludes his *Order*: as the sea washes over the lineaments of a familiar face, we are reminded that the image of "man," constituted with such rigor by the powerful discourses of modernity, is a vulnerable construct. This vulnerability reflects the unstable historical positioning of such a figure: "the scattering of the profound stream of time by which [man] felt himself carried along and whose pressure he suspected in the very being of things" (*Order* 385). In the concluding moments of his elaborate and complex delineation of the modern episteme, Foucault once again deploys the limit as a descriptive category as well as a critical strategy. While Foucault identifies and methodically describes the limits of the modern discourses within the domain of history, his critical strategy seeks to explain how the presencing of "man" as object within the modern discourses is a discursive "effect": history defines modern knowledge by controlling the space of man's "life, labor, and language." In short, Foucault's strategical questioning of the very identity of "man" is aimed at dislocating the naturalized boundaries of

modern epistemology and at revealing the discursive practices determining these boundaries.

As Foucault continues to track the dynamic relations between the three primary discourses of the modern episteme in *Order*, he is able to explain how their historical emergence radically alters the entire field of epistemological arrangement secured by the classical age. Unlike his analysis of the classical episteme in the discussion of the modern episteme there appears to be a closer relationship between Foucault's historical and descriptive tasks and his critical strategy. This is due to the fact that Foucault sees his own critical stance inscribed on the threshold of modernity, a position that is precipitous in being both underlined and undermined by the limits of modernity. First, in dealing with the modern discourses he is able to elaborate on the discursive roles played by the limits of their representations. These representations, Foucault clarifies, are products of territorial interrelationships that seek to define man as a historical being and also establish the epistemological conditions for knowing this historical finitude. Second, in attempting to situate himself on the margins of modern thought and in defining his own analytical posture in terms of a liminality that is inaugurated by the play and mobility of the limits of modern thought, he carries modern thought to the very boundary of its identity. Such a move radically alters the space within which modernity's critical consciousness situates

itself. Through a characteristically Foucauldian paradox, we are reminded that it is only by marking the space that lies outside the boundaries mandated by modern epistemology that one is able to recover the figure of man and to understand both its fragility and power.

By closely aligning his own historical and critical tasks, Foucault is able to interrogate the legitimized limits of modern thought, thereby disrupting the latter's epistemological certainties and transcendental enclosures. The ensuing crisis in modern thought's identity is crucial to an understanding of Foucault's thought of the limit, particularly of his Heideggerian task of undertaking an "historical ontology of ourselves" (WE 45). This critical task remains an on-going project in his intellectual career. By advancing this historical ontology in *Order*, Foucault is able to maintain his focus on linking the limits of the discourses of modernity to the forms of finiteness in which history breaks into the region of thought. He is able to elaborate how an anthropologically situated historical consciousness that modernity inaugurates determines an epistemology and an ontology of historically finite man, tentatively guarding both from their inherently precipitous natures.

The systematic manner in which Foucault identifies the limits of modern thought and the representations and territories they give rise to, suggests that Foucault's historical task is ultimately linked to his task of defining a new

historical ontology. One of efforts in this chapter will be to investigate the nature and function of this historical ontology, and to examine the manner in which its enabling conditions are progressively defined within the parameters of a "humanism" that Foucault regards as the source of modernist consciousness. The growing destabilization of modern thought made possible by Foucault's undertaking is therefore an important aspect of his critical strategy.

Explaining how the positive unconscious of the modern episteme territorializes and gives rise to the modern positivities, Foucault proceeds to enumerate the five forms of the analytic of finitude within which the modes of analysis of the empirical and human sciences are instituted. Such a move is aimed not so much at reducing the heterogeneous manifestations of modern discourses to one fixed schema, but at describing, and thereby, rupturing the stability assumed by modern epistemology. Indeed, Foucault's delineation of the limit-conditions inaugurated by the analytic of finitude demonstrates that not only do these conditions circumscribe the specific forms and modes of analysis legitimized by modernity's "humanism," but that they also track in their wake a possible disruption of the epistemological arrangement mandated by this humanism. As a result, Foucault is clearly able to discern the multifarious ways in which the modern "will to knowledge" connects itself to the historicizing principle of modern thought. Representing the operations of the forces of the "singular,

contingent and. . . arbitrary constraints" at the site of history, these conditions also exceed the regularizing and determinable forces of the philosophical limits of the modern analytic of finitude, and, for the first time, escape the philosophical imperatives of modernity, to introduce a form of analysis that operates from the threshold of modern thought, instead from its center.

To the post-modern critical consciousness, Foucault's recovery and questioning of the limits of modern thought are significant. Foucault's critical enterprise rests on the following questions: if modern critical consciousness is part of a disruptive ontology, how can it negotiate the limits imposed on its status as observer and knower? Can it avoid the forms of blindness that the limits of modernity impose on its powers of reflection? Is it possible that a philosophical and critical awareness that takes the knowledge of limits into account can achieve this new historical task?

By describing and then challenging these limits, Foucault seeks to better understand the paradox implicit in the historical task of objectifying the very foundations on which modern consciousness stands--foundations that are limited by the latter's acknowledged finiteness. However, at a critical level, the paradox inherent in this situation prepares the ground for a new approach towards conceptualizing and understanding the dynamic nature of the limits of modernity, its precipitousness and contingency, as well as its discursive

power to secure its truths. This paradox also leads Foucault to requestion the "philosophical ethos" that marks his own position as an analytical and critical agent, and as a subject attempting to understand its own history in terms of its own finitude. The aim of this chapter is to understand Foucault's ideas of the limit by exploring the vibrant relationship between the ideas presented in Foucault's new historical ontology in "What is Enlightenment," and his delineation of the discourses of finitude in the modern episteme. Much of what Foucault says about modern thought is generated through a series of recursive movements, with each strand of his argument constantly returning to the whole. Any attempt to alter this pattern by transforming it into a linear and categorical form is bound to be reductive. Therefore, in keeping with this pattern, I will arrange my discussion in a manner that foregrounds the recursive nature of his ideas.²

**"What is Enlightenment?": Defining a New
Historical Ontology**

It is clear that the elaboration of a philosophical ethos of modernity by Foucault serves as a pre-text for his investigations into the discursive conditions of modern thought in the final four chapters of *Order*. Note the manner in which he addresses the issue:

This event, probably because we are still caught inside it, is largely beyond our comprehension. Its

scope, the depth of the strata it has affected, all the positivities it has succeeded in disintegrating and recomposing, the sovereign power that has enabled it, in only a few years, to traverse the entire space of our culture, all this could be appraised and measured only after a quasi-infinite investigation concerned with nothing more or nothing less than the very being of our modernity. (*Order* 221)

What stands out in these comments is Foucault's concern with understanding the historical basis of the analytic of modernity, which he claims, links our epistemological concerns with our philosophical ethos as historically situated subjects. The history of the modern subject's being is inscribed within the limits that discourses about labor, life, and language generate. The questions of epistemology and its links with the modern discourses of finitude, then, can be seen to assume a special place in Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?" This is a work that establishes a crucial context for our understanding of Foucault's critical strategy in *Order*. Therefore, although it appears a few years after *Order*, it is apparent that Foucault was still engaged in reviewing, extending, and clarifying his ideas on modernity, in this essay.

One of its primary tasks is to delineate the critical forces behind the "philosophical ethos" that establish the

operative conditions of modernist consciousness, one that enables the modern thinker to engage in an analysis of "what we are saying, thinking, doing." In this essay, Foucault claims that this "philosophical ethos" comes into being at the margins of modernity and that it offers a site on which the question of our "historical ontology" can be addressed by opening up the limits of Enlightenment thought--specifically as defined by the Kantian critique.

The question of "philosophical ethos" has, in a sense, always been predicated on the larger philosophical belief that philosophical analysis is a-historical, and therefore its historical continuum is self-evident. But the idea that Foucault is intent on communicating is that the philosophical ethos with which we are concerned in our condition as post-modern subjects is a historical one--it is, in fact, an explicit function of the historicity of modernity. It is part of the post-Kantian analytic tradition, with which we, as modern critical agents, constantly negotiate our ways of thinking, saying and critiquing. Therefore, we, who recognize this, are the historicizing agents of the Enlightenment, bringing its philosophical ethos into crisis by setting our thought at its limits.¹ John Grumley observes: "Foucault presupposes a 'we' that according to his own radical historicism can be nothing other than a result of historical accumulation. This 'we' is the object of critique: critique must analyze the limits imposed on 'us'" (204).

The question of our "philosophical ethos" is tied to other questions relating to the history of modern thought. These questions are: Is the modern "philosophical" ethos to be regarded as an extension or part of the hidden continuum of western thought, originating within the discourse of philosophy? What are its relations with the positive unconscious of modern thought and how can this ethos be realized within an "historical ontology of ourselves"? How do we as "post-modern" subjects say, think, and, engage in our critical endeavors across a form of thought whose ontological basis is subjected to its own finiteness--a finiteness that disrupts the very foundations on which ontologies are constructed?

In seeking to answer these questions, Foucault asserts that our own critical consciousness determines how we realize the "philosophical ethos" that we so closely associate with the Enlightenment. We are certainly placed within our discursive space by the ethos of the Enlightenment, but not by being the simple extended "effects" of that mode of thought, but by our questioning of and then distancing ourselves from the very limits of that constitutive effect. Commenting on this distancing, Ernesto Laclau observes that our critical endeavor necessitates the "delimit[ing] of an analytic terrain from whose standpoint" this distancing function "is thinkable and definable" (67). The critical implications of this "delimitation" become clear when we examine closely Foucault's ideas

of "the limit attitude" in "What is Enlightenment?" David R. Hiley notes:

What connects Foucault to the Enlightenment, then, is not a set of doctrines, but an attitude toward the present, a "philosophical ethos" that he called "a principle of critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy." Negatively, this is the refusal of Enlightenment blackmail, blackmail which rests in part on the confusion of the Enlightenment with humanism. Whereas the Enlightenment is, at its base, a certain reflective attitude toward the present, humanism is a set of themes, always tied to value-judgments, which Foucault saw as opposed to and in a state of tension with the Enlightenment. (70)

Explaining this tension in terms of the constitutive effects of a "philosophical ethos," Foucault elaborates:

This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a limit-attitude. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers. Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into

the positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the place of a possible transgression. (WE 45)

"The critical question has to be turned back into the positive one"; in Foucault's assertion about the *positive* nature of such questioning, one discerns a typically Heideggerian idea of the positive direction of the destructive (deconstructivist?) attempt at overcoming the history of metaphysics. Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time*:

[T]his tradition is just as far from having the negative sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, *stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits*; these in turn are given factually in the way the question is formulated at the time, and in the way the possible field for investigation is thus bounded off. On its negative side, this destruction does not relate itself towards the past; its criticism is aimed at 'today' and at the prevalent way of treating the history of ontology, whether it is headed towards

doxography, towards intellectual history, or towards a history of problems. But to bury the past in nullity [*Nichtigkeit*] is not the purpose of this destruction; its aim is positive; its negative function remains unexpressed and indirect. (my emphasis; 44)

In emphasizing the "positive" function of this history, both Foucault and Heidegger are responding to and opposing the Hegelian critique of reflexivity--one that makes reflection a negative concept. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen notes, "Hegelian self-consciousness places itself outside itself, negates and opposes itself to itself the better to know itself " (my emphasis; *Lacan* 26). However, in order to escape from the eventual consequence of making this centered reflexivity the basis of a dialectical system of negativity, Foucault offers a critique founded on a "limit-transgression" that goes beyond any totalizing vision of overcoming negativity. In the place of the reflective process that is empowered to overcome its own "aporias" (Gasché 60), Foucault assigns thinking to a multifarious and non-teleological region where differentiations are marked off in the very process of thought encountering its "other." This is, by far, the most significant stage in Foucault's thought of the limit, as it is enumerated in the final chapters of *Order*. Rodolphe Gasché notes, "This positive intent of destruction consists of a systematic removal or dismantling of the concealments (*Verdeckungen*) of the meaning

of Being by the history of ontology, a meaning with regard to which traditional ontology does not simply become relativized but in which it is rooted and from which it acquires its own epochal meaning" (*Tain* 113). The task of the post-modern critic, Foucault appears to argue, is closely aligned with this form of "destruction." Because her position is itself marked by the space of this transgressive possibility, the post-modern critic's understanding is "the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think" (*Order* 342).

If the philosophical ethos of post-modernity is made possible by our ever-renewed efforts to transgress the limits of modern thought, and our wanting to maintain this ethos, our own critical history has to be dispossessed of all absolutist certainties. It has to locate its being by acknowledging the limitation of modern thought to conceive of its own difference in the "differentiated" terms of its own history, and it has to oppose situating itself on a transcendental plane of that historicity. Perhaps, as Foucault suggests, the knowledge of precipitousness has always been the very condition of change in the epistemic order of things. Foucault also implies that such confrontations with limits are not unique to our post-modern condition, and have regularly marked the previous epistemic changes in Western history of thought. Indeed, the rupture that makes modern thought possible was connected with the failure of classical representation to maintain its transparency: once this transparency presented itself as a

problematic *within* classical thought, it had to undergo a catastrophic change. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow comment on this possibility: "[O]nly when classical discourse no longer appears as a perfectable medium whose natural elements represent the natural elements in the world, only then does the representing relation itself become a problem" (27). Manfred Frank discusses the failure of classical representation by pointing to the fact that its epistemological profile was fated to be undermined by the very systems of analysis that had consolidated its being:

What is new is that the rules of reason, or of language, are grounded in synthetic acts that precede analysis and remain exterior to it.

Analysis would have nothing to sink its teeth into if synthesis had not previously produced something. The dependence of analysis on synthesis, however, clouds the transparency of the relation of depiction that is articulated in analysis; it obscures the bond between language and representation.

(Frank 133)

With the fate of analysis extended to the furthest boundaries of its own transcendental epistemology, classical thought had confronted its own limits. In a similar manner, modern thought faces its own possible disintegration, but in the face of such dissipation emerges the force of a "counterhistory" that radically challenges its own centered anthropologism and offers a

new critical site where thought can once again recover the linkages that constitute "man." This self-conscious attempt to realize the limits of modern anthropologism by agitating the very seams of discourse by which man becomes "thinkable" is the focus of the final four chapters in *Order*. Foucault's exploration of the discursive arrangement of entities like life, labor, and language, therefore, centers on a critique of modern finitude, one that he amplifies in his detailed discussion of the limit-conditions inscribed within the forms of modern finitude.

Before I undertake a discussion of Foucault's critique of these forms of finitude, I must point to the overarching difficulty involved in presenting his strategy in a linear manner. One can best characterize Foucault's own analytic impulse as eccentric: as he systemizes his own historical reconstruction of the discourses of life, labor, and language, he negotiates with the analytic tradition of modernity by introducing what Bové calls the "historical, textual topology of argument, power, and interconnections within or across overdetermined intellectual and discursive productions" (Deleuze xiii). Such an approach continually engages and disengages the continuities that make these discourses possible. Recognizing the power and authority of modern epistemologies, Foucault nevertheless reminds us that the legacy of the Enlightenment (with its modern analytic epistemology) is something that can no longer be conceived of as a "received" tradition, in our condition as

"post-modern subjects." It is not a philosophical baggage that we have to either singularly adopt or reject; rather, in our position as post-modern subjects, our "understanding" will emerge in the light of our specific needs and claims, and within the horizon of our "argumentative topology." Therefore, far from being completely determined by the categories of the Enlightenment, we will carry them to the point where our present argument meets the *limit* imposed by such thought. In the interview with Gérard Raulet, Foucault clearly states that "any description must always be made in accordance with [the]kinds of virtual fracture which opens up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, i.e., of possible transformation" ("Structuralism" 206). The sense of the "limit" is crucial, not because it signifies the endpoint of our reflection, or the necessary boundary of what is possible to think, but because it offers the space in which history is understood as the differentiating force of a "counter-history" and not as a seamless transcendental continuum, where our post-modern epistemology acquires the critical power to think its own difference outside the transcendental frame of modernity. Such an understanding multiplies the possibility of critical contestations within the system of current knowledge; it disperses the very givenness of bodies and truths by acknowledging the specificities generated by their discursive movements.

Part of the reason Foucault's ideas are perceived as inscrutably dense and complex is that critics, when confronted with the aporias in Foucault's strategy of engagement and disengagement, attempt to regularize them by explaining them in terms of the normalizing analytic categories of "philosophy." What goes unnoticed is Foucault's own endeavor to force his own discourse to the limits of analytic thought through these aporias, through the constant transgression of the mode of modern analytic inquiry, and to arrive at positions where he can force us to confront how analysis itself structures its objects of inquiry, and therefore, has no "given" transcendental and rational basis. In other words, we are led into that highly fluid region of our will to knowledge that creates the conditions for us to receive the "truth" of modern thought and to install it in the regions of our thought.

This Nietzschean approach necessarily implies that Foucault cannot abandon or ignore the critical conditions imposed by analytic thought. But it allows him to track its discursive history--its function in the network of legitimizing forces of institutional inscription. All forms of critical inquiry participate across the space of interest, which disperses as much as it organizes their effects. This interest is not derived from a singular position, but is the effect of intersecting discursive conditions and practices that depend on how the interest of this critical agent is itself generated--and, as Foucault implies, it is often generated by

participating in the analysis itself. Robert Wuthnow rightly remarks that , "[u]nlike Althusser, who talks of a theory of practice, Foucault is critical of all ongoing practices with the help of his theoretical discourse, which itself, is a 'practice'" (*Cultural Analysis* 136). Foucault's modes of analysis are inherently strategies that Deleuze sees as "not external to thought but lying at its very heart, as that *impossibility of thinking* which doubles or hollows out the outside" (my emphasis, *Foucault* 97; see also Colin Gordon's *Afterword*).³ With this context etched out in a rather speculative manner, the following discussion will return to Foucault's strategical deployment of the idea of the limit-- both as a descriptive order as well as a counter-historical positioning and questioning of the space ordered by modern epistemology.

The Reign Of Limits in Modernity

The close association of the descriptive and the strategical makes Foucault's deployment of the limit in Part II of *Order* central to the book's critical and philosophical concerns. Such an approach informs Foucault's complex delineation of the discursive arrangement of the discourses of modernity, his exploration of the analytic of finitude underlying the epistemology of modern anthropologism as this epistemology regulates the differences introduced by history, and his attempt to reveal the vulnerable status of the human

and the counter sciences as they negotiate, and in turn are mediated by, their essentially finite inscription within the domain of knowledge. By identifying the forms of modern discourses, Foucault is able to reconstruct the parameters of modernity that were installed in the nineteenth century within the discourses of life, labor, and language, and that now stand precipitously on the threshold of their limits. Because these discourses were bound to those analytic practices that secured the epistemology of modernity, an inherent tension remains within modern thought between the "objective" and "negotiated" status of its limits. By explicating the play of limits within these dual sites, Foucault is able to expose the precipitous space that surrounds man as he is defined in relation to the life that he leads, the labor in which he is implicated, and the language that he speaks. As extensions of the empirical sciences of the modern episteme, the human sciences-- psychology, sociology, and the study of myth and literature-- and the counter-sciences--psychoanalysis and ethnology--produce representations that are caught up in the inherently vulnerable alignment of the different kinds of finitude that belong to the epistemology of humanism.

At one level, then, Foucault's exploration of the modern positivities of life, labor, and language and the human and counter-sciences show how discursive practices of the modern episteme define, territorialize, and institutionalize certain discourses and install their dominant epistemologies. As

Foucault discovers, implicit in these discourses are the fault lines that lead modern thought toward its own de-realization; in other words, once the limits are seen as part of the discourse of modernity--as the moving forces of its positive unconscious--modern thought faces its "Other"--the condition from which there is no recuperation, or a transcendental escape route. This is also, as I have stressed earlier, the point where Foucault's own critique itself becomes possible: it is in this sense that the limit becomes part of Foucault's own critical strategy.

Modern discourse emerges as a result of classical representation being supplanted by a humanist discourse. In order to comprehend the full significance of this development, it is necessary to introduce a short digression. Two significant developments are seen to take place in the order of thought: firstly, the classical, one-dimensional, tabular system of representation is replaced by the complex "volume" of modernism's discourses of life, labor, and language, with each discourse territorialized by the limits enforced by the rules of the positive unconscious; and secondly, the stable relationships of limits in classical representation, which were deployed to name the "truth"--representation itself--give way to the highly unstable order of modern representations. Their instability and fluidity are the consequence of the precarious status of their limits; they are poised to open into the region

of the "Other" by virtue of their own constitution, location, and alignment within discourse.

It is in keeping with this precarious balance effected in modern thought that Foucault deploys the word "limit" to introduce Part II of *Order: "The Limits of Representation."* First, the term "limit" signifies the boundary beyond which the order of classical representation could no longer provide a viable system of description or explanation for its "order" of things. Second, the term functions in the form of breaches and gaps caused by the operations of a historicity that inevitably inserts itself into the very fabric of this order. In the modern episteme, the word "limit" does not only signify the line that separates *what is* from *what is not*, as its conventional usage might suggest, but is the ground on which the density of his-tory is held together as transcendental finitude. But, in reality, it is a field of productive differentiations, and not a static and singular realm of being/non-being.

Modern thought comes into being by positing its limits as the identarian ground on which its representations can fully signify the density of life, labor, and language. It does so, not by adopting the transparent system of representation of classicism, but by isolating, and then objectifying the functional relations of language, life, and labor across a "human" history and a humanist epistemology, relations that operate by re-producing the limits through which these positivities can be

articulated, and by securing a historical space for them. It is clear, as Jonathan Culler notes, that Foucault's aim here is not to develop a "historical hermeneutics" (63) based on some notion of a "real" history, or to record "what the 'real' conditions were at a particular moment" but to examine, as John Rajchman notes, the "'histories' of the terms, categories and techniques through which certain things become at certain times the focus of a whole configuration of discourses and procedures" (*Freedom* 51).

Thus, Foucault's overall purpose in introducing "history" in the initial phase of his discussion of the modern episteme is to study the conditions under which analysis is directly or indirectly mediated by the historical emergence of modern thought's philosophical limits. More specifically, his aim is to show how the epistemological possibilities offered by the modern episteme depend largely on those modes of analysis that develop around the discourses of life, labor, and language. As a result of being formed within their historical densities--out of a whole field of differentiations and transformations within the body established by discursive and non-discursive relations--these modes of analysis are responsible for the emergence of "historical laws." These laws cannot represent the unity and stability of any objective rule governing representation, as they did in the classical episteme, where the continuity of the "table" was ensured by the representability of representation itself. Yet, they stand as "laws" that

embody the principles on which history itself becomes representable. But the modes of analysis they offer are radically different from classicism's mathematical and tabular system of rules.

For Foucault, the modern episteme does not simply alter the conceptual field of classical knowledge or its scene of representation; it is an "event" that introduces radical breaks in the system of analytic practices "distributed across the entire *visible* surface of knowledge, and whose signs, shocks, and effects it is possible to follow step by step" (my emphasis; *Order* 217). Furthermore, as Foucault shows, these practices are inextricably linked to their own historicization and are deployed in accordance with specific historical and practical needs, thereby manifesting themselves on the "visible surface of knowledge," not *within* the interiority of an individual subjectivity or a collective ideology. This is in keeping with Foucault's "archaeological" purpose, whose methodology Foucault will later enumerate in *Archaeology*. Thus, the discontinuities or breaks range themselves on the surface of discourse, instead of being interiorized as a "void which one must hasten to fill with the dismal plenitude of the cause or by the nimble bottle-imp of the mind (two perfectly symmetrical solutions)" ("*Politics & Study of Discourse*" 13).⁴

However, it should be borne in mind that the modern episteme, indeed, establishes a space for an interiorized discourse, but that this "interiorization" is itself a

historically mediated form, inextricably linked to the positivities introduced by the objectification of language in the nineteenth century, and also to the "compensations" for the "demotion" of language (296).⁵ The failure of representation to fully represent itself in the modern episteme has an important consequence that Foucault identifies with the emergence and manifestation of an "internal space" in the heart of things. This space, which appears at a depth indicated by the "inaccessible point" or peak of the sign, stands in a radically different relation to those representations that had appeared on the contiguous matrix of classical representation. This "point" indicates "a volume" within which things are posited; this volume remains "exterior" to representation because, as Foucault maintains, it is maintained outside its pure space by a temporal succession that implicates the subject "who from the depths of his own history, or on the basis of the tradition handed on to him, is trying to know" (*Order* 239). Kant had situated his metaphysics on this premise, but, as Foucault adds, this metaphysics also opens up "the possibility of another metaphysics; one whose whole purpose will be to question apart from representation, all that is the source and origin of representation; it makes possible those philosophies of Life, and the Word, that the nineteenth century is to deploy in the wake of criticism" (*Order* 242). The possibility for the constitution of a modern philosophical critique, with its accompanying analytic modes, thus proceeds from this position--

by limiting its ties with classical representation it moves into the territory of "another" system of representation. This new representational space installs "man" as the centered object of inquiry, and brings with this new interest questions about human knowing within a new transcendental plane. As Stephen Watson notes, the Kantian question, "*Was ist der Mensch?*" was made possible--in its "positive sense"--in the age of criticism by the withdrawal of representation, and by the gap opened up by the "volume" referred to earlier, leading to the installation of "the speculative metaphysics" of man (85). With the radical historicization of the classical space of analysis, the symmetry sustained within it--between thought and the analysis of thought--gives way to an asymmetrical relation between the laws of History and the analysis of production, life and language.

The first rumblings that lead to the radical reconstitution of the classical dyadic system is felt in the formation of a "metaphysics" that Foucault sees as residing in the gap between "history and History, between events and the Origin, between evolution and the first rending open of the source, between oblivion and the Return" (*Order* 219). No longer identical to itself, metaphysics is now located in those forms of differentiation and mediation through which analytic practices distribute and assign the specificities of production, language-use, and life. The "laws" of history, as Foucault implies, are to be located not in a universalizing

stable form of History, but in in those nodes of analytic practices where specificities and general laws of empirical being bring each other into being. Furthermore, the notion of an "individualized" identity who secures for itself the command of analysis, is itself revealed as "the gap between our history and History, between our self-conscious and purposeful use of language and the Logos that makes our speech possible" (Racevskis, "Michel Foucault" 21)--the space within which one can locate the "philosophical ethos" of modern man sitting precariously on the positive edifice of humanism. In this context, Karlis Racevskis further contends that "Foucault's project can be viewed as an attempt to dramatize and magnify this gap" ("Michel Foucault" 21). Once this gap is magnified, Racevskis appears to imply in his argument, the "positive" questions of modernist metaphysics (whose source is Kant) are catastrophically subjected to a form of dispersion which represents its "Other." What is established as a consequence of this catastrophic alteration is a highly fluid and dynamic, but tension-ridden, matrix for the practice of analysis, a subject Foucault will subsequently elaborate in *Archaeology*.

Labor, Life, and Language

In examining the play of limits within the discourses of labor, life, and language, Foucault is primarily concerned with showing how man's constitution as a subject of history is negotiated across certain epistemological possibilities--conditions

across which the many representations of value can be determined and legitimized. This is achieved by showing how the order of representation within the modern episteme moves away from the binary and transparent space of classical epistemology, and arranges itself around the notion of historicity that provides the center and circumference for modern thought, enabling man to be measured against specific systems of value that are posited by history.

Labor

In examining the discourse of labor, Foucault brings his attention to the material forces behind the formation of modern economic theories. He explains that the "subject," as a laboring agent, is the product of the multiplication of the productive power of labor responsible for assigning "value" (*Order* 224). As he notes so succinctly, exchange and circulation are no longer dependent on objects of need representing one another (as in classical analysis), but on labor--"time, toil, transformed, concealed, forgotten" (*Order* 225). Consequently, the analysis of representation that operated from classical binarism is ruptured by those elements of synthesis in which the perfect duplication--of this classificatory space, as well as of analysis--is rendered impossible:

It is true that Adam Smith is still, like his predecessors, analyzing the field of positivity

that the eighteenth century termed 'wealth'; and by that term he too means objects of need-- and thus objects of a certain type of representation-- representing themselves in the movements and methods of exchange. But within this duplication, and in order to regulate its laws--the units and measures of exchange--he formulates a principle of order that is irreducible to the analysis of representation; he unearths labour, that is toil and time, the working-day that at once patterns and uses up man's life. The equivalence of the objects of desire is no longer established by the intermediary of other objects and other desires, but by a transition to that which is radically heterogeneous to them. . . . Men exchange because they experience needs and desires; but they are able to exchange and to order these exchanges because they are subjected to time and to the great exterior necessity. (*Order* 225)

If Adam Smith's analysis rests on the fundamental incommensurability between labour and representation, it is because the underlying order that would ensure the framework of exchange between the two is replaced by a historicity that cannot be ordered through the theory of representation. In other words, representation cannot establish the conditions of possibility for the recovery of an essence or identity of

"historicity" itself. Thus, as Foucault says, the "time of economics," as it develops with Adam Smith, is not regulated by a temporality that is either linear or cyclical--that would be to ensure its representability within the order of the Same--but is conceived as "the interior time of an organic structure which grows in accordance with its own necessity and develops in accordance with autochthonous laws--the time of capital and production" (*Order 226*). The "great exterior necessity" is the foundation for the possibility of exchange and for the possibility of constructing an order for exchange--both of which are inter-dependent.

Life

Similarly, "life" is ordered in the nineteenth century according to an internal principle of organicism which "is not reducible to the reciprocal interaction of representations" (*Order 227*). Visibility as the criterion for determining "character" is supplanted by "function" which relates the part to the working of the entire living whole. Thus, "function" is tied up with the notion of "the *coherent totality* of an organic structure that weaves back into the unique fabric of its sovereignty both the visible and the invisible" (my emphasis; *Order 229*). Furthermore, the "analysis of life," no longer operative from a continuous space of representation or the "table," is rendered possible only by the "fundamental distortion between the space of organic structure and that of

nomenclature." This is how "character" becomes the point where it is possible to determine a "function" in the vertical plane and to affix a "name" in the horizontal (*Order 299*). Thus the classificatory impulse of classical analysis gives away to a fundamentally different order, oriented more towards a concept of organic structure that "intervenes between the articulating structures and the designating characters--creating between them a profound, interior, and essential space" (*Order 231*). It is in the production of this space that "the ground for a possible classification" (*Order 232*) is founded. Man as a "speaking" being is similarly posited within the limits of discourse of "language," in whose density he discovers his own lineaments

Language

It is in Foucault's analysis of language that one discovers the full extent to which modern thought aligns itself to the idea of historical becoming and historical finiteness. The modes of analysis of language in the emerging nineteenth-century order of the modern episteme subvert the primacy of the "name" which, in the classical episteme, had ensured the link between the power to designate and the power to articulate (*Order 235*). Instead, "history" intervenes in this space through the influence of specific institutions, or through changes in geographical locations and historical migrations, providing a kind of "volume" to the two-dimensional discursive

space in which language had been hitherto situated in the classical age. In the nineteenth century, the emergence of a new structure of inflection radicalized the way in which language was conceived--as the medium of combination and analysis. In this new system, "grammatical function" and "formal modification" are linked in a manner quite outside the scopical region of classical analysis of grammar:

[W]hat was at stake in this comparison of conjugations was no longer the link between original syllable and primary meaning; it was already a more complex relation between the modifications of the radical and the functions of grammar; it was being discovered that in two different languages there was a constant relation between a determinate series of formal modifications and an equally determinate series of grammatical functions, syntactical values, or modifications of meaning. (*Order 235*)

The "philological" rationale for the study of language in the nineteenth century introduces a certain idea of discontinuity that can be best discerned in the establishment of the notion of "kinship between languages"--an idea that stands in opposition to the classical theory of derivation. But, because the notion of "kinship" is itself made possible by the "discontinuity between the broad families, and internal analogies in the system of changes" (*Order 295*), philology successfully installs the coherence of internal logics within the specific arena of

systems, even as it dispenses with the continuist representational logic of classicism. In a similar fashion, designation is replaced by the theory of radical contrasts, and the theory of articulation, itself the product of "the visible analysis of representation," is supplanted by the study of internal variations of language. In short, the "objectification" of language is negotiated through a series of restructurings that disrupt the binary alignment between words and things, positing language as an "autonomous organic structure" (*Order 295*). As a result of this radical break in the conception of language, the ontological status guaranteed by the classical mode between "speaking" and "thinking"--in the form of the function of *to be*--is de-territorialized, making language stand on its own refigured ontological space as object. This triggers a series of changes in the alignment of the limits and rules of the positive unconscious. With classical nominalism destroyed, what stands in its place is language with its "own particular density, to deploy a history, an objectivity, and laws of its own" (*Order 296*).

It is worth pointing out that the possibility of such deployments--of history and objectivity--within this autonomous space of language is predicated on two new functions that language introduces within the sphere of knowing, both of which appear to represent two contradictory impulses. One is the "positivist's dream" of a perfectly neutral language, and the other is the expressive function belonging to a "knowing"

subject who "possesses" language (*Order 296*). The former is based on a scientific language that best provides the condition of neutrality and aims to be the effective "table" of things. Foucault clarifies that in this case, the notion of a "table" is fundamentally different from the classical notion--the latter relies on language providing a grid of identities and differences for the classification of nature, while the latter, standing separate from nature, seeks to "draw some of it into itself by means of its own passivity [to] finally . . . become nature's faithful portrait" (*Order 297*). Formed in this manner, the "positivity" of such a language assumes two things: that nature and historical progression can contain within themselves a point of origin that language tries to grasp, and that the possibility of language as a vast "symbolism" is grounded in its objectification and territorialization as a "known object" (for example, in the known form of "Indo-European" languages), and in its maintaining, within the space of knowledge, non-verbal logical relations, such as the ones permitted by logical algebra. The constitution of "symbolic logic" along with the formation of a "historical grammar," Foucault argues, is made possible within the space of this new positivity generated by the modern thought of the nineteenth century. What stands out in these refigurative processes are the specific forms of methodological practices--of hermeneutics and formalization--that grow out of and are supported by the positivities of language.

As a result of having gained a "historical" density, language appears to be located at a new depth, transcending any specific history, extending itself to a space of "traditions and memories" of people, which are unconscious. This excluded unconscious makes possible patterns of thought within which all acts of signification take place. The introduction of exegesis or hermeneutics as a methodological practice in the nineteenth century fulfills the aim of delving below not only the opinions, philosophies, and sciences of man in order to search for the origin of signification, but also below forms of standardized language, to arrive at an "essential life [that] has not yet been caught up in the network of any grammar" (*Order* 298). It is in this space that hermeneutics attempts to locate its radical undermining of all that is presented in the form of "apparent discourse, our fantasies, our dreams, our bodies" (*Order* 298).

In a paper delivered in 1964, and subsequently published in 1967, entitled "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," Foucault addresses the question of hermeneutics along the lines of language being the medium of "suspicion," concealing itself behind all that seems apparent or overt in normal discourse and language-use. Foucault claims that the historical density of language in modern thought dissipates all currently manifested forms of meaning and of immediate signification, "rendering once more noisy and audible the element of silence that all discourse carries with it as it is spoken" (*Order* 298). Within this

region, Foucault tells us, Marx engages in the exegesis of "value," and Nietzsche introduces the exegesis of a "few Greek words". In this essay, Foucault develops his argument by first situating Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx within the context of the modern episteme of the nineteenth century. He relates their critical ventures to an ancient exegetical tradition that had been eclipsed by classicism. The primary task of exegesis was directed towards the search for "meaning," though this search was itself based on "play"--the perpetual play of mirrors or images dispersed in their multiplicity. Central to this hermeneutic tradition, remobilized by these thinkers, is the whole idea of modification of language as a sign system. Foucault asserts that Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx "have in reality changed the nature of the sign and modified the fashion in which the sign can in general be interpreted" ("Nietzsche" 2). This task of interpretation comes into its own in the radical break it introduces within the sovereign space of a transparent discourse, thereby instituting a primal "language" in whose enthrallment man begins to speak:

. . .[W]hat it reveals is not the sovereignty of a primal discourse, but the fact that we are already, before the very least of our words, governed and paralyzed by language. Modern criticism has devoted itself to a strange kind of commentary, since it does not proceed from the observation that there is language towards the discovery of what that language

means, but from the deployment of manifest discourse towards a revelation of language in its crude being.

(*Order* 298)

The effect of "turn[ing] words around to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them" (*Order* 298) leads not only to the adoption of a new notion of sign function in the historical "becoming" of words, but its also makes that history serve the purposes of securing "interpretation" in depths of texts as they are "realized" by a subjective consciousness--by what Foucault calls " a sort of primitive recognition" ("Discourse on Language" 228). With "history" constructed to act as both the effect and cause of language, hermeneutics sets the ground for a textual theory that is deeply steeped in the tradition of interpretation--in its simultaneous possibility and impossibility. But the "impossibility" of interpretation is itself predicated on its possibility, its "Other," and vice versa, so that ultimately, both the impossibility and possibility of interpretation become the effects of multiple negotiations, to be located as effects of a "history," which Gadamer characterizes, in *Truth and Method*, as "the fusion of horizons."⁶

In this context, Foucault's argument about Nietzschean hermeneutics in "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud" is based on the recognition that Nietzsche alone is able to see the process of hermeneutics as being implicated in a series of negotiations, rather than being an uniform site for a "fusion of horizons."

Moving across the differentiated space that is language, along the "descending line" (to use the metaphor of depth), Nietzsche's interpreter is caught up in projecting this depth as "an absolutely superficial secret," revealing it as "only a *game* and a wrinkle on the surface" (my emphasis; "Nietzsche," 2). Thus, the so-called excavations into the depths bring up more surfaces, rather than a solid core at the bottom. Also, the term "game" indicates the negotiatory dynamics involved in any hermeneutic enterprise. However, nineteenth-century hermeneutics suppresses this Nietzschean perspective by developing complicitous relations with both phenomenology and structuralism in the twentieth century.

In *Order*, Foucault refers to structuralism and hermeneutics as "the two great forms of analysis of our time" (*Order* 299). He specifies that formalization as a technique of analysis grows out of the same objectification of language that had installed hermeneutics; in other words, both these systems are made possible by the same "positivity" that is installed as the discursive basis of the modern episteme. First of all, there are already present, in the constitution of a "historical grammar," those discursive impulses that regulate the figuration of vocabularies, synthetic forms, and words within the region of specific laws in formalization. Furthermore, the possibility of engaging in any "formal" analysis of language necessarily implies that one acknowledges the inherent "meaningfulness" of language:

[I]n order to formalize what we suppose to be a language, is it not necessary to have practised some minimum form of exegesis, and at least interpreted all those mute forms as having the intention of meaning something? (*Order 299*).

It is on this "common ground" that phenomenology and structuralism are brought together in the twentieth century--a space that is also their common foundation, built on the possibility of signs bearing meanings--human meanings--whether they lie deeply embedded in speech or take on the shape of objective laws. Formalization opposes hermeneutics in so far as the former aims to "to control any language that may rise, and to impose upon it from the above the law of what it is possible to say" (*Order 299*), but it is still anchored in the belief that such speech is "meaningful." Furthermore, these laws then assume the synthetic *a priori* laws (in the Kantian tradition), and constructed in such a mode, ultimately attempt to overcome the discontinuities introduced by historical formations of discourse.

The relationship of meaningfulness and language is central to the territorialization of the discourses of language in the modern episteme. But such territorialization is unstable, and this is most clearly discerned in Foucault's description of the emergence of "literature." The last, and by far the "most unexpected" and radical event in the territorialization of language, is the appearance of "literature," or more specifically,

"literary language." Foucault believes that with the appearance of such language, the limits of modern thought undergo their most radical transformation. If hermeneutics and formalization, as analytic systems, develop out of the space constituted by the limits of the positive unconscious of the modern episteme, literature traverses the limits of that episteme, foregrounding the gaps that come into play, thereby enabling it to "reconstitut[e] itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing" (*Order 300*). By indicating its eccentric status and its seeming independence from the specified discursive regions of this episteme, Foucault wants to emphasize the fact that literature is transgressive in breaking its ties completely with all forms of referentiality that had been zealously protected by the two systems of analysis. Even when language had been realized in the volume of its historical density in these systems, it was subjected to a form of referentiality for which "history" had provided the foundation. In being completely intransitive and singularly pointing to itself, language is able for the first time to deal with its own being as language--as "the untamed, imperious beings of words" (*Order 300*). More emphatically, literature realizes the full potential of the formation/ disruption of language in the modern episteme, pointing to the dynamic function of its limits:

[L]iterature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself with a radical intransitivity; it becomes detached from all the values that were able to keep it in general circulation during the Classical age (taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth), and creates within its own space everything that will ensure a ludic denial of them . . . and becomes merely a manifestation of language which has no other law than that of affirming--in opposition to all other forms of discourse--its *own precipitous existence*. (my emphasis; *Order 300*).

The focal interest here is not so much on language's being for its own sake as on the manner in which language forces the limits of modern thought to the sites where their constitutive effects become evident. By manifesting and then progressively leading to a crisis the energies that had set the new episteme into motion, literature extends the matrix of thought into the unthought and the region of the "Same" into the differential space of the "Other" in ways that the positivities of language were unable to effect. Since the "Other" cannot be conceptualized or harnessed within the frame of any objectified, or referential epistemological system, it forces language to confront its own precipitousness--its perennial condition of becoming, which is best reflected, Foucault argues, in the "pure act of writing." Forever elusive,

threatening and in turn being threatened by the very concepts it gives rise to, language hovers on the brink of "unmeaning," forcing its chaos to confront "meaning" in all its discursively manifested forms. It returns endlessly to itself, its own point of origin as "words" by not attempting to break out of this cycle through some trajectory of recovery and emancipation--like those of significant content or of specific referentiality in the world of ideas. Also, because it refuses to attach itself to a "subjectivity" but "addresses itself to itself as a *writing* subjectivity (my emphasis; *Order 300*), literature detaches itself from the space of subjective "expression."

Foucault points out that through this new development, coming at the heels of an event in which "language becomes an object of knowledge. . . reappear[s] in a strictly *opposite* modality," the objectifications of hermeneutics and formalization are acutely challenged. The condition ushered in by literature--one that lies behind the "purist" Mallarmean view of language--as Foucault points out is

the silent deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being. (*Order 300*)

Contrary to the opinion of certain critics of Foucault, I would like to suggest that in positing this kind of radical

intransitivity, Foucault was not simply attempting to justify the epistemological basis for a theory like art for art's sake, but was attempting to track how literature actually challenges the very arrangement of the limits of knowledge that undergirds the positive unconscious of the modern episteme. One has to disagree with Jon Stratton's contention that in developing such an "absolutist" category Foucault was simply extending a "formal definition of Literature" (116).⁷ Because language in the nineteenth century had itself been made the "object" of knowledge, its systems of analysis were progressively activated and deployed to extend their *objectifying* power into the realm of knowledge--of speech, subjectivity, "texts," etc., thus creating a double movement that "literature" serves to highlight, and then collapse and transgress. Hermeneutics attains to this objectifying truth by positing "significance" to all forms of discourse, while formalization (later, structuralism) installs the law of "what it is possible to say" (*Order* 299). Literature's radical intransitivity serves to *short circuit*, or better, to "contest" (*Order* 322) this double movement by cutting across it, thus making it a condition from which there is no recuperation--dialectical or otherwise. With Foucault establishing "literature" as the site of a possible transgression of the limits imposed on knowledge in the modern episteme, one is prepared for his "practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression" (qtd.in O'Farrell, 32), which he develops subsequently in his archaeological/

genealogical enterprise, and in his analysis of power/knowledge. Clare O'Farrell notes that

[w]hat a 'thought of the limit' means is this: if instead of looking at totalities, the 'edge'(limit) which separates the Same and the Other could be analyzed and described, perhaps an insight into the reality or truth of the Same and the Other could be gained. Such a system of thought in which 'transgression,' that which crosses the 'Limit,' plays a vital role, has both critical and ontological value in Foucault's view. Its critical status lies in the fact that it is able to study the Same (finitude) which lies in the limits of empiri-knowledge. As for the ontological requirements, these are met by 'transgression' in its lightning movement across the Limit separating the Same and the Other; 'transgression' indicates where the limits lie. (32)

By blocking any direct passage from the sign systems to their interpretation or their formalization, literature strives to overthrow the reign of all totalities--of knowledge, of analysis or explanation, and of expressive signs. From this perspective, one can consider the radical intransitiveness of literature as reflecting the "other" of these totalities--the cycle of return from words back to words allows no direct translation of the world of language into the world of being.

What appeared as a crossable limit, separating the Same from the murmuring of words, is revealed as the constantly deferred condition--the Other of the Other. In that sense, Foucault's view on literature in this segment of *Order* remains a significant exploration of the thought on the limit as well as being a critical strategy that contests the boundaries of modern epistemology.

The "critical" function of literature, as it reappears in the fold of the modern episteme, is therefore not to be seen as another event to be placed within the sequence of gradually unfolding events like "the return of exegesis" and "formalization," or within the development of "philology," as Foucault's opening assertion in Chapter 9 of *Order* might lead us to assume. Though it is true that the appearance of "literature" is made possible by the objectification of "language," the former is not to be construed as linked causally to the latter. Its status as event is connected with the kind of crisis it brings to bear on the discourse of positivities of the modern episteme and this crisis, as Foucault seems to suggest, is built within the differential relations it shares with them.

Thus, Mallarme's project of upholding the "precarious being of the word" serves to dissociate language from the totalizing positivities of modern thought. Such precariousness or "precipitousness" marks the extreme limit of the "limits of representation" in which the prepositional object

(representation) is far less important than the noun ("limits"), modified by the prepositional phrase: how a limit can "occur" (as event) in a manner that puts within limits the body of values that led to the positing of that specific limit. In this sense, the question of "language," as Foucault reminds us (*Order* 306), is vitally connected with the condition of think-ing that is projected within the "modern" humanist discourse of man. How are questions of human nature and the particular forms of human thinking made possible by the positivities of modern thought negotiated within this horizon of a limited language? What are the limits posited at this line, and how are the modes of analysis instituted by the deployment of such limits made to generate the required conditions of a speci-fically "humanist," epistemology? These questions lie at the heart of Foucault's discussion of the analytic of finitude.

Analytic of Finitude

If the discourses of life, labor, and language represent the nexus of modern humanism, their epistemologies often lead to the region where the human is confronted by its double. Indeed, the presence of the limit that produces this double is a necessary condition that is inscribed within modern epistemology. Located within the strategical sphere of a body of discourse that has formulated its positivities around the specifiable conditions of humanist knowledge, this double

points to the openly transgressive nature of such epistemology-its power and vulnerability. Since the world of classical thought had ceased to provide the conditions for the spontaneous deployment of entities of representation, man's density as a living, working, and speaking being could only be represented by establishing specific forms of the analytic of finitude. For example, although language still continues to play an important role in the constitutive dynamics of modern epistemology, its discursive make-up is altered in a radical manner. In this context, Roger Paden notes that this change occurs as language ceases to be a "transparent medium" and an "isomorphic model," becoming an object of "limited existence"; modern episteme, therefore, installs the theory that "through the study of these limitations on the process of knowing, it might be possible to establish a *foundation* for knowledge that would serve to justify it" (emphasis added; 25). Thus, the limited, historical nature of language itself provides the conditions for modern epistemology to consolidate its power, but the knowledge of historical limits is always precariously stable, since the analytic of finitude that undergirds this knowledge is necessarily implicated in its own dual positioning of the human as subject and object of knowledge. Consequently, man appears to be caught within the opposing claims of subjectivity and objectivity, each utilizing the other to establish its own ground and identity. Foucault describes five interrelated forms of finitude, capturing this dynamic duality

of modern epistemology--"Place of the King," "Analytic of Finitude," "Empirical and the Transcendental," "Cogito and the Unthought," and "Retreat and Return of the Origin." It is also significant to note that in such a delineation of finitude, Foucault proceeds to deploy the idea of the limit as a critical strategy in order to open the space beyond the boundaries naturalized by modern thought and to lead into the region of an historical ontology that can account for the relational inscription of all historical entities.

Place of the King

Serving as a reminder of the imperial presence in the represented space of Velazquez's painting, the "king" represents the inscribed power of "man" in modern epistemology. This new imperial figure is both the subject as well as the object of modern thought: the "modern" knowing subject depends on its existence on a specifiable finitude, but this finitude is transcendentalized within the epistemological enclosure of humanist philosophy. In this context, Foucault argues that though man as a being had always existed, his mode of existence as possessing a specific "human" nature is the unique creation of modern thought. Classicism, according to him, had no need for such a concept because, within its system, "nature" was aligned to "human nature" in a perfectly complementary space. The notion of a "regional, limited, specific nature," which is the basis for constructing "man" in modern thought, was completely

subsumed in the universal, limitless continuum of classical representation. The representability of representation is the condition for the existence of classical thought, wherein "the human" is caught up in the double fold, making it impossible to differentiate itself in any identifiable manner from the act of representing. The linear sequences of thought that are implicated in thinking are always caught in the double movement of representations, and regulated "into the constant table of partially different things" (*Order 309*). Since this table itself embodies the representability of nature, and at the same time provides the site for dealing with the experience of the different and the contingent in perfectly duplicatable representations, nothing within the purview of human thought--as thinking difference--can be imagined outside of it. Thus, as Foucault notes,

The chain of being becomes discourse, thereby linking itself to human nature and to the sequence of representations. . . . If human nature is interwoven with nature, it is by the mechanisms of knowledge and by their functioning; or, rather, in the general arrangement of the classical episteme, nature, human nature, and their relations are definite and predictable functional moments. (*Order 310*)

It is this predictability of the relations between "nature" and "human nature" that precludes the necessity of assigning a

specificity to human knowing in classical thought. "Classical representation articulates resemblance-based on Same. In man, representation articulates a subject/object that cannot overcome its difference" (Scott 175). Modern thought is able to change the arrangement of resemblance based on Same, because by raising the question of human finitude and finite human knowing, it creates the site where this finitude can be situated. Thus "man" is installed in this site as "a primary reality with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge" (Order 310). It is in the difficulty of assigning a conceptual wholeness to this site--of constructing it out of the sphere of the differential relations through which it is synthesized--that the analytics of modern thought opens up a new order of critique, one that Foucault associates with the idea of the limit.

Although the concept of human nature might suggest that by dealing with his own finitude within a determinable site, man, in modern thought, has ultimately emerged in all his completed finality--in some form of transcendental discourse that originates in him, and him alone--this fulfilling dream cannot be realized. The problem lies in the regulatory role that this concept plays in the order of thought in the modern episteme, a role that has to be relegated to the status of the unthinkable. Because the concept "man" or "human nature"--as a site for a perfectly transparent order of finitude--is itself the product of specific transformations within the limits of modern

thought, the modes of analysis across which these limits are ensured are themselves limited by the conditions of synthesis to which man's knowing is irretrievably linked. These conditions of synthesis are made possible by man's very position within the order of finitude that defines him as a historically synthesized being. No sooner does it appear on the site of finitude as "human," with the possible conditions of knowing that finitude guaranteed, is it caught up in its own double--the double of the transcendental and the empirical, that of the cogito and the unthought and the retreat and return of origin.

The Analytic of Finitude

Foucault pays careful attention to the specific ways in which man is caught up in his own synthetic condition as a living, laboring, and speaking being. The dream of humanistic freedom and truth lies behind the duality of the subject/object in which the figure of man is circumscribed. In "The Analytic of Finitude," the emphasis is on recovering how the question of analysis of the human object is specifically negotiated across the limits of finitude which provide the ground for the discursive emergence of man. First of all, this space is a designatory site, and for that very reason "ambiguous" (*Order* 313). Man's concrete existence is to be assigned to the determinations made possible by a specific history--of life, labor and language--but these determinations always exceed the

designatory function, too dense in their exteriority to be simply figured within the confining site of an unitary finiteness:

All these contents that his knowledge reveals to him, overhang him with all their solidity, and traverse him as though he were merely an object of nature, a face doomed to be erased in the course of history. (*Order 313*)

The possibility of his erasure in the face of these densities disrupts the purely designatory function of man as subject of knowledge. Foucault goes on to contend that "this primary discovery of finitude is really an unstable one; nothing allows it to contemplate itself; and would it not be possible to suppose that it also promises that very infinity it refuses, according to the system of actuality" (*Order 314*). Thus, the very possibility of knowledge--in all its forms--is itself predicated on a fundamental impossibility: the order of finitude provides the ground for finiteness to *be thought*. But this "impossibility" has to be forgotten and erased if this finiteness is to be extended into the objectified sphere of discourse--the positivities--as well as the world of modern analysis. In fact, such an extension can only be effected at a site where "man's being will be able to provide a foundation for all those forms that indicate to him that he is not infinite" (*Order 315*).⁸

What emerges from the negotiation of this paradox is a "repetition--of the identity and the difference between the positive and the fundamental" (Order 315). The experience of finiteness has to be aligned along the analytic of finitude, with the figure of the Same providing the ground for the identification of difference within the order of the positivities. To the extent that the "fundamental" is itself the region where the multiplicity of discourse is erased, the analytic of finitude is caught in

the interminable to and fro of a double system of referentiality: if man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labour, and life; and inversely, if life, labour, and language may be posited within their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms. (Order 317)

As a figurable entity, man is thus rendered possible only within the order of finitude; such figuration is always caught up in the differential play of that finitude, and in the movement of the "the empirical and the transcendental." A pure space for man in the order of discourse is impossible because in order to be "itself" it cannot overcome its "other," which both provides the condition for its existence, as well as its impossibility.

The Empirical and the Transcendental

Continuing his analysis of the dynamics of the limits of modern thought, Foucault now moves to another arena in which this double movement is enacted: the empirical and the transcendental. He begins by stating,

Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible. (*Order* 318)

While the forms and properties of specific representations--delineated across a continuum of differences--provided the ground of classical epistemology, modern thought seeks to order the empirical contents of history within its order of finitude by establishing two kinds of analysis: transcendental aesthetic and transcendental dialectic. The former--transcendental aesthetic--indicates that "there is a nature of human knowledge that determines its forms and that can at the same time be made manifest to it in its own empirical contents." The latter assumes that there are historical, social or economic conditions on knowledge, which all form the basis of a "history of knowledge which could be given to empirical knowledge and prescribe its forms" (*Order* 319). Such "transcendentalization" has one significant effect on modern thought--it is the institution of a notion of "truth" as belonging to the empirical object. This truth is that of "actual experience." The evaluation of the empirical at the transcendental level is

conducted through a series of "divisions" (*Order 319-320*), as modern epistemology seeks to define a true language that will be symmetrical to true discourse. But, as Foucault argues, the status of this true discourse remains "ambiguous" because it is caught up in the double fold--of positivism and of eschatology, within this transcendental move:

[E]ither this true discourse finds its foundation and model in the empirical truth whose genesis in nature and in history it retraces, so that one has an analysis of the positivist type (the truth of the object determines the truth of the discourse that describes its formation); or it sketches out in advance and foments it from a distance, so that one has a discourse of the eschatological type (the truth of the philosophical discourse constitutes the truth in formation). (*Order 320*)

Here we see the specific location of the analytic of finitude--one that allows discourse to maintain its truth by keeping separate the empirical and the transcendental while maintaining their shared ground of identity. This status of "truth" is, after all, conjoined with, or perhaps a manifestation of, a specific knowledge of man as a subject,

that is, as a locus of knowledge which has been empirically acquired but referred back as closely as possible to what makes it possible, and as a pure form immediately present to those contents, a

discourse, in short, which in relation to a quasi-aesthetics and quasi-dialectics would play the role of an analytic which would at the same time give them a foundation in a theory of the subject and perhaps enable them to articulate themselves in that third and intermediary term in which both the experience of the body and that of culture would be rooted. (*Order 320-21*)

In these arguments, Foucault establishes the manner in which the double movement contained in the empirical-transcendental discourse determines the site for an analysis of body and culture in modern thought. Crucial to this site's activity is the manifestation of the human sciences' regulatory ordering of modern thought. The analysis of "actual experience" is made actual by virtue of being inscribed within this fold, and this analysis acts as the site for what might be given to experience and what might be construed as its originating impulse. As a "figuration," it results in

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 naivete, to content it and seek foundations for it. (*Order 321*)

The Cogito and the Unthought

The empirico-transcendental is the site on which modern thought's analytic modes find themselves caught up in a double fold. But behind the deployment of such modes lies a specific notion of the "cogito" and of its regulatory function as the basis of humanist identity. This cogito, in order to function as the empowering center of the new epistemology, has to confront its own unthought, and it in this new encounter of the cogito and the unthought that the modern episteme tentatively situates its experience of finiteness:

If man is indeed, in the world, the locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet, if he is that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible, then man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a cogito. Nor can he inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and never can lead to self-consciousness. Man is a mode of being which accommodates that dimension --always open, never finally delimited, yet constantly traversed --which extends from a part of *himself not reflected in a cogito to the act of thought by which he apprehends that part*; and which in the inverse direction, extends from that pure apprehension to the empirical clutter, the chaotic

accumulation of contents, the weight of experiences, constantly eluding themselves, the whole silent horizon of what is posited in the sandy stretches of non-thought. (my emphasis; Order 322-23)

In this crucial commentary, Foucault points to the fundamental epistemological problem of modern thought: being situated at the center of the epistemological system, the modern cogito attempts to overcome and transcend its finitude by assuming a wholeness that is beyond that scheme. Caught between the horns of a plenitude that seeks to know itself through the finalizing teleology of function, and a finitude that always exceeds this final form by virtue of its chaotic and never-to-be-finalized wholeness, the modern cogito is continually attempting to exceed and overcome its own limitation. It is in this play of thought and its other--the "unthought" that Foucault refers to as its "stubborn exteriority" (Order 323)--that the differentiating dynamics of modern thought are generated. The form in which this play is regulated into unity and wholeness is also the form of the critique that originates in Kant and extends to the normalizing discourses of the human sciences. Foucault argues that as modern thought traverses the post-Kantian period, its epistemological site refigures the transcendental domain set forth by Kant:

There has been a fourfold displacement in relation to the Kantian position, for it is now a question not of truth, but of being; not of nature, but of

man; not of the possibility of understanding, but of the possibility of a primary misunderstanding; not of the unaccountable nature of philosophical theories as opposed to science, but of the resumption in a clear philosophical awareness of that whole realm of unaccounted-for experiences in which man does not recognize himself. (*Order 323*)

Foucault points out that the "unity" of the cogito that subsumes this form of transcendence is radically different from the classical conception of the cogito, as formulated by Descartes. Rather, it is the unity of disjunction that functions as a regulatory movement--of extending itself over the "distance that both separates and links thought-consciousness-of-itself and whatever within thought [that] is rooted in unthought" (*Order 324*). The Cartesian cogito, on the other hand, is the site for the purification of knowledge--of isolating and separating all those thoughts that are regarded as "exterior" to pure consciousness, to be assigned to the realm of "illusion," so that consciousness can shine in its state of complete synoptic mastery. Because its status is tied up with the order of finitude and exteriority, and its movement aligned with the density of historical existence, modern epistemology calls for the "ceaseless task to be undertaken afresh"--in "the constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside elsewhere and here, and yet so very close to itself; how it can be in the forms of non-thinking"

(*Order 324*). With "man" situated at the heart of this enterprise, the modern cogito can translate man's historical finitude into those conditions within which the "unthought" becomes a real possibility.

Perhaps, the most sweeping effect of such change is experienced in the mode of Being in modern thought. In this Heideggerian section, Foucault explains that the modern cogito brings into the arena of Being not the self-evident space of consciousness but those singular movements that are caused by "the being of thought" penetrating "right down to the inert network of *what does not think*" (my emphasis; *Order 324*). Disturbing the equational relationship shared by the Cartesian "I think" and "I am," the modern cogito activates an entire range of differential relations that constitute the status of man as a laboring, living, and speaking being. What emerges as the order of value in the actualization of labor, life, and language is linked to the space created by the disjunction of consciousness: it is necessarily conjoined with a form of reflection, which is "removed from both Cartesianism and Kantian analysis." Foucault characterizes this as the questioning of "man's being in that dimension where thought addresses the unthought and articulates itself *upon it*" (emphasis added; *Order 325*). The form that this articulation takes is the subject of Foucault's analysis of the human sciences, which we will follow in the foregoing discussion.

At this point, Foucault is interested in exploring the direct consequences of this movement within modern thought. He notes that they are two: the first is "negative" and the second "positive." The "negative" consequence belongs to a "purely historical order" articulated in Husserl's phenomenology. In Husserlian phenomenology, the mode of affirmation of thought is always caught up in thought eluding itself and leading to "a many-sided and proliferating interrogation concerning being" (*Order* 325). This form of interrogation, which takes the form of a "reduction," necessarily leads thought into the sites of labor, life, and language which provide the basis for the "empirical analyses of man." But because, the question of ontology is always inserted into this form of discourse, "[t]he phenomenological project continually resolves itself, before our eyes, into a description--empirical despite itself--of actual experience, and into an ontology of the unthought that automatically short-circuits the primacy of the 'I think'" (*Order* 326). The second consequence--the "positive" one--is the co-existence of the thought and the unthought within the very discourse in which modern man makes his appearance:

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the episteme without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparent inert density in which it is embedded,

an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. (*Order 326*)

Since the double of the unthought is assigned the complementary form and "the inverted name of that for which it was the Other and the shadow," it comes to be represented as the "blurred projection of what man is in his truth" (*Order 327*). Foucault lists Hegel's notion of the "An sich," Schopenhauer's "Unbewusste," Marx's "alienated man," and Husserl's "inactual," as the embodiments of such inversions. At the same time, however, these entities play "the role of the preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth" (*Order 327*). Thus, with the necessity of thinking the unthought established, modern reflection takes upon itself the task of overcoming this unthought in order to establish "man" in his closest proximity to his posited essence. Thus a precarious balance is maintained, one which strains modern thought towards its own limit and isolates the unthought into the region of the "other" (so that thought can hope to return to itself). Modern thought finds itself burdened by the need to carry the unthought through the very process of its becoming into that "region where man's Other must become the Same as himself" (*Order 327*).

The Retreat and Return of the Origin

Characterizing man's mode of being in modern thought as the site on which a specific relationship is established

between "the origin" and the "experience of finitude," Foucault goes on to demonstrate how this relationship both marks and limits epistemological order of modern thought. Classical thought had posed the question of "origin" in terms of an "ideal genesis of thought," with its modes of analysis deployed in a manner that aligned it to representation as its "mere duplication" (*Order* 329). In other words, representation itself had made possible the ideal kinship between itself and thought—a kinship that assured representation of its status as the chief regulator of thinking, as well as the only ground in which all thought could take place. This relationship of equivalence determined the efficacy of classical representation in ordering "wealth" (because the barter system itself rested on equivalent representation of desire); in ordering "life" (since the table of life was based on the representation of the "expanse of likeness" of identities); in ordering "language" (since its primal being was invented in the form of "the transparency between the representation of a thing and the representation of the cry, sound or gesture that accompanied it"). With the formulation of a sequence that guaranteed a symmetrical exchange of things and representations across a continuum of difference as the Same, it became unnecessary for classical thought to insert an "origin;" this origin would only disrupt the sequence by posing questions about its own status as true or fictitious entity, or as explanatory hypothesis or a point of historical event. Both questions, in fact, could not be

raised within the order of classical representation. What was essential to classical thought was that its modes of analyses be made to deal with their own operations as if they were the starting point--"at the same time outside real time and inside it."; its own "historical" significance lies completely subsumed in the "first fold"--one in which the differential movement of history has no place.

Foucault goes on to say that such a notion of origin was no longer available to modern thought. Since the history of labor, life, and language are available "from their inside," it is no longer possible for an origin to be conceived as the sole basis and the beginning point of this type of historicity. Rather, "it is historicity that, in its very fabric, makes possible the necessity of an origin which must be both internal and foreign to it" (*Order* 329). Gathered together in the form of a "cone," this history has a tip, "a single point of identity," which represents its status as history, and it has a body and a density that has the potential to "burst open upon itself and become Other" (*Order* 329-30). Constituted across such a condition in which it is subjected to the torsion of its own "volume" and density, modern thought can no longer posit history in the fold of a unilateral system.

The "inaccessible identity" of the origin of histories out of which "man" is constituted on the very fabric of modern discourse is "inaccessible" for the very reason that man is bound up with a finitude that is "never contemporaneous with that

origin." This "inaccessibility" also provides the pretext for modern thought to construct a way in which man "articulates himself upon the already-begun of labour, life, and language." But this process of "articulation" can only be achieved on "the thin surface of the original"--in other words, in that "fold" of life, labor, and language into which he is "thrown" in his finitude. As a result, this surface does not reveal itself in "the immediacy of birth," but on its belatedness, on the "complex mediations formed and laid down as a sediment in their own history by labour, life, and language." Caught up in the "intermediaries" of these histories, man's knowledge of his finitude becomes a condition in which he is always circumscribed by the "immense region of shadow in which labour, life, and language conceal their truth (and their own origin)." Thus, the interplay of revealing and concealing, so close to the heart of modern thought's construction of what Foucault calls the "original," becomes, for his critical perspective, the "final" dimension of modern man's mode of being.

In modern thought, the "original," ceases to be mere "origin" because it ceases to construct itself in the form of the Same--one in "which the dispersion of the Other has not yet come into play" (*Order* 331). Accompanied by its double, the thought of the original defines the region in which man is linked to everything that is not "him":

[I]t sets free in him everything that is not contemporaneous with him; it indicates ceaselessly,

and in an ever-renewed proliferation, that things began long before him, and that for this reason, and since his experience is wholly constituted and limited by things, no one can assign him an origin.

(*Order 331*)

Foucault's argument here needs to be scrutinized with the utmost care, because what he is attempting to establish is crucial to our understanding of "humanist freedom," as it is made possible at the very moment when modern thought becomes conscious of itself as constituted in relationship to everything that restricts that freedom. This "setting free" of all that is not him, and this ceaseless "indicating" of things that exceed his historically finite space is the power with which modern thought is imbued; it is a power that informs and creates the so-called "vigilance" of anthropology. Shut off from an "origin" that is outside man--"born in time and no doubt [to] die in time"--he exercises his freedom by positing the status of "already there." It is on this site that he figures the notion of origin:

[I]t is in him that things (those same things that hang over him find their beginning: rather than a cut, made at some given moment in duration, he is the opening from which time in general can be reconstituted, duration can flow, and things, at the appropriate moment, can make their appearance.

(*Order 332*)

Foucault characterizes this posture of "the setting back of things" as a double movement in which man is empirically and transcendently empowered to establish a "foundation" for thought. This foundation is made possible "by rediscovering the mode upon which the possibility of time is constituted-- that origin without origin or beginning, *on the basis of which everything is able to come into being*" (my emphasis; *Order 332*).

The form of the critique of time that is entailed by this construction of origin in modern thought is crucial to the formation of humanist discourse. In its ever-deffered condition, time is a continuum of "suspension" that has the "power to revolve the reciprocal relation of origin and thought." With this "power" firmly secured in the face of human finitude, the origin becomes a kind of "pivot," "becoming what thought has to think, and always fresh, would be forever promised in an imminence always nearer yet never accomplished." Since the origin always places man ahead of what recedes as "origin," the double movement of modern thought is clearly evident in the injunction made on thought to "keep watch in front of itself." This action is deployed in the very manner in which modern thought is required to be "vigilant" for "the day from which it came and from which it is coming in such profusion" (*Order 332*).

That this "inversion" of the space of the "origin" helps establish the primary relationship between man and things in

modernity is perhaps most clearly discerned in the positivist and phenomenological attempts to deal with the question of origin. The unity of time is restored in the continuum of evolutionary progress in which that "origin" becomes part of a sequence, and in the figuration of a historical and cultural time *in* which man "experiences" his world. But as Foucault notes,

[I]n each of these two alignments, the origin of things and the origin of man are subordinated to each other; but the mere fact that there are two possible and irreconcilable alignments indicates the fundamental asymmetry that characterizes modern thought on origin. (*Order* 333).

Moreover, the thought of the origin posits an origin in the site where no origin is possible by specifically delineating it as one in which "man's time (which has no beginning) made manifest, for a possible memory, the time of things (which has no memory)." As Foucault goes on to contend, this grounding leads to a "double temptation": to "psychologize" all knowledge, and to counteract the "positivity of all science" by using the "insuperable character of this experience" (*Order* 333). As Foucault demonstrates, the space occupied by the human science within the domain of modern knowledge reflects, similarly, the tendency to be caught between this double-temptation. Therefore, while the human sciences embody the

centralizing power of modern humanism, they are inscribed by the very duality that characterizes the analytic of finitude.

**The Limits of the "Human" and
the "Counter-Sciences"**

Man's discursive location within the space of life, labor, and language is problematic. Constituted within and across the field defined by the limits of modern thought, the human sciences find themselves reflecting, and to an extent, furthering the preoccupations of a humanist era by resorting to the double temptation of psychologizing all knowledge and at the same time maintaining its objectivity as "science." This double temptation leads to a crisis that is articulated in the formation of "counter-sciences"--psychology and ethnology--both of which point to the possible erasure of the "human" that acts as the facilitating agent of this temptation. Because they "probe the conditions outside man that make his reality as a representing subject possible" (Gutting 215), the counter-sciences no longer construct "man" in his dual role--as subject and object of knowledge--but reveals in that duality the general conditions for unconscious representations of life, labor, and language.

Here, I will concern myself with examining the productive dynamics of the human sciences in order to emphasize the ways in which their epistemological limits always exceed their own centrality. Foucault says that the human sciences occupies a

unique place within the discursive order of modern thought. On the one hand, the analytic of finitude provides a stable ground for the representations of the human sciences, but the human sciences maintains its stature through a complex alignment of the mathematical and physical sciences, as well as the transcendental, philosophical reflection of the "Same." Foucault argues that one of the consequences of such alignment and stabilization is the production within the realm of the human sciences of an entire body of representations that evolve from the interstices of these three planes. Since these representations do not occupy any predetermined planes, they are constantly subjected to the unstable alignments effected between the mathematical and physical sciences, and the philosophical reflection of the same. In fact, the emergence of the "counter-sciences" crystallizes this instability, as a result of which the limits of the human sciences are pushed beyond the centrifugal forces of humanism, creating out of the friction between the psychologizing and the objectifying impulse the possibility of the erasure of man from the very domain of the "human" sciences.

As Foucault shows, the relations of representation and finitude sustained in the epistemological configuration of modern thought make the "critical" function of the human sciences depend to a large extent on the pattern of consistency sustained in these relations. But this consistency is part of a complex and highly overdetermined network of possibilities.

Foucault argues that as representations that are produced through the deployment of the binary system of "functions/norms," "conflict/rules," and "meaning/system," the seeming consistency and homogeneity of the representations of the human sciences are quite different from their classical counterparts. The former's "representative" function depends on the notion of finitude as it is defined by the interrelations of the discursive network established between the three planes--the empirical, the mathematical, and the philosophical. In this network, the inductive and the deductive, the empirical and the formal, the structural and the processual, set up shifting parameters within which these representations acquire their specific functions, constituting a "positivity" in specific relation to that network.

However, because of these constantly shifting alignments between the planes, the question of these representations acquiring and retaining their identarian places within the space of knowledge remains problematic. Foucault claims that the notion of the human sciences--like the notion of the "human" developed in modern thought--is only locatable in strategic relationship with the three planes, each with its own limits clearly demarcating their territories. Describing their location within a "volume," as defined by the three planes, Foucault explains that the human sciences appear to be simply lodged within it, characterized by its "cloudy distribution" in this space. The parameters that give rise to this "volume"

are further complicated by the fact that each plane establishes its own set of relations : the deductive and the propositional (drawn from mathematics), in relation with the causal and structural (drawn from the empirical sciences); the causal transposed to the philosophical dimension (analytic of finitude); and the deductive and the propositional in conjunction with the philosophical reflection of finitude (a relation that signifies the "formalization" of thought).

By virtue of this very strategic configuration, the human sciences appear to occupy a rather perilous position. As Foucault asserts, they become the "dangerous intermediaries" in the space of knowledge (*Order 347*). As intermediaries, they always function on liminal borders, their concepts often "travel[ing] from one territory to the other" (*Order 356*). Indeed, their epistemological position is not always fixed and unmoving, and their "representations" are not the unmediated products of a fixed configurative process, but are the highly synthesized and often overdetermined effects of specific relations established between the discursive boundaries of the "volume" they occupy. Foucault underscores this idea in his assertion that

the human sciences are not then, an analysis of what man is by nature, but rather an analysis that extends from what man is in his positivity to what enables this same being to know what life is, what the essence of labour and its

consist of, and in what he is able to speak.

(Order 353)

Here the issue is more than a simple equation of human finitude with the mere representation of that finitude (that had been more or less achieved by the empirical sciences); rather, it is the marking of a "distance" in the distribution--between the space of "positivity" established by the empirical sciences of biology, economics, and philology, and "that which give them possibility in the very being being of man" (Order 353). While the idea of positivity retains its objective and scientific status, the conditions of their possibility as conceptualized by "man" remains fettered to the latter's psychological needs.

In the human sciences, this distance is elided and instead developed as a new way of conceptualizing the scale of finitude. As Foucault explains, the representations of the human sciences internalize and suppress this distance by relating themselves to the "the mechanisms and functions" that are defined "not in terms of what they are but in terms of what they *cease to be* when the space of representation is *opened up*" (my emphasis). In other words, the possibility of representing the "mechanisms and functions" in the human sciences is once again made possible through a new relationship of the "thought" and the "unthought," with "thought" signifying the representations, and the "unthought," the "representability," implying the thinkableness of these representations. This new

condition of representability in the human sciences is, as Foucault argues, rendered possible not by positing a transcendental subjectivity but by "giving them (the empirical sciences) interiority [and] by deflecting them towards man's subjectivity . . . tak[ing] them up again in the dimension of representation. . . by *re-apprehending them upon their outer slope*, by leaving them their opacity" (my emphasis; *Order* 354).

As Foucault asserts, the categories of conflict/rule, function/norm, and signification/system do not require a given consciousness, in whose interiority they can be realized to their fullest extent. In such an approach one discerns Foucault's attempt to de-realize any specific interiority or givenness in the notion of the "human." There is no "essential" human subjectivity lurking behind the "tension between empirical experience and its conceptualization" (Berman 21). The function of these paired categories is simply to "ensure representation"--the representability of need, desire, and interest--and to offer the conditions of possibility for the structures of life, labor, and language (*Order* 362). Therefore, the human sciences can be seen to effectively introduce a countermovement to the transcendental thrust of modern phenomenology that views man as totally object and totally subject. This movement is perhaps most evident in Heidegger's thought which sees man as realized within the scene of historical and cultural practices, which form a background that can never be made completely explicit, and, therefore, cannot be

attributed to a single meaning-giving subject. As Foucault emphasizes,

. . . representation is no consciousness, and there is nothing to prove that this bringing to light of the elements or structures that were never presented to consciousness as such enables the human sciences to escape the law of representation. The role of the concept of signification is, in fact, to show how something like a language, even if it is not in the form of explicit discourse and even if it has not been deployed for a consciousness, can in general be given to representation. (*Order 360*)

On the other hand, the question of the unconscious that is brought up by the counter-sciences--psychoanalysis as well as ethnology--essentially marks the limit condition of the human sciences:

On the horizon of any human science, there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back to its real conditions, of restoring it to the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it. (*Order 364*).

Thus the problem of the unconscious is raised as a simultaneous validation and limitation of the "human," which enters the discourse of the counter-sciences by precluding the possibility of retaining "anything resembling a general theory of man or an anthropology" (*Order 376*). In other words, the "unconscious"

continually disrupts the singular construction of man's space within the limits of knowledge, and reveals the inherently discursive matrix of that space.

The "face" of man is, indeed, the manifestation of a certain arrangement of knowledge, one that depends on extremely contingent but powerful alignments of limits within discourse. Having "composed his own figure in the interstices of [a] fragmented language" (*Order* 386), man must leave his being in suspense, must accept its precipitous condition as the enabling condition for thought itself. By deploying the idea of the limit as a strategy, Foucault is able to reveal the highly ramified nature of the space occupied by modern discourses and the vulnerable status of the epistemology that undergirds them.

NOTES

¹Ernesto Laclau maintains that "postmodernism does not imply a change in the values of the Enlightenment-modernity but rather a particular weakening of their absolutist character" (67). If modern thought is the full realization of Enlightenment thinking, its "weakening" in post-modernity is the result of a counterforce triggered by the opening up of its limits.

²Dreyfus and Rabinow, Major-Poetzl, Frank, Gutting, and Bernauer follow a similar track, but they often resort to removing the chaff from the grain. By discussing Foucault's arguments from a purely conceptual and linear perspective, they often overlook the intricate design of argument sustained in these texts. As I have emphasized in the "Introduction," Foucault develops his theory of limits in a recursive manner, identifying points of similarity and difference in an ever-expanding field. Often, such a schema can be best understood by bringing other texts into conversation and by studying the ensuing dialogue between them. This is my rationale for including the essays "What is Enlightenment?" and "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" in the discussion of the modern episteme in *Order*.

³Ladelle McWhorter asserts that even Foucault's analysis of "power" is nothing but a "movement of thinking, and . . . a strategic movement, a deployment. . . .It makes no definitive claims. Rather it moves into the domain of traditional theories of power as transcending cause, and it destabilizes those thought-complexes from within it. In doing so, it creates for thinking a new path, a way out of and beyond transcendental discourses that force us to assume the primacy of agency and the ahistoricity of human subjects" ("Foucault's Analytics" 125). My point is that this "new path" is already part of the trajectory of Foucault's strategy in *Order*.

⁴It must be borne in mind that Foucault repeatedly emphasizes the plural form, "discontinuities," since the singular form conveys the idea of a singular, unified concept. See also "Interview" with Raulet.

⁵Classical representation saw language as the transparent, binary sign, and therefore, could not conceive of its density. Hence, language was "demoted," and made to fuse its identity with the sign itself, as a secondary entity.

⁶In Gadamer, the "fusion of horizons" does not represent "negotiation," but the merger into some form of synthetic meaning condition or "understanding."

⁷Stratton further comments that *Order* is "also a history of writing. Partly this is through the absence of a concern with writing" (43). It is abundantly clear that Foucault's concern with "writing" is not tied to any specific form of a-historical epistemology or to a universalist theory of textuality, but to forms of discourse that are historically mediated and individuated.

⁸Note, for example, what Husserl asserts about human finitude: "For the human is not essence, it is true, but it 'has' essence, which can be said of it with evident validity" ("Philosophy as Rigorous Science" 183).

CHAPTER III
THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE LIMITS
OF MODERNITY

Introduction

Foucault's comments in the closing sections of chapter 6 of *Order* strongly suggest that the emergence and crisis of the modern episteme are linked in a fundamental way:

Sade attains the end of Classical discourse and thought. He holds sway precisely upon their *frontier*. After him, violence, life and death, desire, and sexuality will extend below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which we are now attempting to recover, as far as we can, in our freedom, in our thought. But our thought is so brief, our freedom so enslaved, our discourse so repetitive, that we must face the fact that that expanse of shade is really a bottomless sea.

(emphasis added; *Order* 211)

Two kinds of finiteness are being indicated here: one that is inherent to modernity's discursive being but which also provides the modernity with its own epistemology, and one that refuses to be regularized by the gaze of modern anthropologism, posing an intractable problem for the consciousness that has

recognized its own "frontier" status. In short, in the place of a two-dimensional finiteness of the "shade," post-modern thought is confronted by a "bottomless sea," indicating that its own identity is always poised against an irrecuperable depth that lacks any transcendental ground. Around the time Foucault was engaged in dealing with this problem in *Order*, he produced a series of essays that were later collected in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977). By deploying the idea of the limit as a critical strategy for opening up the liminal regions in modern thought, in these essays, Foucault explores the epistemological ramifications of this new depth for post-modern thinking, which push beyond the density that history introduces within the order of modernity.

Such a strategy is clearly indicative of Foucault's ongoing preoccupation with extending the critical focus of his historical ontology, one that operates by not only identifying the limits of modern epistemology and its discourses but by deploying itself beyond them. This region beyond the limits of modernity is not a static and fixed place but comes into existence in the very limiting processes that allow thought to maintain its ground of identity. Adopting a vantage point that enables him to understand this mobility, Foucault articulates the inherently precipitous nature of this thought, and in so doing, he radically reconceptualizes the very form of finitude that is the mark of modernity. Essays like "A Preface to Transgression," "Language to Infinity," "The Father's No," and

"Theatrum Philosophicum" embody a singularly dynamic vision of the crisis in this form of finitude by inaugurating a vision of liminality that constantly exceeds the natural boundaries of modern thought, thereby interrupting its stabilizing influence and its epistemological certitude.

In these essays, Foucault appears to be arguing that, as critical agents, we are poised on the edge of the modern episteme and are part of the shade that we are attempting to recover. If this is so, why does this rupture in the continuity of modern thought make our present historical ontology so crucial to the task of philosophy? Why are the certainties of the human sciences and the anthropological discourses of modernism no longer available, in all their accessibility, in this shade? In the concluding chapters of *Order*, Foucault had already indicated that as modern knowing subjects, we are the multifariously constituted synthetic products and producing agents of our discourses, molded in conjunction with the accretions of our finitude, representations that are caught up in their duplicity and instability. Foucault's essays further this idea by delineating a condition in which the modern subject's knowing position becomes irrecoverable, in which he is unable to recover effectively a stable or fully situated discerning position from which to objectify the shade or to remain enclosed within it. But this irrecoverability marks the limit of a finitude that is "fundamental for the constitution of

philosophical language, which reproduces and undoubtedly produces it" (PT 44).

Foucault's overall argument, in *Order*, rested on the following assumptions--that modern thought's fully centered "anthropologism" sits precariously on the brink of its own edifice of a unifying and unified subjectivity; and that its efforts are nothing beyond an attempt to recuperate from its own inherent and dissipating discursiveness a highly unstable center, which is then figured as "thought" and "freedom" (*Order* 211). These essays fully dramatize the fact that philosophical humanism's attempt to control the excess that emerges in its ramified existence can be interrupted by the strategical deployment of the idea of the limit. In our present "threshold" position, the modes of critical inquiry mandated by modern thought can no longer sustain the conditions of knowledge regulated by the dual position of the subject as the knower and the known; the precarious alignment of "being and the Same" (*Order* 209) secured in modern thought, now fractured, can only represent thought as differentiated and discontinuous. There is absolutely nothing that can sublimate this discontinuity: no self-similarity can be sustained in these discontinuous moments.

Foucault signals the new threshold in the existence of modern thought in these essays by inserting new forms of critical contestations within its domain. These are the ideas of "limit and transgression" played out in the language of the

negative--with non-discursive entities like death, sexuality, and madness providing the new loci of what Foucault calls the "event" or phantasm. This movement of thought is made possible by an inherent "impossibility" that is inscribed within modern epistemology: a condition that is paradoxical since it depends on the existence of limits and yet exists because those limits are continually surpassed. Intervening in the very movement in which modern thought is caught up in securing a stable center, these ideas re-open the issue of a "counter-discourse" that catches such thought in its flight and pushes it beyond the point at which it can safely enclose its finiteness. The play of limit and transgression described, for example in the essay, "Preface to Transgression," forms a new basis for radically reconceiving the difference and finitude of modern thought outside the plane of the Same.

In uncovering the limits of representation in the analysis of human sciences in *Order*, Foucault had demonstrated that despite modern thought's negotiation with the order of the Same (embodied in the form of a knowable finitude), it had failed to offer itself as a simple space of analysis. In place of the continuous space of the classical episteme, modern thought uncovers the vast regions of the "unthought" that order its synthetic representations. The modern knower as subjectified consciousness is itself the product of the history of these syntheses. Consequently, the modern knowing position does not lend itself to be always clearly demarcated in the

regions of what is represented, retaining in itself the differentiating moments of its own production as subject/object of discourse. When humanism links this dual position to a transcendental site of finitude, it only guards the subject from being erased by its differentiations. But, by virtue of this linkage, the duality is always threatened with potential dispersion.

In the midst of this dispersion, the modern consciousness recovers something that had always eluded it, and it is in the fragility of this recovery that it becomes "post-" modern. It is the "other side" of modern humanism's transcendental subjectivity, a side that gathers together those radical forms of finitude that are ostensibly mastered in the humanist ideology of freedom, only to disperse them and make them discontinuous. The relation between representations is disrupted by the insertion of this represented being, man-- who can be located not at the center of the finitude that is being objectified but at those sites where such finitude is underlined and undermined. Caught between the "infinite task of knowing" (*Order* 244) and the fundamental inability to master its own unthought, modern thought finds itself implicated in a highly contested space, one in which the limits of thought continually shift in order to maintain stability. In this space, modern thought can posit its freedom to the extent to which this infinite task can be conducted in a seemingly seamless space of discursivity; on the other hand, however, its freedom, severely

circumscribed by the choices made available to it, can be posited only as a discontinuous finitude. As Foucault shows in *Order*, the analytic of finitude faces a bifurcated pathway: one leading to the recovery of the forces that far exceed human thought, and the other leading to the finite within which the infinite operations of its historical becoming can be conceived.

Given this view, Foucault, it seems to me, is contending that a post-modern thought, as distinct from the humanistic impulse of modern anthropologism, preserves itself as a highly ramified consciousness, only to reveal itself in the transgressive discourses of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and of writers like Bataille, Blanchot, and Artaud. Thus, opposed to the relatively stable positivities instituted by modern human sciences of life, language, and labor, which inaugurate modernism's "transcendental philosophy" (*Order* 244), the transgressive discourse of these thinkers unceasingly extends their "subjective" positions to those trajectories where thought temporarily finds "its Limit and its Law" (*Order* 208), and yet remains unredeemed by that infinite movement. It is in this sense that such thought, transgressing the mode in which it is framed ("as modern"), is able to break its coextensive ties "with the very thing that governs it" (*Order* 209). This radical finitude is articulated as the very inability to master the unthought, or to align it within the symmetrical complementarity of representative thought. But it also

provides, as Foucault emphasizes, a more radical force to the "ceaseless rending open[ing] which frees the origin in exactly that degree to which it recedes" (*Order* 334). In the discourse of transgression, the opening up of the origin and its recession are constructed within the eccentric play generated by the movement of the thought of the limit, where all symmetrical spaces are eliminated. This movement is linked to and registered in the "history of forgetting" that Ned Lukacher points to, in his book *Primal Scenes* (65). Thus, the area of finitude, captured by the play, appears as a function of the highly contested force in the history of modern thought's becoming--as the Other of "life, labor and language." This history of becoming, so well delineated by Heidegger, is, according to Foucault, dramatized by the reappearance of "Literature" in the modern episteme. This is the new fold--"the birth of literature, the "vertical space" that opens up the Limit where the postmodern is constituted (Lash 4). In the following sections, I will attempt to explain how Foucault attempts to understand the energies behind this appearance of Literature along the lines of modern thought's encounter with its own radical finitude. My discussion will focus on four essays--"Preface to Transgression," "Language to Infinity," "The Father's 'No'," and "Theatrum Philosophicum," all of which were published in the intervening period between the writing of *Order* and *Archaeology* (1960-1972).

**"Preface to Transgression:" The Radical
Play of the Limit**

If the notion of finitude entails an acknowledgment of the "empty form of the sacred, its absence" (PT 30), the modes of transgression that Foucault describes in his essay "Preface to Transgression " are inextricably linked with a language dealing with its own impossibility, in a space that has dispensed with all symmetries of thought and word. As an enunciatory element, "speaking" entails a simultaneous bringing forth and a disappearing, in the space hollowed out by this essential impossibility. Lacan captures this movement:

There where it was just now, there where it nearly was, between the extinction which still glows, and this blossoming forth which comes to grief, I can come to be by disappearing from what is said by me.

(*Ecrits* 300)

The enunciatory function of all speaking positions is, therefore, ultimately a confrontation with a belated sense of becoming in the tireless tides of finitude which themselves provide the conditions of possibility for its being, and in turn become possible by the enunciation. Foucault presents the central problem in his essay by conflating the experience of death and sexuality with this enunciatory function. Written as a homage to the dead Bataille, the essay celebrates the author's language of extremity--of death and laughter--at a margin where it offers itself as a counter-discourse to the

limits of life, labor, and language assigned in the normal registry of modernism's transcendental subjectivism. Exceeding and destroying this form of humanist representationalism, Bataille's counterdiscourse situates itself on the immediate threshold of extremity and violence, and not on the stabilized threshold of freedom, historicity, and evolutionary genealogy, constituted by modern humanism.¹ Disclosing humanism as having covered up what it had forgotten--that its own history of teleology and unity, progression and coherence are the unified and stabilized parts of the manifest discourse of finitude--Bataille's language fractures the transcendental mobility of modern thought. Thought is ensnared in the very dynamics that makes it possible. In fact, the moment of transcendence is the encounter with the limit.

Under the force of Bataille's language, thought and language, so well cornered in the folds of humanism and positivism, cease to be complementary entities possessed by the knowing subject in its singularity, to be ceaselessly engaged in a continual exchange of identities through the play of transgression and limits. As noted earlier, the synthetic subjectivity of modern humanism, located in the asymmetrical space of its synthesized representations of being, language, and labor, can posit itself only by halting and containing this process of "exchange" of identities. Humanistic subjectivity, transcendentalized through History is complicitously aligned with its own historicity--one that it claims to own and one

that allows it to regard itself as "agency." Foucault explains this process in *Order*:

Thus, behind the history of positivities, there appears another, more radical, history, that of man himself--a history that concerns man's very being, since he now realizes that *he not only 'has history' all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economies, and a history of languages are given their form.* (my emphasis; 370)

Thus, man is "forced to place the most stable of things in the liberating stream of time" (*Order* 370), allowing himself to attain to his own freedom in this form of historicity. Time, as the liberator, is the entity that supports man's historicity as man--as the free agent in the processes of production and life. "Identities" are fixed and stabilized in this "time" frame (note the spatial metaphor). But this freedom, as Homi Bhabha contends in another context, is produced as the effect of the sign of "man"--the sign of an authority that "can neither be 'original'--by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it--nor 'identical'--by virtue of the difference that defines it" ("*Signs Taken for Wonders*" 169). This authority--as the effect/producer of the sign and the sign itself--can also be located in the "non-dialectical language of the limit which only arises in transgressing the one who speaks" (PT 44), thus dispossessing itself on grounds of its

own belatedness. In fact, this authority cannot dialectically recover itself in the movement of its own speech or in the "progressive," or evolutionary and linear dynamics of production and value.

Using the figure of the "eye"[I] from Bataille, Foucault delineates the double movement contained in the reversed non-philosophical (and non-dialectical) direction of Bataille's language:

Within such a non-dialectical movement, "repetition" and "difference" subvert the "philosophical eye" by taking away those moments of transparency where meaning is created, where the inner movement is finally resolved in a non-material center where the intangible forms of truth are created and combined, in this heart of things which is the sovereign subject. (PT 45)

It is widely acknowledged that the origin of a specular idealism that provides the larger philosophical framework for historical and anthropological discourse can be traced to the functioning of the "eye" in Plato. Sight, Plato's favorite representation of *eidos*, represents in its universality and singularity the unveiling of Truth that "can be imitated, reproduced, repeated in its identity" (Derrida, *Disseminations* 111). As Heidegger notes, in philosophical thinking, particularly in forms of "Cartesian perspectivalist epistemology" (Jay 11), the identity of Being and vision is central:

The Greeks . . . conceived knowledge as a kind of seeing and viewing, a state of affairs suggested by the expression "theoretical," an expression that is still common today. In it, the words *thea*, "view," and *horan*, "seeing" (compare with theatre and spectacle), speak. . . . But that can have its sufficient reason only in an interpretation of being which was decisive for the Greeks. Because Being means presence and permanence, "seeing" is especially apt to serve as an explanation for the grasping of what is present and what is permanent.

(*Nietzsche* 167)

As Ned Lukacher observes, the immateriality and intangibility of the *eidos*--its "photology," as Rodolphe Gasché names it--is made possible by a conscious forgetting "of the writing and the signifier that triggered the recollection" (Lukacher 48). The "philosophical eye," as the authoritative ground for specular idealism, Foucault argues, is employed to establish its singular authority and self-transparency on the basis of a movement that is already duplicated, although this duplication is suppressed (see Jonathan Curry's "Modernizing Vision"). By being empowered "*to observe*, the power of becoming is always [rendered] more interior to itself" (my emphasis; PT 45): the eye, then, multiplies itself in its double, where the difference between itself and the "more tenuous" eye is at once preserved

and erased. Derrida describes the dynamics of this condition of "seeing" in the following manner:

What is it that is decided and maintained in ontology or dialectics throughout all the mutations or revolutions that are entailed? It is precisely the ontological: the presumed possibility of a discourse about what it, the *deciding* and *decidable* logos of or about the *on* (being-present) that which is, the being-present (the matrix-form of substance, of reality, of the oppositions between matter and form, essence and existence, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.) is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon, etc., that is, from anything that, presenting it as being-present, doubles it, re-presents it, and can therefore replace and de-present it: there is thus the 1 and the 2, the simple and the double. the double comes after the simple; it multiples it as a follow-up. It follows. . . that the image supervenes upon reality, the imitator upon the imitated. . . . it is at the bottom this order of appearance, the precedence (*pré-seancé*) of the imitated, that governs the philosophical or critical interpretation of literature, if not the operation of literary writing. (*Disseminations* 191-92)

In a similar manner, Umberto Eco observes that in the metaphysical configuration of finitude every oppositional structure is inscribed on the register of a "constitutive difference which dissolves the different terms." He goes on to argue that

in order to conceptualize an oppositional system where something is perceived as absent, something else must be postulated as present, at least potentially. The presence of one element is necessary for the absence of the other. (23)

It follows that the necessary erasure performed by the need to sustain the self-presence of finitude is necessarily suppressed in the discourse of the human sciences. The "gaze" of the human sciences is aligned more with a historicizing impulse that offers a singular principle of objectivity, even if this principle itself cannot always be uniformly "objectified."²

Contrary to the philosophical eye, Bataille's "eye" situates itself within the heart of the double movement, continually exceeding any transparency and lucidity that might be attributed to it as a philosophical center of vision. What lies at the heart of this vision, Bataille's eye reveals, is not a solid core of light that reveals the world but a field of duplicitous relations of the "presence of the present" and of darkness and light:

the upturned orb suggests both the most open and the most impenetrable eye: causing its sphere to pivot,

while remaining exactly the same and in the same place, it overturns day and night, crosses their limit, but only to find it again on the same line and from the other side; and the white hemisphere that appears momentarily at the place where the pupil once opened is like the being of the eye as it crosses the limit of its vision--when it transgresses this opening to the light of day which defined the transgression of every sight. (PT 46)

Through his characteristic use of the visionary/revisionary folds of transgressive sight, Foucault delineates in Bataille's language, a space of writing that inhabits the gaps between "catechesis" (orig. to resound, sound amiss [OED]) and "cat-achresis" (abuse of a trope or a metaphor [OED]). Bataille's "eye"

encloses its darkness, traces a limiting circle that only sight can cross. . . the darkness within. . . pours out into the world. . . lights up the world [and] gathers up all the light of the world in the iris, that small black spot, where it is transformed into the bright night of an image . . . it precipitates this same light into the transparency of its well. (PT 44-45)

In Bataille, "sight," writes itself across the solid density of its material and differential position in the world of seeing. The distances spaced in the hollowed caverns of this "uprooted

eye" (PT 52) is the differential space within which sight is "re-collected." It brings with it a "violence and uprooting" when

the eye is seen absolutely, but denied any possibility of sight: the philosophizing subject has been dispossessed and pursued to its limit; and the sovereignty of the philosophical language can now be heard from the distance, in the measureless void left behind by the exorbitated subject. (PT 46)

Having deviated from its "normal" philosophical course of vision, this straying ("exorbitated") subject iterates the movement of the "upturned eye" by dying at the very moment of recollection, and "discovers the bond that links language and death at the moment that it acts out this relationship of the limit and being" (PT 47). The return of visibility is promised only as the extreme recession of sight, and the philosophizing subject is "spaced" by the very language that "discovers its being in the crossing of its limits: the non-dialectical form of philosophical language" (PT 48). On the other side of this upturned eye is the anthropological "vigilance" (*Order 341*) of the human sciences whose positivities act out this ocular relationship of limit and being in terms of "a circularity of a dogmatism folded over upon itself in order to find a basis for itself within itself" (*Order 341*).

The language of transgression itself describes a "circle" (PT 44), but its circularity is non-dialectically regulated by

the radical experience of finitude. Sight, in Bataille, intervenes in the space of this finitude through what Lukacher calls the "dispossessive function of language" (24), throwing into relief "this retournement, this redoublement":

Perhaps in the movement which carries it to a total night, the experience of transgression brings to light this relationship of finitude to being, this moment of the limit which anthropological thought, since Kant, could only designate from the distance and from the exterior through the language of dialectics. (PT 49)

The differentiating movement of transgressive language produces a *différance* within the act of enunciation and its projection as a specific articulation of thought. The authority of the eye occupies that space of "double inscription" that Derrida describes in *Disseminations*:

Whenever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke. . . [this] double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth; it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts. this displacement does not take place, has not taken place as an event. It does not occupy a simple place. It does not take place in writing. This dislocation [is what] writes/is written. (193)

Sight, as the "site" of productivity and as a sign of difference, is therefore aligned in Bataille with this kind of "double-inscription." Its transgressive potential is articulated as it marks the zone of a language that "turn[s] back . . . upon itself at the moment that it fails" (PT 49); in other words, its failure is the condition of its transgression. Instead of setting up a relation of "*homoiosis* or *adequatio*" (Derrida, *Disseminations* 193) between the terms Law and Limit, Bataille's language speaks in a "second language" (PT 48) that is available only in the differential space of the two. It is a language "spoken" by a subject who is "systematically disengaged from the "I" who has begun to speak":

Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time. (PT 34)

Transgression follows the spiral of the double inscription by "writing itself" outside the regulative space of binary finitude, a finitude that is based on the simple opposition of law and limit. Major-Poetzl comments that transgression "merely delineates the fragile line separating 'same' from 'other' while simultaneously forcing an inclusion of what had previously been excluded" (101). It seeks freedom not in the

"victory over limits" but in measuring "the excessive distance that it opens up at the heart of the limit and trac[ing] the flashing line that causes the limit to rise" (PT 35). It does not play into the dialectical logic of positive versus the negative, but affirms "division" that retains "in it which may designate the existence of difference" (PT 36).³ Foucault clarifies that this difference is not a "cutting gesture" or the simple measurement of a distance, something the positivities of human sciences have, Foucault argues in "Theatrum Philosophicum," so precariously secured in the form of "good sense" and in the "tyranny of good will" (TP 181, 183). Representational theories within these sciences maintain difference by "divid[ing] the "same" through contradiction, [by] limit[ing] its infinite identity through non-being" (TP 184). Placed beyond the limit of the Law, "non-being" in such theories serves the function of holding finitude within the logic of contradiction, recognition, and specification (TP 184). On the other hand, transgression functions as the persistent critique of what one must inhabit in the region of positivities by involving an incessant recoding of diversified fields of finitude.

Foucault also employs the metaphor of a line to trace the differentiating processes through which the law of the limit is dynamically regulated within discourse. A line is a conventional sign of transitivity that can function as boundary--between the thought and the unthought--as well as the

linear extension of a continuous movement of thought pushing beyond the limit through some form of dialectical thrust founded on an originating impulse. But, as Charles Scott points out, the line "names difference without reference to ultimate reality. It does not show ultimacy breaking through the contingencies of meaning and laws. It merely transgresses" (104). The line transgresses, because at any point in its trajectory the differentiating points that constitute the line can provide nodes for linking other lines, as well as for dispersing the continuity of a linear extension. In other words, its transitivity is merely a manifestation of a dynamic "poised singularity," and not of the condition of possibility for a fixed or predetermined extension.

Traversing the heavily charged atmosphere of discourse, the line lights up like a "flash of lightning in the night which . . . gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity" (PT 35). In what seems like a characteristic thrust of Foucault's poetically ocular evocation of the movement of thought, there emerges a radical notion of thinking that places thought squarely within the folds of discourse. The line maintains its "poised singularity" by emerging--and not originating in a single moment--to define the limits of darkness as well as its own limited and limiting intensity of illumination. Its moment

of clarification depends on its potential to differentiate itself both as light as well as night--outside of this transgressive play it can only be the static image of a permanently illuminated line defined across a space of permanent darkness. Law and limit, within this scenario, can only remain caught within the rigidly fixed categories of light and dark, and thought can only exist as the static border that defines them.

In his genealogical analysis, Foucault will establish this kind of highly dynamic and differentiating movement as a "downward fall" (*herkunft*), described as a "descent," in order to oppose the humanistic impulse of seeing historical finitude in terms of a progressive continuum that transforms the "other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a *glittering expanse* [my emphasis]" (PT 35). This perfectly illuminated "expanse" is, as Foucault explains, the space where thought in the "histories" of Hegel, Marx, and Spengler "curves over itself, illuminates its own plenitude, brings the circle to completion" (Order 334), restoring a fullness to the origin as a point of specification and recognition. "Historical" vision is thus negotiated in the transparent medium of an ocularism that denies the darkness "the small white globe encloses" (PT 44).

In opposition to this form of ocularism that seeks a total and totalizing form of illumination, Foucault places Raymond Roussel's "solar language" within a visionary space in

which, "instead of being the perfect sphere of an illuminated world, [this language] divides things to introduce darkness into them" (*Raymond Roussel* 163). Foucault proposes that in the idea of a "solar language" there exists "a void" or a "hollow core" that is intimately connected with the dazzling "brilliance" of the sun which "obscur[es] what it [has] to show." In this book, he shows that, as language burdened with the task of revealing the prolific profusion of the world, this language marks the "insolvency of words which are fewer in number than the things they designate." However, as Foucault points out, "language speaks only from something essential that is lacking. From this follows the proliferating emptiness of language, its capacity to say things, all things, to lead them to their luminous being, to place in the sun their 'mute' truth, to 'unmask' them" (165). As Foucault specifies within the context of Bataille's language, the double inscription registered within this radical scenario of sight forms part of those transgressive movements of modern thought which inhabit an eccentric place within the discourse of productivities in the human sciences. In fact, sight is related to those categories of "exhaustion, excess, the limit and transgression--the strange and unyielding form of these irrevocable movements which consume and consummate us" (PT 49) that constitute the "modern experience." The conditions of speech and thought established by these experiences "depend for their meaning on the concept of an essentially unspoken trace with its

associated space of writing" (Winspur 173); the scene of writing as "transgression" re-crosses the region of those primary traces that are repressed in order to free those limits that are locked within the equations of thinking and speaking. "Productivity" is itself doubly enclosed within the scene of writing, differentiated in its movement towards establishing a finitude that is both a limit and a transgression.

Foucault later elaborates this idea in "Theatrum Philosophicum" by arguing that this "spaced" language destroys the order of equivalence that establishes the subject-object identification, introducing a "double dissociation" where subjectivity is consumed as well as consummated:

. . . that of a central and founding subject to which events occur while it deploys meaning around itself; and of an object that is a threshold and point of convergence for recognizable forms and the attributes we affirm. (TP 178)

Thus, the "productive" dynamics of subject-creation, writing, regulation of life, and production are no longer unilaterally determined within the progressive unfolding of an universal "labor" of finitude, but within constantly negotiated, and negotiable, "thresholds" of symmetries that can at best serve as "local spaces" in the order of thought. In these discontinuous spaces, the subject's synthetic-synthesizing role is attributable to its being part of an "indefinite, straight line that cuts and recuts into each moment so many times " (PT

178). This line is inscribed as a form of finitude that affirms both itself as "finite," and as the endless exhaustion entailed in maintaining the multiplicity of events that define that finitude. In fact, the synthesized/ synthesizing "subject position" is an "uncrossable fissure" (PT 179) that can track its finitude only in the wake of the disruption of the "thought of the Same" (*Order* 316) and the idea of the "pure form immediately present to the contents" of empirical knowledge (*Order* 321).

The experience of the body and of culture that are located in the body of empirical knowledge and in the subject's power to define such knowledge across its own finitude is similarly spaced in the experience of transgression. While the human sciences deploy these experiences to secure the foundation of the theory of the subject and of specular forms of containment, and to insert man into a dialectic of cultural and economic production (to produce "anthropologism"), the discourse of transgression and limits is an act that spreads out man's productive plane "inserting intervals into its interstices,[and] dispersing it" (Sallis xv), so that it loses its empirico-transcendental ground. In *Order*, Foucault attributes to this ground the origin and founding of the mechanism of modern human sciences' theory of agency--where it serves both as the "slave" of finitude and the "master" of its own possibility of redemption and of overcoming this finitude. As a finitude that is an "original" alienating condition, this

empirico-transcendental ground appears in the human sciences as the guaranteed apprehension of a redemptive dialectics. If man is alienated through the forms of finitude and through his labor and production (with which he deals with that finitude), he can exercise his freedom to regain his lost "presence" by simply activating the powers of being an "agent"--of using his own labor--and his finitude--to overcome them. In other words, this order of finitude serves strategically to open the chasm at a level where it can be covered up by a doubling-over discourse that is both empirically, as well as transcendently, grounded. It is this "irreducible anthropological factor in the definition of work, production, and profit" (PT 50) that is occluded in the transgressive acts of sexuality and death. Foucault claims that

the appearance of sexuality as a fundamental problem marks the transformation of the philosophy of man as worker to a philosophy based on a being who speaks.

(PT 50)

In the shadow of the dead Bataille, Foucault persistently conflates the condition of "speaking" with "dying," a move that reduces the irreducible elements of work, production and profit into laughter, excess, and loss, and the speaking subject, as agency, is "exposed, goes to encounter his own finitude and, under each of his words, is brought back to the reality of his own death" (PT 51).

"Language to Infinity:" Death and the Limit

In the essay "Language to Infinity," Foucault deploys the idea of the limit by linking it with the theme of death. Death is constituted as a metaleptic narrative, the embodiment of the process of substitution or duplication which is "figurative" as well as "dissipative." To this extent, death is a limit that is continually finds

its original fold in this duplication. In this sense, death is undoubtedly the most essential of the accidents of language (its limit and its center): from the day that men began to speak toward death and against it, in order to grasp and imprison it, something was born, a murmuring which repeats, recounts, and doubles itself endlessly, which has undergone an uncanny process of amplification and thickening, in which our language is today lodged and hidden. (LI 55)

Two aspects of the differential space introduced by death within language and man's mode of being stand out in the above description. One, pointed out by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, relates to the order of temporality in man's mode of being that can be posited as "determinate" only when based on the presupposition that something "present-at-hand" is permanent. But, as Heidegger notes:

But this [something present-at-hand which is permanent] cannot be 'in us,' for only through what

is thus permanent can my Dasein in time be in time be determined. Thus if changes which are present-at-hand have been posited empirically 'in me,' it is necessary that along with these something permanent which is present-at-hand should be posited empirically 'outside of me'. (*Being* 247-48)

This empirical "exteriority" is itself a function of modern thought's negotiation--of its sense of self-presence as the order of finitude and its sense of finitude as the self-present locus of representation. As modernist thought establishes itself within the simultaneously surfacing of the transcendental theme and the new empirical fields (which determine its modes of representation), the operations of finitude introduced by death as a limit in the "signifying chain" lead to an accumulation that stands poised against the singularity of "life, labor and language" as they are inscribed within the reconstitutive dialectics of human sciences and anthropology. Second, with the inauguration of "literature" and the language of transgression, death comes to play the role of projecting itself onto to a set of "specular" relations. As always, situated on the space of finitude--within the limit of a "life" that sets the conditions of possibility for the dynamics of labor and language--death is engaged in the challenge to representation, from which it cannot separate itself.⁴ By being non-representable, death forces language to reproduce it

in the virtual space (in the real transgression) of the mirror, and to create a new mirror in the first, an again another, and always to infinity" (LI 65)

However, one must note that in positing this sense of infinity, Foucault is not arguing for a conceptual wholeness of infinity that can stabilize the actual differentiations inserted into discursive body by death. Neither is he interested in reconstituting infinity as the body of textual traces. Rather, he is attempting to "analyze the modes of implication of the subject in discourses," whose own finitude has to be seen as belonging to the "field of transformations" that enact and negotiate the multifarious forms of specular mirroring.⁵

Thus, it is possible to see the relation between Foucault's persistent working out of the problem of transgression and limit within the domain of "Literature" and his discussion of precipitousness of modern thought in *Order*. Both "Preface to Transgression," and "Language to Infinity" signify a certain concern with the excess of language as it "plays" with the forms and experiences of human finitude. Foucault's entrance into "textuality," through such concerns about "literature" and "literary writing," is to be seen as the historical consequence of his encounter with the limits of modern thought. Essays such as "Preface to Transgression" and "Language to Infinity" situate that historical point in Foucault's own engagement with Literature in which language and thought confront each other in their productive and dissipative

forms, challenging the effects of positivist, analytical thought that had initially brought "language" back into the realm of thought in the modern episteme. Objectified as "language" within the positivities of the modern episteme, literature (or "literary language") is gradually absorbed within its transcendental fold in this episteme. But in these essays, literature emerges in its dynamic, unstable forms, and is inscribed within the play of the "discursive" and the "non-discursive"--the "unthought" of sexuality and death. Such play not only enacts the movement of transgression and limits, but also performs the Heideggerian task of recalling the "history of Being" through the

construction of a "counterhistory," . . . which is precisely a history of forgetfulness, a history of all those things that thinkers forgot to say but that nevertheless determined their discourse.

(Lukacher 12)

It enables Foucault to engage in a mode of critique that is not completely enclosed within the analytic modes of modern thought, and enables him, as Charles Scott maintains, to "think through difference" (90). Consequently, his critique is able to represent the "crisis" that is inherent within the very imperative to "speak" or "write" in the space of modernity.

Furthermore, the notion of "crisis" as "critique" pointed to by Michael Clifford is dramatized in the very manner in which these essays play within the discursive spaces opened up

by transgressive languages of Bataille, Blanchot, and Deleuze. Tracking itself as "counterhistory," one that "remolds" the "will to truth and to turn it against the truth at the very point where truth undertakes to justify the taboo" ("Discourse on Language" 220), this discourse, like the texts that mark the discontinuous spaces between the seemingly continuous epistemes in *Order*, highlights the ways in which the language of transgression brings to crisis those principles of order through which the seemingly stable and uniform world of words and things are constructed and sustained. Therefore, in a Heideggerian manner, Foucault's discourse foregrounds the relation of "questionableness" that Dasein shares with "Being"--"a mode of being that puts being in question" (Clifford 116). Indeed, Foucault puts to work, in these essays, the question of Being by deploying the disruptive effects of language, thus challenging the very ground on which the limits of modern thought objectify Being. Unfortunately, these early essays have been too easily dismissed as peripheral and speculative exercises in a radical "literary criticism." As David Carroll notes, "in their haste to defend [Foucault] as a radical sociologist, political theorist, or historiographer," critics overlook the fact that the strategies of analysis developed in these essays provide "alternative, transgressive, perspectives on the historical-political discursive field (*Paraesthetics* xvii-iii).

**"The Father's 'No'": Literary Language
and the Limit**

Foucault's preoccupation with the crisis of thought that language ushers in by claiming its own density also influences his conception of the "negative." Negativity is part of the strategical position occupied by the limit with respect to the question of identity. The essay "Father's No" traces the manner in which the principle of negativity operates in literary language. Literature as "work of art"

becomes a measure of what *it is not* in the double sense that it traverses the entire surface of this outer world, and then limits it through its opposition. (my emphasis; FN 79)

In moving across the surface of discourse in order to limit itself through a contrary and counteractive wave, language becomes the basis of Foucault's notion of the limit and transgression. Literary language conveys this movement by constantly approaching the abyss and allowing a glimpse of the mobile limits of what Foucault calls in *Order* the "positive unconscious of knowledge" (xi). In *Literature*, this unconscious uncovers the "positive" aspect of what has been constructed as the Other, a feature that can be mobilized only in the form of repetition: "repeated, that is, by the very necessity of [its]destined itinerary and its conclusion" (FN 81). In reviewing Laplanche's psychoanalytic study of the German poet, Hölderlin, Foucault once again ponders over the densely

configured structure of the "negative."⁶ In *Order*, he had postulated that with the emergence of the "complementary concept of system" in modern thought, signification had lost its self-adequate basis, and was reconstituted in its "derived" form across the system that "posits itself, little by little, in fragments and outlines through signification" (361). In "The Father's 'No'" we have a more radicalized notion of "system" that operates on the principle of the negative. Foucault steps out of the binary opposition in modern thought to develop a strategical sense of the "Other." The "Other" radicalizes the order of the Same, by altering the movement of the limit. Instead of marking a fixed boundary between "system" and "signification," the limit now subjects them both to mutually supplementary positions. And it is in the gap opened up by this supplementarity that the signifying chain operates to constitute the "subject" and the world of "representations."⁷

The effect of re-situating the limit is most apparent in the subject's newly constituted position--now seen to come into being through the projection of the negativity of desire, which Judith Butler claims is "symptomatic of a forgotten history of repression" (206). By introducing a gap between desire and its object, the "Other" constitutes a differential space which is language itself, and across which the subject is posited as an entity. Given the sense of loss that the subject suffers as a result of "castration," it can return to a stabilizing

connection with the law of the Other only by "grant[ing] a radical sacrifice" (Goux 152). This sacrifice to which literature as "writing is now linked" is, in Foucault's words, "the sacrifice of life itself; it is a voluntary obliteration of the self" ("What is an Author?" 117). Absence and death mark the scene of writing, where the subject of writing enters into relations of effect and erasure with the law of the Other.

In the language of transgression, the "gap" created by the supplementary positions of the system and signification is not a constant that stands undifferentiated in the calculus of the signifying chain. It is the region of the negative, or "counter-memory," in which the act of naming itself creates a vacancy. Representation is effected in this space not for a specific subject that can be connected to a "certain significant structure as its logico-historical moment" (Goux 175), but is constituted in a relation with this vacancy and deferral "through the catastrophe of the signifier" (FN 82). In a parallel argument, Derrida asserts that "[w]riting is the name of the two absences"--the "absence of the signatory" and the "absence of the referent" (*Grammatology* 40-41); the "catastrophic signifier" ensures the vacancy of the referent. In the characteristic employment of a violent metaphor, Foucault encapsulates the sense of dissipation that necessarily accompanies the process of signifying; at the same time, as this metaphor points to the dynamic status of the signifier,

he also foregrounds the violence and more importantly, the discontinuity, of such a process of "coming to be."⁸

As "The Father's No" shows, literary writing as counterhistory is intimately connected with "laughter"; its violence ("it breaks") unconceals a history of mis/understanding based on the unremitting forces of circular dialectics. Given the "violence" of this process, the subject of such a discourse is necessarily placed out of the boundaries of a history; in fact, the subject tracks the movement of the "impossibility of History" in the form of a successively differentiated counter-history, produced within its gaps and absences. Foucault would like to place his own counterhistory on parallel margins with Hölderlin's language of madness, to perennially situate it on the boundaries of the limit where thought and language share their mutually supplementary spaces and

where language is most unlike itself and where signs no longer communicate, that region of endurance without anguish. (FN 84)

With the removal of identity, sameness, equivalence, and the possibility of communication, the counterhistorical subject is "situated" within a discursive and institutional space--similar to one Foucault finds himself in, in his own critical engagement with the modern thought and the human sciences.

Since Foucault is primarily concerned with the specific status of language--as the locus of difference--in the

institution of the subject, it might be worthwhile to link his concern with Derrida's own theoretical preoccupations about *écriture*. Such an approach will serve to further illuminate the concept of "the negative" as it is articulated in the essay, "The Father's 'No'."

In Derrida, the negative does not claim the status of an ontotheological foundation to discourse. Like the notion of "difference," it no longer refers to a concept, but rather to the possibility of conceptuality. Both these concepts serve as the ground for the possibility for the establishment of a ground. , Implicating the forms of duplicity that are necessarily inscribed in all modes of positivity constituted by the idea of the negative (towards which the positive moves in order to find itself), the idea of the negative also influences the position of the subject. Derrida comments,

For what is reflected is split in itself and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one at least makes three. . . . The specular dispossession which at the same time institutes and deconstitutes me is also the law of language. (my emphasis; *Grammatology* 36, 141).

In Foucault's understanding of the operations of the "negative" within the binary oppositional ground of interiority versus exteriority, what is dispossessed is not necessarily the supplementary term (here "exteriority"), but the seemingly continuous extension of the binary--often in the form of a seamless contiguity of oppositions. It should be clear by now that this act of dispossession is not a gesture of exclusion--it is an acknowledgment of the "absence" towards which all speech is directed (FN 86), an absence, which in Hölderlin's language, is linked to a "division that is responsible for every work in our culture" (FN 86). But this division or spacing, as Derrida points out,

cannot occur as such within the phenomenological experience of a presence. It marks the dead time within the present of the living present, within the general form of all presence. (*Grammatology* 68).

Also,

Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject. By the movement of its drift/derivation [dérive] the emancipation of the sign constitutes in return the desire of presence. That becoming--or that drift/derivation--does not befall the subject which would choose it or would passively let itself be drawn along it. As the subject's relationship with

its own death, this becoming is the constitution of subjectivity. (*Grammatology* 69)

In these passages, Derrida indicates two significant aspects of writing: one, that spacing marks "the dead time of the presence of the living present"; two, that the constitution of subjectivity in writing is inextricably linked with "the subject's relationship with its own death." Foucault's own assertion about the inherent discursivity of writing are clearly highlighted in these positions. As a condition of writing, discursivity is the negative form of the phenomenological experience of a presence since it marks the limit toward which this "presence" continually moves. It, thus, shares in its own "death" every time it is subjected to the principles of its own extrinsic structuration.⁹ It is in this context that Foucault establishes the "unity" or link between Hölderlin's madness and his "artistic work":

a discourse which investigates this indivisible unity and which concerns itself with the space created when these two are joined, is necessarily an interrogation of the Limit, understood as the line where madness becomes, in a precise sense, a perpetual rupture. (FN 85)

The effect of this discursivity, as Foucault tells us in *Fantasia of the Library* is "the distant murmur" of "fleeting words" (109). Discursivity points to the world of the "event" that lies outside the "entangled nexus of causes and events,"

(TP 173) which in philosophical discourse (and in forms of positivism that it institutes) serves as the bridge between origin and distance and as the guaranty of permanence in the face of rupture. The distant "murmur" of words preserves the processual continuity of differences and cannot settle on the objectified grounds of their own condition of possibility: "fleeting" words mark the progress of differentiations in the movement of counterhistory--in what Jules David Law refers to as "that simultaneous [but differentiated] institution--which gathers together language, the subject, and social space" (157). With "language" providing a structure to this differentiating movement, Foucault operates out of an epistemological system that, in the words of P.L. Brown, is "the nearest thing possible to absolute decentering." Furthermore, as Brown observes, "it involves a removal from the center toward an identification of center and structure in which neither could be accurately distinguished" (158).

"Theatrum Philosophicum":

The "Event" and the Limit

Foucault's efforts to delineate the "complex logic" of the event in "Theatrum Philosophicum" can be seen as an extension of his arguments on the negative presented in "The Father's No," which makes this logic part of the strategy of the limit. Written a year after the publication of *Archeology*, it serves to track the evolution of his ideas on language as

they open into the more structured metadiscourse in his archaeological enterprise. Here, structure should not be identified with "structuralism"; what we see in *Archaeology* is not the simple back-door revival of a much discredited structuralism, but the emergence of a theory that deals exclusively with the highly contested appearance of structures of discourse within a "language-space" that is dynamic and open-ended. More importantly, Foucault's own "analytic" efforts are themselves defined within his multiplicitous space as particular negotiations with the philosophical discourse of human sciences, particularly with the "history of ideas." More about this in my chapter on *Archaeology* .

The "event" is a dynamic nexus of signs that in the words of Eco:

appear[s]. . . as the manifest and recognizable end of a net of aggregations and disintegrations constantly open to further combinations. (*Semiotics* 21).

Just as writing cannot occur in the phenomenological experience of presence, the event "is not a state of things, something that could serve as a referent for a proposition" (TP 173). Foucault speculates that as the basis of a counterhistory, the event cannot be explained in terms of its alignment with the "referent." It is interesting to note here that in explaining the distinction between the two--the event and the proposition based on a referent--he offers the example of "death" as an

"event." He says that "the fact of death is a state of things in relation to which an assertion can be true or false [and therefore be called "propositional"]" while "dying is a pure event that can never verify anything" (TP 173). Foucault appears to establish "death" as a pure event that escapes the enclosures of propositional thinking, standing on the threshold in which language appears as the im/possibility of speech, and as the complete dispersion of "positive" knowledge. One can certainly discern in his consistently manifested concern with the idea of death the play of transgression and limit within which we are all situated as modern, speaking beings.

Since the distances marked by the progress of a counter-history are available to us in the gaps of supplementarity between the "system" and "signification," and not in the simple binary positioning of the two, Foucault proposes that "for a ternary logic, traditionally centered on the referent, we must substitute an interrelationship based on four terms" (TP 173). This is a crucial idea in Foucault that points to his problematizing of the anthropological impulse in modernist thought as it recovers from the play of binary difference by positing a ternary term. But Foucault's understanding of the "event" as a discursive entity disrupts the alignments forged within this new ternary system.

Instituted as the "holding" space of the binary oppositions from which modernist thought attempts to free itself, the ternary term acts as a form of cathexis because it

stabilizes the differentiating forces of the event in the "referent," which are, then, reconstituted as the evolutionary and genealogical force of History and historicity, or as the empirico-transcendental forms of anthropologism--life, labor, and language--centred around "man." Thus, as Foucault shows, this ternary term is complicitously engaged in consolidating the differences inscribed within the theory of "representation" that Foucault finds reinstated in the analytic of finitude in the human sciences.

In order to substitute the ternary with a form of thinking based on "four terms," Foucault proposes the following terms: designation, expression, signification, and meaning. Foucault had proposed a similar four-term relationship in his discussion on "speaking" in the classical episteme. The famous "quadrilateral of language," holding together classical thought, is based on the interrelationship of the four terms--proposition, articulation, designation, and derivation (*Order* 115)--which are seen to "confront" and "reinforce" each other in pairs in a manner that is characteristic of the classical order. Articulation and proposition are aligned and opposed to each other in a pure space of transparent duplication: articulation gives body to a proposition, while they both remain opposed on the homogeneous ground of the same (one differentiates while the other connects); designation and derivation are similarly involved in the play of oppositions of continuity and slippages, all enacted on the plane of the same.

Thus, it is possible for "derivation" to lead back to "proposition" in order to open up the "fold[ing] in on itself" of the former into the region of a generality through which all predication is made possible. In the finely orchestrated ordering of these four terms one observes the working of the general *mathesis* of the classical order, which always remains unproblematic in the privileged movement of its structuration. In "Theatrum Philosophicum," Foucault's presentation of the relationship of these four terms and their operations within the field of the "event" is quite different.

Foucault explains that "designation" refers to a "state of things"; expression refers to "opinion or belief"; signification is an "affirmation"; and "meaning" is added as "intangible" with "one side turned toward things" and "the other toward the proposition" (my emphasis; TP 173). Note that "meaning" is not "recovered" in the substitutive play of the three ternary forms, designation, expression and signification, but remains as point of contact and the strategical movement of differences; in other words, it is question of "facing" and being placed within the spaces of differences, not transformed and assimilated (dialectically or otherwise) by the substitution of differences--into a finalized and coded form of meaning. Therefore, from "within language experienced and traversed as language " (*Order* 383), the "event" arises, not a the manifest form of the play of differences in the region of the Same, but as "a point without thickness or substance of

which someone speaks and which roams the surface of things" (TP 174). Foucault emphasizes its exteriority, in addition to its nomad like movement, to bring out the larger significance of the event as an effect/condition of a discursive movement.

Such a notion of "event" does not seek its conceptual validation in neopositivism, phenomenology, or the philosophy history (TP 175). The ternary is no longer deployed to secure the heart of man's interiority and his status as a singular knowing subject--or with the latter, the objective status of the known. Neither is it a quest for a "grammar of events in temporal inflections." "Meaning and event" are related as "meaning-event" that is "always both the displacement of the present and the eternal repetition of the infinitive" (TP 174). Therefore, Foucault reminds us:

We should not restrict meaning to the cognitive core that lies at the heart of a knowable object; rather, we should allow it to reestablish its flux at the limit of words and things, as what is said of a thing (not its attribute or thing in itself) and as something that happens (not its process or its state). (TP 174)

Returning to his original example of "death" as pure event, he adds:

Death supplies the best example, being both the event of events and meaning in its purest state. Its domain is the anonymous flow of speech; it is

that of which we speak as always past or about to happen and yet it occurs at the extreme point of singularity. A meaning-event is as neutral as death: "not the end, but the unending; not a particular death, but any death; not true death, but as Kafka said, the snicker of its devastating error. (TP 174)

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the "meaning-event" is the lack of a continuous space on which it comes into being-- "not the end, but the unending." Situated on a discursive surface in which it continually negotiates with "presence" and the multiplicity of "eternity" through the specific strategies of an "institutional/instituting inscription, the event is

. . . at the limit of dense bodies, an event is incorporeal (a metaphysical surface); on the surface of words and things an incorporeal event is the *meaning* of a proposition (its logical dimension); in the thread of discourse, an incorporeal meaning-event is fastened to the verb (the infinitive point of the present). (TP 175)

Neopositivism, phenomenology and philosophy of history fail to "grasp the event," because as Foucault demonstrates, they suppress the externality of the event in order to sustain the wholeness and authority of the referent in the conditions imposed by the notions of "the world, the self, and God (a sphere, a circle, and a center)" (TP 176). By rejecting the

"pure surface of the event, neopositivism "places it within the order of a referent that eliminates the particularities of its externality within the "spherical plenitude of the world." Foreclosing the exteriority of the event by aligning the event within the structures of an intending consciousness and the phenomenon towards which this consciousness is directed, phenomenology, "places the event outside and beforehand, or inside and after, and always situates it with respect to the circle of the self" (176).¹¹ Philosophy of history defines a historicity for the "event" by aligning it with a temporality by which the event's identity can be defined and placed. As a representation of his own efforts to delineate the conditions of a counterhistory that effectively reorders our understanding of the "event," Foucault's reading of Deleuze's critical deconstruction of the order of the event, in "Theatrum Philosophicum," is significant. To him, Deleuze's efforts successfully combat the "triple subjection which to this day, is imposed on the event" (TP 176). Deleuze's proposals constitute the metaphysics of "the incorporeal event, (1) that is irreducible to the "physics" of the world (the "incorporeal" since it deals with effects, rather than with the the plenitude of causes); (2) that offers a "logic of neutral meaning" ("neutrality" is to be read as "anonymous"--a term that combats the notion of specific self- signification based on the "intended" meaning by a consciousness); and (3) that presents a "thought of the present infinitive." (The latter reflects an

Heideggerian idea--of refuting the conceptual hardening of the the past through its positivist determinations and its figurations of the future based on those deter-minations).

In dealing with the dynamics of the "event" in this present context of Foucault's de-schematizing schematics, we are once again confronted with the issue of textuality that critics like Edward Said and Scott Lash problematize in their readings of the post-structuralist credo. Said maintains that in opposition to Derrida, Foucault presents the order of the event, not as part of any system of textuality, but as a discursive force that operates in conjunction (in fact, is made operative by) with non-discursive practices that derive from institutional, social and political arenas of human experience. Lash makes a similar argument that, while Derrida stands with Lacan on the scene of writing, Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard represent the opposite order: the conscious attempt to limit that scene (see Lash, "Desire in Postmodernism"). This is, in my opinion, a limited view of Foucault because it attempts to set up a binary opposition between "textuality" and "discursivity,"--an opposition that these essays seek to counteract. As I have attempted to show, Foucault's problematizing of the event--in the face of the orderings of neopositivism, phenomenology, and philosophy--is part of his attempt to re-situate all forms of inscription within the larger framework of a counterhistory that is very much implicated in issues of "textuality," and, to use Said's term,

in a "*mise en discours*" ("Problems" 673). The issue of "textuality" as "discursivity" is of significant concern in "Theatrum Philosophicum," as is evident in Foucault's elaboration of the Deleuzian idea of "phantasm."

Foucault does not provide a definition of a "phantasm," but places it within the context of the meaning of the term, "event." He asserts that the event is related to the phantasm as part of one series to another, a relation that brings both into "resonance" (TP 176). Foucault's argument is that the phantasm is not part of the illusoriness of an illusion that is instituted by an idealist textuality, but the force of desire. In the domain of such textuality, "judgment" is rendered possible by measuring the "phantasm against reality, by going in search of its origin" (TP 177-78). In the domain of the "event," on the other hand, the phantasm does not indicate "a common point. . . or the primary origin of simulacrum" (TP 177), but the space of repetition that is tracked by the movement of lack, a movement through which an "event" comes into being:

The event is that which is invariably lacking in the series of the phantasm--its absence indicates its repetition devoid of any grounding in an original, outside of all forms of imitation, and freed from the constraints of similitude. (TP 177)

The phantasm, therefore, is not the site of an "ultimate illusion" that has to be recognized before the meaning of an

event can be posited, but is part of the disguise that the event repeats: "the always singular mark that conceals nothing, simulacra without dissimulation, incongruous finery covering a nonexistent nudity, pure difference" (TP 177). In this radical construction of the relationship between the event and the phantasm, Foucault introduces the full thrust of a counter-history that "conceals nothing," a form of thinking that is implicated in the Being of language of which we are a part.

Foucault goes on to amplify his argument by stating that the "phantasm" is "an imaginary supplement adding itself to the bare reality of fact [neopositivistic]," but it is that excess of the "play of the (missing) event and its repetition," perceived as something that overflows the form of individuality, that the event may claim in its singularity and present itself as "universal singularity" (TP 177).¹² Foucault relates this movement to the necessary condition of the splitting of individual identity that the subject might claim:

The splitting of the self and the series of signifying points do not form a unity that permits thought to be both subject and object, but they are themselves the event of thought ("la pensée") and the incorporeality of the object of thought ("le pensé"), the object of thought ("le pensé") as a problem (a multiplicity of dispersed points) and thought ("la pensée") as mime (repetition without model). (TP 179)

The notion of mime, associated with the simulacra, "explicitly breaks with the paradigm of truth which has controlled representation" (Ulmer 176) by dissociating itself from the idea of a "model" of truth and its self-present and self-evident structure. Mime as "mask," says Russell Berman, "indicates the radical absence of a genuine identity and the constant possibility of the multiplicity of personae" (21).¹³ The "phantasm," Charles E. Scott's observes, is not "the 'sub' that 'stances' the organizations, but is the place of

desires, interests, repeated qualities and characteristics, but nothing primordial about them. Phantasms are plays of surfaces relations, . . . they are differences coming from plays of differences, differences with growing and passing similarities; they are simulacra.¹⁴ (*Language of Difference* 95)

The metaphysics of origin typically relegates the derivatory form of "illusion" to a secondary position, and "designate[s] the separation between the simulacrum on the one side and the original and perfect copy on the other" (PT 170-71). This is revealed, in the phantasm, to be an already constituted movement of difference--"mark[ing] and go[ing] back over its mark with an undecidable stroke" (Derrida, *Disseminations* 193). Therefore, the phantasm opposes the duality of the concept of illusion by revealing the instability at the heart of the binary fold.

Foucault's essays in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* are not to be dismissed as merely experimental pieces that yoke together disparate literary themes with appropriate stylistic variations. The intensely dialogic nature of these essays serve to magnify the kinds of literary effects that result from languages intersecting at the limits of their concepts. In fact, Foucault's appropriation of Deleuze's language in "Theatrum Philosophicum" itself marks the limits of a self-sustaining, singular, critical, analytical gaze, pointing to the inherent dialogism that inflects and disperses the identities of thought and language. Thus, in a sense, it is impossible to regard the essays considered in the chapter to be in any way organically unified. What appears in them are links in a chain, figurations of incompleteness and ruptures. What is enacted is the possibility of a counterdiscourse as crisis, the diacritical movement as critique, actively dispersing and continually systematizing the limits of modern thought by tapping into its heterogeneity.¹⁵

NOTES

¹In "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," Foucault points to the influences of Bataille and Blanchot in his reading of Nietzsche (24).

²For a detailed explanation of this problem, see Manfred Frank, 133-34.

³Here, Mark Seem's comments are instructive: "To speak of difference in terms of contradiction is to undertake a violent negation of one of the differences which is 'contradictory,' in order to reach a resolution. In so doing, one negates the entire nature of differentiation by staying within both the concept of totality and the limits of representation. You do not resolve differences; you analyze their condition and affirm their reality" (126).

⁴Note how Blanchot figures the relationship between thinking and the dying in the space of "absence":

To think the way one dies: without purpose, without power, without unity, and precisely without "the way." Whence this effacement of this formulation as it is thought--as soon as it is thought, that is, both on the side of meaning and in excess of meaning. No sooner is it thought that it has departed; it is gone, outside. . . . Thought as dying excludes the "as" of thought, in a manner such that even if we suppress this "as" by paratactic simplification and write "to think; to die," it forms an enigma in its absence, a particularly unbridgeable space. The unrelation between thinking and dying is also the form of their relation: not that thinking proceeds towards dying, proceeding towards its other, but not that it proceeds toward its likeness either. It is thus that "as" acquires the impetuosity of its meaning: neither like nor different, neither other or same. . . . Between thinking and dying there is a sort of downward ascendance: the more we rise, step by step, toward the precipice, but it has no determined thought to stop at and so return toward itself. Whence its vertigo, which is, however, its equilibrium--its precipitousness, which is nonetheless, level or even--just as to die is always even, equal (lethal). (*The Writing of the Disaster* 39-40)

In another essay on Blanchot, Foucault emphasizes a similar relationship between language and death that brings us attention to the relationship between language and the limit:

Language, in its attentive and forgetful being, with its power of dissimulation that effaces every determinate meaning and even the existence of the speaker, in the gray neutrality that constitutes the essential hiding place of all being and thereby frees the space of the image. . . The pure outside of the origin, if that is indeed what language is eager to greet, never solidifies into a penetrable and immobile positivity; and the perpetually rebegun outside of death, although carried toward the light by the essential forgetting of language, never sets the limit at which truth would finally begin to take shape. They immediately flip sides. The origin takes on the transparency of the endless; death opens interminably onto the repetition of the beginning. (*Foucault/Blanchot* 57)

⁵ As I have indicated elsewhere, these essays have been all too easily dismissed as peripheral and speculative exercises in a radical literary criticism. For example, Jonathan Arac, in his 1980 article, comments that the post-70's Foucault "avoids the mystique of language, madness, and transgressivity that marks the works of the sixties" ("Function" 74). As David Carroll has rightly pointed out, "in their haste to defend [Foucault] as a radical sociologist, political theorist, or historiographer," critics have overlooked the fact that the strategies of analysis developed in these essays provide "alternative, transgressive, perspectives on the historical-political discursive field" (*Para-aesthetics* xvii-xviii).

⁶The influence of Lacan is undeniable here, which I will not be elaborating in this study. Karlis Racevskis points to the essential link between Lacan and Foucault. Arguing that the notion of the "episteme" is derived from Lacan's description of the Symbolic, he says that one might be able to track the effect of the catastrophic signifier in Foucault to Lacan's position on discourse as "a process of language which compels and constrains truth" (*Michel Foucault* 58).

⁷Without entering into a detailed account of the specific problematics presented by Lacan's theory, I wish to emphasize one particular aspect of the relationship between the "other" and the "subject," which has a direct influence on Foucault. In Lacan, the "symbolic" as the "other" is a dynamic term that refuses to yield to a single sense. Malcolm Bowie suggests that the symbolic, in each of its incarnations, is "that which introduces 'lack' and 'gap' into the operations of the subject and which in doing so, incapacitates the subject for selfhood" (117). This idea is manifested prominently in Foucault's essays in *Language*. See also Zizek, 175-77.

⁸In an interview with Roger-pol Droit, Foucault expresses this idea in a slightly different, but which is still significant. Referring to the function of literary writing, he remarks: "To rid oneself of philosophy necessarily implies such an offhandedness. It's not by remaining in philosophy, it's not by refining it to the maximum, it's not by turning its against itself that one exits from it. No. It's by opposing it with a kind of astonished and joyful stupidity, a sort of incomprehensible burst of laughter that in the end understands, or in any case breaks. Yes. . . it breaks more than it understands" ("On Literature" 118).

⁹Shoshana Felman remarks that Foucault's quest for a "new status of discourse" is aimed at identifying a language "which would undo both exclusion and inclusion, which would obliterate the line of demarcation and the opposition between Subject and Object, Inside and Out, Reason and Madness" (214).

¹⁰See Said, "Michel Foucault," 31.

¹¹The "humanism" that is secured in such a position is clearly reflected in the words of Ernst Cassirer: "[Man] continues to create for he knows that is only by doing so that he can discover and gain possession of his own self. His world and his true self can be had only in the shape which he gives to them" (*Logic* 115).

¹²Roland Coles notes that "the unmastered singularity of events is . . . obliterated as thought makes them identical with its own categories" ("Foucault's Dialogical" 102).

¹³The notion of the "simulacra" receives its most extensive and radical treatment in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*.

¹⁴Similar ideas are expressed about the phantasm as simulacra in Derrida's idea of "mimicry imitating nothing" (*Disseminations* 206). In *Speech and Phenomenon*, Derrida writes: "There is probably no choice to be made between two lines of thought; our task is rather to reflect on the circularity which makes the one into the other indefinitely. And, by strictly repeating this circle in its own historical possibility, we allow the production of some elliptical change of site, within the difference involved in repetition" (128).

¹⁵Michael Clifford points out that "crisis" and "critique" share more than a common etymological origin: "In cutting, the two are thought together; that is, the severity, the severing moment, of crisis can be realized only through a critique that enables it to be recognized as crisis" (108).

CHAPTER IV
"STUBBORN PROCESS OF BECOMING": ARCHAEOLOGY AND
THE LIMITS OF HISTORY

Introduction

Foucault's delineation and interruption of the limits of modern thought is central to the historical task undertaken in *Archaeology*--the recasting of history's transhistorical finitude by relocating the limits to the sites of formation of historical objects and events. Referring to Foucault's challenge to the epistemological imperatives of writing the history of philosophy, Blandine Barret-Friegel notes that for the philosopher it was not a "question of thinking in thought. . . [but] of thinking in terms of the point where thoughts and their objects border on one another, thinking in terms of the knit-ting together, the adjunct, the intersection, the regulated interplay of words and things, and thinking of the game itself as historical relationship" (193). It is clear that, by placing the "interplay of words and things" within the dis-continuous operations of historical formation where their limits are instituted, this kind of thinking radically departs from the paradigmatic conception of history as a discourse of an evolutionary idea or a given *telos*. Foucault's archaeological enterprise dispossesses history of its

transcendental finitude by wrenching its epistemological base from the centered subjectivity of human consciousness and by placing the finiteness of such consciousness within the heterogeneity and discontinuity of the historical formation of discourse.

Noting this revisionist strategy, François Wahl observes:

Now, if, rather than the setting in of 'stubborn process of becoming,' one comes across 'disconnections' in patterns; and if, rather than the continuing history of an object, one bears witness, as a result of 'interruptions' to its disappearance and replacement: if, instead of the evolution of a concept, one comes across, as one reaches 'the inflections of the curve' and the 'inversion of a regulatory movement', shift in this concept so that it takes on a different form (the same characteristics no longer being the pertinent ones), within the context of a different field (such that it is no longer the same structures which are problematical), and when the constitution of 'series' and the way they are linked changes into 'series of series' or tables--it is clear that archaeology is dealing essentially with *breaks and redistributions*: 'the problem is no longer that of the tradition and the tracing of it, but the way it is formed and delimited,' where what is at stake are

the 'shifts in level and synchronisation' (emphasis added; 75-76).

In chapter 3, I have shown how Foucault locates the dramatic shifts and fault lines in the order of modern thought. By opening the spaces within the languages of death, sexuality, and the phantasm, Foucault forces the trajectory of modern thought into the region of the "negative," encoded beyond the empirico-transcendental space of modern thought. In a similar move, *Archaeology* works out the specificities of history's discursive function by reviewing its limiting operations in constituting its ontological and epistemological field. Manifesting itself as a theory of discontinuity, archaeology delineates a "historical a-priori" across which the ruling epistemology of historicism can be questioned and its system of constraints unravelled. In other words, the archaeology's strategic displacement of modernist epistemology is both a rupturing of the transcendentalized limits of historical consciousness on which it is founded, as well as an reinscription of history's radical mode of being as "difference."

In this chapter I will focus on the specific ways in which this theoretical enterprise in *Archaeology* can be viewed as a critical deployment of the thought of the limit, developed earlier. By positioning "difference" within the conceptual "counter-discourse" of archaeology, Foucault is not attempting to advance another transhistorical theory of history or a

metatheoretical singularity as a foundation for that history. Rather, archaeology is a historicocritical project that operates by identifying and deploying itself beyond the limits of modern epistemology, thereby overcoming the metaphysical centeredness of humanism--a centeredness that makes historical finitude the stable bearer of historical meaning. This is achieved by interrupting and perverting the centripetal forces of modernist history and by delineating those eccentric, centrifugal forces that regulate the differences in the formation of historical objects. My first step will be to investigate Foucault's delineation of an archaeological "historical a-priori," a term that opposes its metaphysical counterpart by introducing the dispersive potential of all historically generated "difference," and by making the latter a condition in which specific discursive and non-discursive practices give rise to historical objects, including "archaeology" as a possible source of an new "post-modern" historicity. As a parallel argument, I will demonstrate how the dynamics of "historical a-priori" can be read as effects of such "spacing" that I delineated in chapter 3. Historical spacing, in *Archaeology* is a movement that opens up the very space in which history, as a metaphysical construct, constitutes itself as transcendental finitude.

Archaeology as Radical Historicism: A Counter-discourse to Structuralism and Hermeneutics

Any study that attempts to evaluate the status of Foucault's historicocritical project must necessarily begin by establishing the shared space between "archaeology" and the two great critical projects of modernity--structuralism and hermeneutics. Foucault's relationship (or, affiliation) with structuralism--a recurrent concern in critical circles--has proven to be an intensely problematic issue. It might be worth noting that at a time when structuralism had already inaugurated, and made current, a radical, subject-less discourse, Foucault's challenge to the legacy of modern thought's "anthro-pologization" of knowledge was seen by many scholars as a continuation of the structuralist tradition. For them, Foucault's radical critical thought appeared to be no more than a re-staging of structuralism, with concepts like "episteme," "systematicity," and "archaeology" serving as the latter's derivatives. Furthermore, Foucault's critique of modernity was perceived to be in line with the structuralist critique of historicism, especially since the latter's antihistorical and synchronic approach to the study of human culture and thought had already opposed the Hegelian, synthetic, historical dialectics that Foucault had himself sought to problematize in *Order*.

Despite these similarities and shared assumptions, there are fundamental differences between structuralism and

Foucault's archaeology. Foucault's refusal to be regarded a structuralist is not an evasatory gesture. The differences are fundamental: one has simply to consider Foucault's own position on this issue. In *Order*, he noted that structuralism was one of the two systems instituted by modern thought (the other being hermeneutics) that grew out of the latter's epistemology, whose imperatives Foucault had challenged in his analysis of the human sciences. Furthermore, as Foucault subsequently argued in *Archaeology*, the historical discourse that structuralism inspired is based on "those analyses in which subjectivity eludes one retains its own *transcendence*"(sic) (emphasis mine; *Archaeology* 202). Acutely conscious of his radical post-modern critical posture vis-a-vis the systemic constraints of modern thought, Foucault knows that even when structuralism opposes the subject-centered, anthropological assumptions of humanist thought, it retains its allegiance to a transcendent, semiotic objectivity that aligns it with the authority of modern thought.¹ The purpose of archaeology, as Foucault consistently maintains, is to challenge the transcendentalization of thought, which is achieved and secured in structuralism and hermeneutics. Therefore, in assessing the significance of *Archaeology* as an analytic system, it might not be adequate simply to state, as Gary Gutting has, that it is a theory of history that "eliminates the fundamental role of the human subject. . . . [and] operate[s] as the historical counterpart of the

structuralist countersciences. . . in the post-modern move away from a con-ception of man as the object that constitutes the world of objects" (228). Also, Manfred Frank's remark that Foucault is a "neostucturalist" whose archaeology "consists in destroying the orders of discourse, disorganizing it, and putting it back together in a new form" (165) only serves as a limited pers-pective because it refuses to acknowledge Foucault's radical departure from the entire epistemological construct of struc-turalism, one that is supported by the conceptual as well as the methodological imperatives of modern philosophy.

Archaeology is the first fully-extended exploration of what Michael Roth calls a *sens historique*, as opposed to the Hegelian search for a *sens de l'histoire* (see Roth, *Knowing and History* 204). As a *sens historique*, its main purpose is to disconnect the "present" from its pasts.² The de-linking of the two is a tactical move that prevents the present from mastering the past by representing it as a "general synthetic element" (Cousins and Hussain 83). Thus, the historical scope of archaeology represents a departure from the Hegelian absolutist position, and its meta-discourse is aimed not at securing a *sens de l'histoire* that offers a complete synoptic assurance or reasonableness to the present, but at articulating the difference that *is* the present, one in which archaeology is itself made possible. Similarly, archaeology deals with structures that are not the fixed centers of a continuous

historical movement, but a highly mobile set of relations, regulating and regulated by the emergence and transformations of discursive objects. Cousins and Hussain argue that for Foucault knowledges serve as discursive formations in being "a corpus of statements which relate to the existence of objects, mode of statement, concepts and thematic choices" (85). The specificities generated by the existence of statements undermine the dialectical and continuous regularity of historical continuum because they constantly redistribute and transform the limits across which history recognizes its own objects.

Foucault's rationale for providing a methodological map that traces the lines of these transformations is offered in the "Introduction" to *Archaeology*. He writes that he is interested in exploring in detail the theory of discontinuity that he had proposed, and explored, in his earlier works:

An enterprise by which one tries to measure the mutations that operate in general in the field of history; an enterprise in which the methods, limits, and themes proper to history of ideas are questioned; an enterprise by which one tries to throw off the last anthropological constraints; an enterprise that wishes, in return, to reveal how these constraints could come about. These tasks were outlined in a rather disordered way, and their general direction was never clearly defined. It was

time that they were given greater coherence--or, at least, that an attempt was made to do so. This book is the result. (*Archaeology* 15)

Foucault's desire to achieve a "greater coherence" through the adoption of a methodological map must not be interpreted as an attempt simply to order the differences made possible by a disruptive archaeology along metaphysical lines. In fact, the call for "coherence" does not translate into the creation of a static, unchanging, and predictable system of structures. Rather, it presents itself as an "open system" in which the productive dynamics of modern thought can be studied, and its alternatives proposed.³

Archaeological meta-historical perspective makes possible a greater awareness of the authoritative imperatives of structuralist and hermeneutical epistemologies, and it also provides an alternative to these imperatives. Because these authoritative imperatives have traditionally precluded the possibility of acknowledging the difference generated in our understanding of the past by the "present" critical gesture, archaeology helps de-link the seams that hold together the differences of the past and the present. In fact, conceiving the differences generated in history by reconstructing the site of the "present" at which history can be critically studied from a non-absolutist position, archaeology recasts the entire continuum of historical epistemology in the modern age.

Therefore, Foucault's construction of the historical "present" as a function of historical discontinuity is essentially a critical maneuver that operates from the same transgressive impulse that can be located in the essay "What is Enlightenment?". In this essay, Foucault questions the basis of modern, bourgeois thought and identity and their links with the Enlightenment. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note:

What is clear is that, far from being a project of the future, Foucault is identifying and indemnifying what is perhaps the most characteristic manoeuvre of bourgeois identity. For Foucault transgression is the interrogation of boundaries, 'a realm, no doubt, where what is in question is the limit rather than the identity of a culture'. But cultural identity is inseparable from limits, it is always a boundary phenomenon and its order is always constructed around the figures of its territorial edge. (200)

On a more general level, therefore, Foucault's archaeology acts as a counter-narrative to the dominant modes of identity-construction in modern thought which lie at the heart of history. Specifically, it dissociates the historical figuration of identity that historicism, in collaboration with hermeneutics, establishes within the order of modern thought, thus subjecting the "presentness" of modernity to the dispersion of historical transcendence. In all of this, Foucault renegotiates the limits deployed by modernist

historicism in order to demonstrate that its epistemological system rests on highly unstable, "local" systems of coherence and order, systems that are generated by the imperatives of truth which are themselves determined by the play of epistemological limits and the constant shifting of boundaries of emergent historical objects.

Overcoming the Hermeneutics of Modern Historicism:

Foucault's Archaeology as Counter-Narrative

Foucault's critique of western modernity, which commenced with an evaluation of Kant's question "Was ist *Aufklärung*?" parallels his detailed analysis, in *Order*, of the productive dynamics of humanistic inquiry. His "symptomatic" reading of the discourse of humanism reveals the complex alignments supporting the figure of "man"--both as the object as well as the subject of knowledge. Humanism, according to Foucault, maintains its "scientific" status by controlling and regulating the very finitude that gave rise to it. Serving as the condition of possibility for knowledge, as well as the possibility for transcending the limit that circumscribes that knowledge, this finitude is projected as the "historical a-priori" of humanist knowledge. The main purpose of *Archaeology* is to render problematic the space of this historical a-priori, and to introduce into the region "where anthropological thought once questioned man's being and subjectivity" (*Archaeology* 131) the limits of its transcendence. As he states in "Politics and

the Study of Discourse," archaeology's purpose is "to establish [the region] where the history of thought, in its traditional form, gave itself a limitless space" (16). As archaeology shows, this limitless space is not an infinite region but one in which objects of historical knowledge are constantly subjected to forces of limitation; indeed, the very possibility for the emergence of these objects within the epistemological field is determined by such action.

According to Foucault, it is the institution of the "history of ideas" in the modern episteme that makes the "historical field of the sciences, of literature, of philosophy" the "discipline of beginnings and ends, the description of obscure continuities and returns, the reconstitution of developments in the linear form of *history*" (my emphasis; *Archaeology* 137). Archaeology retraces the limits that are formalized in this field, seeking to establish "its threshold of existence . . . by the very discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say" (*Archaeology* 130). In other words, through its interventionist "symptomatic" reading of the text of modern historicism, archaeology attempts to identify the "locus" of those limits, a plural space that no longer belongs to the pure field of knowledge, but "fall[s] outside our discursive practices" and "bursts open the other. . . the outside" (*Archaeology* 130-31).⁴ Moreover, as Robert D'Amico notes, "Because discourse is erased in its substantiality by being treated as a window through which one

looks but does not look at," Foucault opens up the "complex meta-physics designed to repress discourse" ("What is Discourse?" 203), thereby restoring the "other" of its dominant epistemology.

Foucault recognizes that if his prime concern is to redeploy the limits of modern thought in order to dissipate those forces that have consolidated and regularized its precipitousness, his critique has to challenge the very ground of finitude on which historical epistemology is inscribed. Formulated along the paths of "those great caesures, furrows and dividing lines which traced man's outline in the western episteme and made him a possible area of knowledge" (*Order* 378), this finitude, Foucault argues, has acted as an "historical a-priori" in modern thought. By developing into a "limit-condition," this "a-priori" helped anchor history to humanist thought in two specific ways. One, as the transcendental internalization of subjectivity, and second, as its extrapolation to the dimension of "history." The former posits a "gentle, silent, intimate consciousness"--silent, because consciousness is empowered to return always to the source to claim its ground of identity, thereby establishing "the intentional continuity of the lived" (*Archaeology* 210). Modern hermeneutics and structuralism, in their own distinctive ways, negotiate a space within this order, and by extension, within the continuum of history. The a-priori status of history guarantees the transcendence that is required to

install the evolutionary subjectivity of the "human" in a continuous space. Particularized as "the history of the mind," it is related to "the synthetic activity of the subject" (*Archaeology* 19). Determining a temporality for human experience whose "limits" are fixed within the philosophical simultaneity of "speech" and "thought," the synthetic activity of the subject also ensures the ideality of the multiple representations in the human sciences. It is on these foundations that a "human" history became possible in the nineteenth century. It is a history of human experience that is continuous in its discontinuity, teleological in its passage through its temporality, and sub-jected to causality and the "powers of a constituent consciousness" (*Archaeology* 203).⁵

Foucault argues that once these postulations become the regulatory forces of a "human" history and humanistic inquiry, the breaks that originally defined their arena of knowledge in the nineteenth century arrange themselves in the form of an epistemological enclosure. And this epistemological enclosure reproduces the primary binarism of subject and object, and ensures the representability of finitude in the human sciences. Once established as the condition for the possibility of thought, these breaks now cease to present themselves as limits and are virtually absorbed within the naturalized spaces of knowledge. It is this containment and naturalization that *Archaeology* seeks to counter.

Archaeology's strategies are manifold, but its chief concern is to open up the limits of humanistic inquiry by introducing irrecuperable differences within its order of finitude. Foucault announces his strategy by saying that archaeology "establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make " (my emphasis; *Archaeology* 131). In this crucial statement about the purpose of the archaeological critique, Foucault makes it clear that he is interested in inaugurating a radical historical thinking that proliferates the conditions of its own existence by locating the discursive, local operations underlying the region of the universalizing Same. Rather than plot a grand narrative that endlessly secures its unremitting singularity and teleology, archaeology introduces the counterdiscourse of the Other. Its task, as Foucault characterizes it, is discerning "the *individualization* of discourses" ("Politics and the Study of Discourse" 8), since it is in these individualizing dynamics that one can critically observe the strategic relation of the Same and the Other and the play of epistemological limits. Note that the individuation of discourses in *Archaeology* is not based on the retrospective perspective on specific historical epistemes, which was central to *Order*. In fact, having mapped out the specific discursive arrangement of modern thought and

questioned the epistemological order mandated by such arrangement, Foucault proceeds, in *Archaeology*, to further problematize the epistemological base of history that recovers the past in order to legitimize its own humanistic bearing.

Therefore, by individuating discourses in terms of discontinuous "statements," each circumscribed by its own systemic constraints, Foucault fractures the wholeness of historical perspective. The statement exists as a particular and specifiable articulation of signs, carrying an "enunciative function." Different statements are linked together within the productive system of institutions that are responsible for securing historical meaning. Furthermore, statements only operate in combination with other statements, and in fact, are bordered by other statements, and characterized by their material repeatability. Such a conceptualization of the statement allows Foucault to reconceptualize the notion of individuated discourses by distributing the function of these limits all across the ramified regions of discourse, instead of placing them within a "naturalized," static, propositional and grammatical system.

From this perspective, one might characterize archaeology as the great antagonist of humanistic knowledge. But it should be noted that such antagonism does not rest on a simple opposition of contraries, or on a simple binary dialectic of the Same and the Other. In fact, archaeology situates the "Other" at the sites of difference, singularity, specificity, and rarity

by exploring the field of the emergence of discursive objects and events. Consequently, it refuses to transcendent-alize its own movement by either restoring a fullness and continuity to its own interventionist purpose, or to construct itself as a totalizing "counter-rationality" to modern historical epistemology. As stated earlier, it "reads" the discourse of history symptomatically, and in so doing, locates the differentiating spatialization and temporalization of human experience in the "human" history of modernity at the site of "difference" and specificity, where ideas of subjectivity, telos, continuity, and causality are themselves generated. As Mitchell Dean comments, "This kind of dissociating history, since it does not seek to reconstruct a new meta-historical identity, can be defined by the 'exteriority' of its vicinity, by the forms of history it contests and the characteristic operations it suspends" (45).

**The Function of the Historical A-Priori in the
Counter-Discourse of Limits**

The contestatory maneuver effected by archaeology is clearly evident in Foucault's deployment of the term "historical a-priori." The term is traditionally associated with philosophical and formal discourse. In using a philosophical notion to counter the very epistemology on which philosophy grounds itself, Foucault is attempting to demonstrate how archaeology problematizes the limits of modern

thought. My intentions in engaging in a close analysis of Foucault's deployment of this term are primarily to keep this discussion focussed on the issue of archaeology as the counternarrative to the historical production of meaning in the history of ideas.

In proposing a "historical a-priori" as an explanatory model for archaeology, Foucault places himself in an intellectual arena that many of his critics find difficult to characterize, in purely disciplinary terms. As Clare O'Farrell notes, "[e]ven a brief survey of the literature produced on Foucault's work reveals an overwhelming interest in the question of how his work is to be classified. What 'discipline' can it be annexed to?" (20). She points out that even Alan Sheridan, one of his early commentators, is cognizant of this problem, and is also the first of a long line of critics who fail to provide a satisfactory answer. Although it might be argued that such questions cannot be resolved once and for all (or, simply, that they might be redundant and unnecessary), it is interesting to note that the dispute over Foucault's disciplinary affiliation, as it continues to engage the interest of scholars, is mostly confined to whether he was a "philosopher" or a "historian." Indeed, Foucault's use of the term "historical a-priori"--combining a philosophical concept with a modernist sense of history--can be easily interpreted as a sign of his indeterminable status as member of a particular discipline.⁶ But the task of classifying

Foucault's "real" vocation, I argue, fails to address the other more significant issues: how does Foucault justify the use of a term borrowed from propositional thinking to describe historical thinking? How can a "historical" thinking that has confronted the finitude of human experience be resituated on the grounds of propositional certainty? Or, does the juxtaposition of the two terms bring each to its own crisis? If so, how does this crisis relate to Foucault's problematization of the propositional, referential continuum that continues to operate within the representative field of humanist discourse, despite the latter's break from classical "representation"?

Because "a priori" has a discursive function in Foucault's archaeological view, its function is not to replace a philosophical concept with a historical one, or to simply align the two terms in a symmetrical order, but to radically bring to crisis the limitless, transcendental field in which philosophical idealism and historicism anchor themselves. Indeed, as Foucault repeatedly asserts, the action of both philosophy and history are defined by the order of the "human" within modern thought, constructed to serve the purpose of securing the primacy of a founding consciousness, the universality of its transcendent limitation, and, ultimately, the possibility for a human "meaning." It is this untangling of the complicitous relations between philosophy and historicism (*Order specifies*

the ways in which this is maintained) effected by the concept "historical a-priori" that I want to pursue further.

The term historical a-priori deploys a contradiction that is meant to radically challenge the assumptions of a humanist epistemology. It is not the possibility for meaning--a purely epistemological concern--that the term "a priori" ensures; it is, as Foucault repeatedly maintains, not prior to discourse, nor is it a hidden condition of "truths that might never be said, or really given to experience" (note the Kantian language being employed here). Rather, it operates on the positive surface of discourse, on the site where "history" and "discursive practice" come into being at the site of "things actually said" (*Archaeology* 127). The enunciative domain, which Foucault identifies with the "positivity" of discourse, thus, occupies the region of "things actually said," and forms the key normative element in his archaeology. What is characteristically different about this notion is that it does not account for the differentiations effected by discourse on a transcendental plane, one in which the Same and the Other are dialectically poised in a binary bind; rather, these differentiations are seen to function as a result of "all the flaws opened up" by the dispersion and "non-coherence" of statements--in their "overlapping and mutual replacement, in their simultaneity, which is not unifiable, and their succession, which is not deductible" (*Archaeology* 127; also see Machado 15-16). Deleuze points out that in such a system "we

never wholly remain within a single system but are continually passing from one to the other" (*Foucault* 5).

Yet, as Foucault says, even in this dynamic system, we cannot dismiss the "singularity" of the historical event and its irrevocability. Rather than posit "singularity" as a binary manifestation of "multiplicity," Foucault argues that the singularity of the event is reflective of the condition of "rarity" that is part of the positive unconscious of history, and that can be archaeologically studied. In an interview, Foucault explains that "the set of discourses. . . is envisaged not as a set of events which would have taken place once and for all and which would remain in abeyance, in the limbo or purgatory of history, but as a set that continues to function, to be transformed through history, and to provide the possibility of appearing in other discourses" ("The Archaeology of Knowledge" 45). But the relations of appearance that determine the singularity of events are always mobile, interacting in multifarious ways in the circulation and institutional appropriation of discourse, and therefore cannot be formalized in traditional systems of knowledge. In the next section, I argue that these dynamic relations can be studied as effects of "spacing," a critical maneuver aimed at opening the entire region of historical knowledge. Through such a maneuver, the field of formalized relations in historical knowledge are revealed to be intersected by the productive activities of dis-

course, often transgressing the continuity and singularity of limits within historical thought.

"Historical A-priori" and "Spacing"

While studying his description of the conceptual bases of the historical a-priori, one finds that rather than inaugurate a determinate, positive system for archaeology's critical ontology, Foucault often extends his philosophical argument to cover what appears to be a theory of spacing that rests on a "negative ontology." In this view, "discursiveness" is not constructed as a fully objectifiable phenomenon; rather "discourse" is the site of the "Other" of thought that both allows for and limits objectivity. Constructed as a "positivity" in *Archaeology*, discourse is a form of otherness that escapes the propositional, referential system that freezes thought in the order of the Same: it is, to use Marian Hodson's phrase, "a disjunction of negatives" ("History Traces" 103). "Positivity" itself appears to be a strategic term used to counter the epistemological binary instituted by modernist thought, and to this extent, it is aligned with a negative ontology that spaces this binary construction. This idea is clearly delineated and illustrated in Foucault's analysis of the analytic of finitude in *Order*.

The "negative" runs through much of the metadiscourse of liminality in *Archaeology*. As indicated earlier, the specific form assumed by it in *Archaeology* can be traced to the earlier

explorations of "spacing," especially in his essays "Preface to Transgression" and "Theatrum Philosophicum." John Sallis has remarked in his work on Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, that spacing has always been part of the differentiating movement of modern philosophical thought of "presence." As "a 'movement' that is such as to open the very space in which it occurs" (*Spacings* xiv), spacing is the activity of "otherness" with which the metaphysics of presence negotiates endlessly in all its paths to fullness and singularity. This opening of space, which Heidegger introduces in his philosophy of "destrucktion," also constitutes the "scene of critical writing" (Sallis xiii). Archaeology, as the "writing" of such a crisis, or indeed, as "critical writing," attempts to space the transcendent epistemology of humanist history by relating the latter's space to itself, thereby introducing "a self-opening of space" that fractures its self-evident and self-contained status (Sallis, xiv). Through the operation of such spacing, archaeology "inserts intervals" (Sallis, xv) into the temporality and transitivity that govern its epistemology, introducing differentiating and irrecuperable moments of rupture. Such a disruptive movement of spacing disperses the very basis of deductible truths, propositional thinking, and unified meaning secured in the human epistemology of modernity. It also restricts the doubling movement of the historical consciousness instituted in the great hermeneutic systems of the nineteenth century. For example, as Gadamer notes, Dilthey's nineteenth-

century hermeneutics posited the historical discontinuity of consciousness as an "intensified possession of itself" through a reflective folding-over: "[A]dopt[ing] a reflective attitude towards itself and the tradition in which it stands. . . it understands itself in terms of its own history" (emphasis mine; *Truth and Method* 207). One of the major impulses in Foucault's archaeological critique is, then, to render problematic this relationship between history and the self. Through a fundamental discursive spacing of the reconciliatory movement of "self-extinction" and "self-possession" in history, it stalls the possibility of any metaphysical reconstruction of historical difference and discontinuity or to build a consciousness that holds complete power over it.

In seeking to account for the differentiations in the limitless space of humanist epistemology by countering all continuities and teleologies, archaeology, Foucault maintains, "is trying to deploy a dispersion that can never be reduced to a single system of differences"; in fact, it is "a scattering that is not related to absolute axes of reference," and it "operate[s] a decentering that leaves no privilege to any center" (*Archaeology* 205). And yet, the historical a-priori of archaeology is conceived of as a "rule-bound" condition. The question is: is this yet another instance of Foucault's hidden affiliation with structuralism that he elsewhere so vehemently denies, or are we to regard the status of these rules in a different light?

By deploying the term "a-priori" to characterize the operations of history--clearly a "logically" contradictory move--Foucault forces us to reconsider the very basis of our understanding of the term "rule."⁷ He explains that the "a-priori" is rule-governed, but these rules "are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together; they are caught up in the very things that they connect; and if they are not modified with the least of them, they modify them, and are transformed with them into certain decisive thresholds" (*Archaeology* 127). Determining and, in turn, being determined, these rules are dynamic relations in a discursive field of practice; they are caught up in the formation of identities and objects which exist not in a formal or ideal space, but at the level of their appearance and transformation. Together with the identities that appear in discourse due to the differentiations effected by these dynamic relations, the action of "rules" represents the "opening up of the very space in which they occur." These rules are caught up in this dispersive spacing, and do not escape the conditions of their own constitution (and institution). In other words, they mark the threshold limits in whose transgression identities come into being, and thus define the space that is to be regarded, in positive terms, as "discourse."⁸ Thus, as a "transformable group" (*Archaeology* 127), these rules escape the static and closed system of structuralist epistemology; in fact, these rules challenge the very ground on which humanist epistemology

institutes its limits. The overall effect of such spacing is to deny the limitless field of "meaning" by which modern historicism secures its "hermeneutic" privilege of positing a continuity to a founding consciousness or ensuring the stability of "real origin."⁹ Similarly, modern historicism's "structuralist" privilege of maintaining the synchronicity of rule-governed determinations is displaced. Thus, the figuration of "history" in the space of a rule-bound historical a-priori is essentially discontinuous, but this discontinuity depends on a radical separation of past and present. As Foucault asserts in an interview, the task of philosophy today should be to "diagnose the present, describe how our present is different, and absolutely different, from that which is not it, in other words from our past" ("Foucault Responds" 39).

What, then, are the "positive" aspects of archaeology in the context of the radical difference between the present and the past? Is the "empiricism" entailed in the "presentness" of our historical being a mask for re-staging the epistemological certainties of humanist discourse, and is it, after all, ultimately determined by the same binary of subject/object that Foucault is so intent on transgressing? Is the ideality inscribed in the a-priori that conditions the archaeological view of presentness merely a continuation of the non-contingent critical position adopted by Kant in his *Critiques*? Foucault makes clear that the archaeological a-priori is a "contingent" figure in a way that resists being posited as a transcendent

reality; its "empirical status" is not defined as self-evident or given. Rather, "it must be able to take account of the fact that such a discourse, at a given moment, may accept or put into operation, or, on the contrary, exclude, forget, or ignore this or that formal structure" (*Archaeology* 128). In other words, the archaeological a-priori does not see the "present" as the privileged vantage point from which one can exercise the power of a totalizing gaze; rather, its concern is with local relations whose mobility precludes any formal, a-historical consciousness of culture. In this context, Foucault argues that "formalization" itself is an empirical and material process, initiated and sustained by the operations of discourse, and not by an "a-priori" condition of possibility in a pure, globally valid, epistemological domain. It is not born out of its "own dialectic" (*Archaeology* 128), and in so far as it possesses "a specific regularity" its history is finite and not purely "contingent"--as the latter is traditionally understood to represent the opposite of "determinateness," in idealist philosophy.

The history of formalization reveals that it is spaced in the very movement of its inscription. It is through the operations of spacing that history intersects with the rule governed space of the "a-priori;" thus, they cannot be aligned symmetrically in the same conceptual space that humanism offers through the figure of "man." Through such spacing, archaeology's offers a symptomatic reading of humanist

discourse and makes possible an understanding of "how the formal a-priori may have in history points of contact, places of insertion, irruption, or emergence, domains or occasions of operation" (*Archaeology* 128). The plurality of formal "a-priori" clearly establishes the fact that as functional entities, they are historically constituted, and that their history is the history of the generative processes by which they get linked to specific domains of practice, which in turn assure what gets said or remains unsaid. As Foucault points out, by homogenizing the forms of finitude that history presents in its discursive form, the continuous dialectic of modern historicism refuses to confront the functional operations of such specific domains. Such dialectic constantly engages in a form of "Aufhebung" by which differences are raised to a self-identifiable sameness and nullified in the process.¹⁰ Thus, by opening up the discursive seams in the dialectics of humanist discourse, archaeology disrupts the balance effected in the homogenization of difference, ultimately to destroy the equivalence maintained in the figure of man, both as "subject" as well as "object."

Thus, the "referential" that the history of ideas deals with is a "domain of possible objects," and not the region of a signifying plenitude. The relations that govern the referential are not to be determined through formal a-priori condition, but as Donald McDonnell notes, by "those which at a specific time in history come into existence between such

things as social, political and economic institutions in the society, as well as those between diverse forms of behavior, systems norms, types of classification and ways of characterization." McDonnell also adds that such processes do not "dictate the meaning that statements will have but only the possibility of their appearance" ("On Foucault's Method" 545). Naming, classifying, describing, and analysis are processes generated by the rules, but they also determine what specific function the discursive domain possesses in the institutional framework, and how these rules themselves will be accommodated, rendered normative, and regularized within it.

The Law of Rarity as a Discursive Condition

It within the context established by Foucault's rendering of the "historical a-priori" that one can understand what he means by the "law of rarity." In modern historical analysis, the "referential" is the region of "implicit, sovereign, communal 'meaning'." Its hermeneutic possibility is ensured in the polysemic conditions offered by this referential. The diversity of discourse--"the superabundant proliferation of statements"--is maintained only in a hermeneutic relation established by the relationship of signifier/signified: its "truth" is itself the possibility of representing the "plethora of the 'signified' in relation to a single 'signifier'" (*Archaeology* 118). The transcendentalization of the relationship effected in such representations is a form of

regularization of difference. Archaeology, Foucault argues, collapses such regulatory moves by "studying statements at the limit that separates them from what is not said, in the occurrence that allows them to emerge to the exclusion of all others" (*Archaeology* 119).

Approaching such a "limit" from a strategically discursive angle entails abandoning the hermeneutic assurance of "a rich, difficult germination." The "referential" is displaced from the depth at which it stands poised in hermeneutics to the surface where a discursive formation is articulated as "a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions." Consequently, a discursive formation defines a space for the statement that "occupies in it a place that belongs to it alone." The description of a discursive statement does not require the raising of a silent text that lies buried or that is repressed within the referential, but in "discovering what place it occupies, what ramifications of the system of formation make it possible to map its localization, how it is isolated in the general dispersion of statements" (*Archaeology* 119). Such a process of critical discovery is concerned with articulating the "rarity of statements" because it aims at identifying the specific relations of "localization" and not at recovering the specification of meaning in relation with a plethora of the hermeneutic "referential."

From a historical standpoint, such localization of the statement, forces us to abandon its "infinite transparency" and

to confront its materiality. Lecourt Dominique contends that "it is clearly necessary to think the history of discursive events as structured by material relations embodying themselves in institutions" (*Marxism* 195). However, it should be borne in mind that the materiality of a discursive event is not a "given" empirical "a-priori," but a condition in which it circulates as discourse. Foucault says that, in the discursive domain, the statement as event stands in relationship with other statements by being "transmitted and preserved, by hav[ing] value, and [by being something] which one tries to appropriate." Within this wider domain of functionality, statements are "repeated, reproduced, and transformed," for which "pre-established networks are adapted," and a status is given in the institution." Rarity is a discursive condition that hermeneutics ignores, though the latter is itself "possible only through the actual rarity of statements." In fact, Foucault asserts that interpretation is "a way of speaking on the basis of that poverty (rarity), and yet despite it" (*Archaeology* 120).

How does archaeology as radical historicism establish the law of rarity, the very conditions on whose basis, Foucault claims, interpretation becomes a historical activity? First, archaeology prevents hermeneutics from overcoming the differences effected by contradictions in discourse--"of incompatible postulates, intersections of irreconcilable influences" by the positing of a single law, "the profound

unity of discourse" (*Archaeology* 150). Rather, in archaeology contradiction is not something to be overcome but is a condition of rarity that "functions throughout discourse, as the principle of its historicity" (*Archaeology* 151). Second, it should be noted that Foucault's arguments about the law of rarity address the crucial question of "value" within a field of discursive and non-discursive relations. Third, the historical phenomena of value is delineated not as the linear history of exchange "gauged by the presence of a secret content" (*Archaeology* 120), but as laws that generate specific ways in which statements are circulated, exchanged, and transformed. As Foucault makes clear, these activities that establish the "law of rarity" are not simply confined to the economy of discourse, but also extend into the arena of the non-discursive--"in the administration of scarce resources." At this crucial moment in the argument, Foucault draws our attention to the material relations that are ignored in the "exegetic attitude" of historical hermeneutics. The law of rarity severely restricts the "referential" domain of historical hermeneutics by asserting that discourse is not "an inexhaustible treasure from which one can always draw new," or that which makes possible a domain of limitless "retrospection." Rather, it is "finite, limited, desirable, useful," and these conditions of existence ultimately pose the "question of power." In a broader sense, then, discourse is an "asset that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, a political struggle"

(*Archaeology* 120). The more comprehensive view of the contestatory relations inscribed in this notion of power is an early intimation of Foucault's genealogical critique and his investigations of the power/knowledge. It might be argued, therefore, that the genealogical critique is not a break from his archaeological position, but that it grows out of the latter (see Frank 181).

It is true that Foucault stops short of developing a fully-sustained genealogical critique of power at this stage. However, it should be borne in mind that by opening up the field of archaeological analysis to the critique of power, Foucault successfully establishes a connection between the crisis of humanist discourse and the possibility of operating from its limits. It is obvious that once the binary of interior/exterior is transgressed, and the desire to move from the exterior to the interior contained, archaeology can effect a contrary movement through its law of rarity. The law of rarity that comes into being within the space of archaeology's historical a-priori can now serve as the basis for a critique of power--a system that is traditionally seen to function by deploying limits and boundaries. Such a move is effected by seizing the moment at which the archaeological statement "irrupts," at "the very place and at the moment at which it occurs." Its singularity or "rarity" is irretrievably a condition of its dispersion and emergence in a field of contestatory relations. By localizing the dynamics of

emergence, the law of rarity counters "the philosophical status in the recollection of the Logos or the teleology of reason," and diffuses the totality of the hermeneutic horizon in which subjectivity and manifest history are allied. What emerges is a complex network of power relationships that inscribe the subject of history. In this domain, the cogito is no longer empowered to recover the "more fundamental history, closer to the origin" (*Archaeology* 121), but is itself caught "up in the play of exteriority," situated in the region "of which certain figures, certain intersections indicate the unique place of a speaking subject" (*Archaeology* 122).

The dismantling of the "subject" in archaeology's anti-humanist critical position is clearly a reflection of Foucault's on-going purpose of securing a discursively-mediated, material understanding of knowledge and its positions within a cultural body. This, according to Michael Shapiro, makes Foucault into a "neo-positivist," who is, unlike the traditional positivist (and humanist), no longer concerned with speaking *about* things and events, but with delineating how our "speaking is constitutive of things and events" ("Michel Foucault and the Analysis" 136). In the aftermath of the de-subjectivising of "speech" and discourse, what is left is not an infinite historical consciousness that brings manifest history into being within the discourse of history, but a "genealogical" consciousness framed within what Foucault calls "effective history."

Of course, Foucault does not coin the term "effective history." In 1960, Hans Georg Gadamer's work, *Truth and Method* proposed the idea of "effective history" (borrowed from Heidegger) to explain the historicity of understanding from a hermeneutic perspective. Despite his radical Heideggerian reading, aimed at reconstituting the historical basis of "understanding," Gadamer appears to retain the strong humanist bias of modernity, seeking to unite the "horizon in which the person seeking to understand lives" with "the particular historical horizon within which he places himself" (271). Such a view of unity is expressed in the following manner:

When our historical consciousness places itself within historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own, but together they constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. (*Truth* 271)

By centering self-consciousness in the horizon of historical understanding, Gadamer transcendentalizes the very movement of historical difference. As a consequence, the "presentness" of such understanding is able to transcend its difference with the past in a conciliatory fusion, instead of being subjected to its own differentiating function. Similarly, Gadamer argues later that in a hermeneutic context, the object and its meaning expressed in language belong together just as an object and its

mirror image belong together together, where, in fact, they are part of a speculative unity (see Wright, "Gadamer" 206-207).¹¹ Foucault would argue that such a move simply rehearses the old hermeneutic ploy by refusing to consider the discursivity of "understanding"--its enunciatory function and its emergence as a contestatory force in a field marked by "truth-regulating" institutional inscriptions. Gadamer's "historical consciousness," therefore, isolates the subject of history from the discursive field in which history comes into being, and instead of "mak[ing] differences, sets out to be the "recollection or a memory of the truth" (*Archaeology* 205).

In direct contrast to Gadamer, the historical consciousness, as Foucault tells us in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," is distinguished by "the acuity of glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses, . . . the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past" (152). While the decomposition of "historical knowledge" into discursively framed "knowledges" corresponds with the de-realization of subject into subject positions, the positive, productive effects of such dispersal are to be studied within the field "of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear and are defined, applied and transformed," and more importantly, understood as the institution of specific knowledges that are defined by the

possibilities of use and appropriation" (*Archaeology* 182-83). As Foucault affirms later in *Power/Knowledge*, we should try to "grasp subjection in its material existence as a constitution of subjects" within such institutional dynamics of use and appropriation (see *Power/Knowledge* 78-108).¹² "Effective history," as defined by Foucault in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," therefore, rests on this double affirmation. He is consequently able to extend the scope of this history by radicalizing and then reconstructing those limits of the modern historicism that regulate the latter's discourses of truth and power.

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NOTES

¹Note Foucault's comment in "Truth and Power": "One can agree that structuralism formed the most systematic attempt to evacuate the concept of the event" (114). The idea of the event, as Foucault demonstrates in "Theatrum Philosophicum," cannot be conceptualized by the static, synchronic apparatus of structuralism.

²Michael Gillespie notes that for Hegel, "history has come to its end and fulfillment in his own time and that it is possible to retrospectively survey the totality of historical development and to know it absolutely" (15).

³For an extended explanation of the term "open system," see Paulson's *The Noise of Culture*.

⁴Bové refers to this interventionist "symptomatic" reading as "oppositional practice" ("Ineluctability" 5). Symptomatic reading implies a reading that targets itself towards recovering those concepts that remain invisible in philosophical discourse, where, in fact, the invisibility or oversight is "built into the problematic as part of the field of operation" (Sumner 152). This critical strategy links Foucault with Althusser, for whom the technique of symptomatic reading "involves a reading of conjoint presences and absences related to the system of the one text. It does not relate them to a second text used as a grid" (Williams 48). It is worthwhile to note that by avoiding the use of a "second text," symptomatic readings function outside any transcendental meaning system, legitimizing the truth of discourse.

⁵According to Rorty, the Hegelian historicist, as opposed to the Cartesian thinker, experiences "the thrill of being up-to-date, of being in touch with the latest developments of the spirit in its march towards larger syntheses and more inclusive discourses" ("Foucault" 44). Indeed, in such a schema, the "present" represents the culmination of the historical, progressive forces that are set into motion by the Spirit, and it is the latter that validates the authority of the historical consciousness.

⁶Major-Poetzl comments that "Foucault's archaeology is an unclassifiable discourse that functions simultaneously as philosophy, history, science, and literature, [and] yet cannot be identified with any of these disciplines" (195).

⁷Stuart Hall notes that in Foucault one sees "how the emphasis on difference--on the plurality of discourses, on the perpetual slippage of meaning, on the endless sliding of the signifier--is now pushed *beyond* the point where it is capable of theorizing the necessary unevenness of a complex unity, or even the 'unity in difference' of a complex structure" (92). The metadiscourse of liminality developed in archaeology constantly seems to hover between the fulness of systematization and the breakages and discontinuities within the movement of the historical emergence of meaning.

⁸The term "discourse," as used by Foucault, needs to be distinguished from its use in linguistic analysis, speech-act theory, classical Marxist theory of ideology, and philosophical positivism. In linguistic analysis, discourse is seen to govern the rules and practices in speech, often within a propositional, grammatical system; in speech-act theory, it is seen as language reflecting the position of the subject of enunciation; in Marxist theory of ideology, it appears as the action of the subject, representing the imaginary relationships between the subject and the real conditions of social existence; in philosophical positivism, it embodies the relationship of "meaning" established between the knowing subject and material reality. For a discussion of these positions, see Cousins and Hussain 78.

⁹Robert Holub claims that Foucault can be described as a "meta-phenomenologist," since he brackets both "truth claims" and "meaning" (245).

¹⁰Gayatri Spivak describes "Aufhebung" as the "traces of a contradiction within a thing [that] makes it split asunder through the generation of a negation which then produces a third thing which raises, denies, suspends, and preserves the first" ("Speculations" 43).

¹¹Foucault summarizes the effect of hermeneutic dialectics by saying that such a "dialectic is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody, lethal character by reducing it to the clam Platonic form of language and dialogue" (*Power/Knowledge* 114-15).

¹²Peter Dews notes that, in both *Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the sciences of the "body" and "mind," playing out the "institutional, and political preconditions for the elaboration of a form of knowledge" (*Logics* 174-75).

CHAPTER V
GENEALOGY: DELIMITATIONS OF TRUTH IN
CRITICAL HISTORY AND THE DISCOURSE OF POWER

Introduction

Like his archaeological critique, Foucault's genealogy represents a significant delineation of a radical historical ontology that is made possible by Foucault's deployment of the idea of the limit. In archaeology, the idea of the limit serves as a strategy for disrupting the evolutionary continuum of history, replacing this continuum with a series of discontinuous formations that are dissociated from an universal and primordial origin or a given *telos*.¹ In his genealogical critique advanced in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" and *Power/Knowledge*, the idea of the limit serves as a strategy for bringing into focus a highly ramified "counter-memory" that refuses to be stabilized in the form of a recoverable "historical meaning" or be subsumed under the binary relations of "origin" and *telos*. Instead, by being situated within the mobile relations of the discontinuous formations revealed by archaeology, this counter-memory articulates the highly dispersed processes of transformation and correlation that determine history's meaning, processes that are seen to be circumscribed by the mobile relations of power and knowledge

and defined in relation to the highly dynamic matrix of "truth."² Thus the genealogical enterprise is an extension of archeology's theory of discontinuity; but this theory of discontinuity now becomes the locus for renegotiating the imperatives of historical understanding within the discourses of power. Power is differentiated and differentiating, and its relations with knowledge indicate that all historical understanding is a function of the limits instituted by the relations of power/knowledge.

Paul Patton regards this transformation as "an inflexion of an already complex curve," rather than a real break in the development of his thought (111). My own position is that the question of "truth" posited by Foucault's genealogy serves as a delimiting force in history: it introduces those boundaries that make knowledge dependent on the very conditions of power--the power of truth to specify its regime. Such a move forces open the very limits that are regularized within the unitary, philosophical system of critical history's conception of the sovereign "right," the stable point around which the determinations and deviations of power are determined. Indeed, constructed as the "naturalized" boundaries within critical history's field of knowledge, these limits are maintained by the humanistic discourse of sovereign, legal "right," and by its critical agency, human subjectivity. By opening up the alignments of these limits, Foucault develops an idea of liminality that identifies and locates the dynamic,

microphysical relations effected in the heterogeneous domain of power and knowledge. Therefore, "meaning" is dispossessed of its unitary power in its relationship with truth, to be replaced by the power of transformation and regulation within the "regime of truth."

Foucault's initial conception of the genealogist's operative strategy may appear to be closer to the critical historian's, raising the suspicion that genealogy is no more than a re-enactment of critical history's will to knowledge. Foucault's strategy suggests that, by identifying itself with the task of the "painstaking rediscovery" of the "historical knowledge of struggles" (P/K 83) fought in the name of a "truth," it aims at using "this knowledge tactically" in order to make possible the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (P/K 84). And yet, there is a fundamental difference between the critical historian's search for meaning and Foucault's call for a "tactful" engagement with knowledge: the attempt to "emancipate historical knowledges" (P/K 85) from their subjection by the centralizing powers of dominant knowledge systems does not necessarily lead to a meta-rational conception of power, but to a genealogical conception of knowledge. Such a theory can only be constructed by focusing on the limits that are regulated within what Foucault calls the "microphysics of power" rather than on those that form the central core of power, those limits that unilaterally differentiate power from "non-power."

Without operating from the foundation of historical rationalism, Foucault posits power as a microphysics. He shows how this power possesses a nature and an operative practice different from that of power as conventionally understood. One of power-as-microphysics's differences from the power of sovereignty of law is that it establishes techniques of normalization; thus its insidiousness. In short, the limits or thresholds of knowledge, within this conception of microphysics, do not fall within the negative of the sovereign legal-political order, but within the disciplinary techniques of normalization that are embodied in cultural practices. These techniques neither emanate from a centralized position of power, nor are they exercised by a central authority.³ In place of the singular and sovereign entity of power and the hierarchies implicit in its existence, Foucault presents "power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary" (P/K 96). "Capillary" power is heterogeneous and heterodox because it institutes limits within the body of discourse that continually transgress the universalizing modalities of the sovereign legal-political order; this power infiltrates and violates those binary divisions of "truth" and "non-truth" that are derived from the epistemological constraints of this order.

Resulting in a discourse about power, which is seen to operate within the vast network of institutional knowledge systems and their interstices, Foucault's deployment of the

idea of limit as critical strategy in genealogy offers a new approach to understanding the foundation of "cultural ontology." This ontology is no longer an extension of philosophical ontology that is secured through a philosophical epistemology. Rather, it represents the radically reconstituted space of cultural objects whose existence within spatio-temporal limits are marked by their emergence within the field of highly contested discourses of "power." Indeed, the microphysics of power that is discerned in these contested spaces can be said to act as determinants of this new ontology, which do not, and cannot, correspond to any pure, given, philosophical space.⁴

In short, the function of the new "intellectual"--the genealogist--is of one who "no longer bears the values of all," but is "the strategist of life and death" (P/K 129) and who ascertains "the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (P/K 133). As *Discipline* clearly demonstrates, genealogy does, indeed, offer a definitive shape to this possibility, and becomes part of an on-going strategy for critiquing the existing relations of power by positing itself as a new theory of limits. My purpose is to inquire into this theory by reviewing "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." One of the purposes of such an inquiry is to examine the ways in which the idea of the "will to truth" that is worked out in the essay later crystallizes in Foucault's theory of power advanced in *Power/Knowledge*. Such an approach will also clarify how

Foucault's deployment of the idea of the limit is fundamentally related to the progression and continuity of his ideas of genealogy.

**"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History": the Initiating
Moments of a Genealogical Critique**

Foucault's genealogy gathers its initial momentum in the essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," where he elaborates how genealogy intervenes in the space of the "three Platonic modalities of history"--monumental history, antiquarian history and critical history--each seen to constitute its own regime of truth (NGH 160). Displacing their authority, genealogy introduces the obverse of historical memory--in "parodic" history, "dissociative" history, and "sacrificial" history. The first, Foucault contends, is a travesty of monumental history's mode of recognition; the second disrupts the ground of identity that allows the past to be judged from the security of the truth revealed by the present; and the third links the legitimized space of knowledge within "critical history" to "the will to knowledge" (NGH 160-62). In all of these three forms, Foucault seeks to subvert the centralizing forces of a historical memory that, in the name of knowledge, obscures the limits by which power serves both as interdiction and as incitement to truth. The genealogist, Foucault suggests, situates herself within these relations of interdiction and incitement by sacrificing the global will to knowledge and by

operating from local sites where power relations are specific and non-universal.

The prominence given, in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," to Nietzsche's understanding of history signals Foucault's concern with problematizing the truth claims of critical history. Foucault suggests that the three modes of history--monumental, antiquarian, and critical history--operating from a centered epistemological system of historical understanding--are derived from Nietzsche's own characterization of the new historical sense in the essay, "History in the Service and Disservice of Life" (*Untimely Meditations*). The term, "critical history" is crucial because it allows Foucault to enter into a theoretical contestation with the truth claim of history, which was hinted at, but remained undeveloped, in *Archaeology*. In fact, "critical history" serves as a crucial pulsepoint, indicating the moment at which he is able to develop his genealogical critique by locating the ways in which the limits in the discourse of truth get aligned with those determining the theory of the sovereign "right" in modern humanism. This movement represents the point of departure for Foucault's transition from a history-centred archaeology to the power-centred discourse of genealogy. Indeed, Foucault's problematization of critical history is a significant concern even in his final work on discourse and truth (see *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of π APPHIA*, 114).

To understand the implications of Foucault's theory of the microphysics of power, it might be useful to recall that in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault subjects "critical history"--that posits itself as the "history as knowledge" (P/K 160) and specifically, as the Hegelian knowledge of the sovereign "right"--to a symptomatic reading. One of the effects of this reading, as Foucault clarifies, is to reveal the manner in which "essential function of the discourse and techniques of right has been to efface the domination intrinsic to power." This "effacement" is central to the construction of power in critical history: this history presents power "at the level of appearance under two different aspects: . . . as the legitimate rights of sovereignty, and . . . as the legal obligation to obey it" (P/K 95). Foucault's symptomatic reading of such a construction is aimed at reversing its binary status, and is derived from the notion of "reversal-principle" that he had earlier identified in "The Discourse on Language" (231). I suggest that this principle is one of the leading impulses behind Foucault's critical strategy in genealogy. It allows him to see the imperative of legalism in critical history as functioning from the "Archimedean point" (Arac, "The Function" 76)--a point that is an authorizing condition reinforcing the unilateral position of humanism. Since humanist discourse conceptualizes power in relation to the idea of a fundamental human "right," the limits of the former are always determined in relation to the latter. Foucault develops his genealogy on

the premise that the humanist's position is always invested with a critical authority that is complicitously aligned with the network of power/knowledge, and that the binary relation elides this relation.

As *Power/Knowledge* demonstrates, "critical history" defines two great models of power--the juridical and the economic--both of which ignore the capillary nature of power relations. Operating from these two models, a humanistic critical history institutes the discourse of the sovereign "right" within the very space of "truth," which it claims to possess by virtue of its unique place in the philosophical continuum. By opposing this space of truth, the genealogical project locates a "non-place" (NGH 150), bringing out the microphysical relations of "truth" within which the discourse of right is ins-tituted. Thus one has to distinguish Foucault's distinction between a power that comes from a specific place (sovereign law) and one that comes from a "non-place" or a dynamic network of interrelated places. It is possible to sum up the movement of genealogy in the following manner: while archaeology aims at disrupting the narratives affirmed in "monumental history," which glorify the past, and "antiquarian history," which seeks to define historical consciousness in terms of the identi-fication of past and present within a continuist and evo-lutionary paradigm, genealogy interrupts the space of "critical history" as the latter seeks to establish its epistemological authority by

instituting the truth about "right" at a site outside the difference of history--in the space of truth uncontaminated by historical difference. The initial stages of this movement are most easily traced in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"; this movement gains new momentum in *Power/Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, where new sites for engagement in the critique of power can be located.⁵

In a characteristic manner, Foucault sets the ground for a genealogical critique of power and the discourse of "right" in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" by identifying the relations of power within the epistemological domain of history. What goes by the name of "knowledge" in history, as Deborah Cook observes, is "the complicated web of seemingly insignificant and sometimes embarrassingly minutiae that are responsible for the emergence and development" (299)--phenomena that are normally seen to be "without history" (NGH 139).⁶ Some common targets of archaeology are evident in this essay-- (1) the unilateral memory of humanist history that gives significance to only those phenomena that are posited as "historical"; (2) the "historical deployment of ideal signification and indefinite teleologies," (NGH 140) which subjects history to the truth of "meaning"; and (3) the search for historical origin that locates itself in a non-historical space.⁷

What makes "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" so singularly unique is its dialogic construction that serves to conflate his own ideas with those derived from Nietzsche. Thus the limits

of Foucault's power as an authorizing subject are textured with those adopted and co-opted from Nietzsche's power as an authorizing subject, and synthesized within this form. The strategic and conceptual purposes of such amalgamation becomes clear when we realize that the essay, constructed in this form, situates the concerns of philosophical epistemology within the larger, on-going counternarrative of transgression. One author's limit-setting authority becomes the condition for establishing another's, and the identity of one's thought can only be recognized within the interstices of another's power. This idea had been indicated in the essays in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*.⁸ It is also crucial to note that, coming to Nietzsche after reading Heidegger, Foucault does not engage in an "interpretation" of the nineteenth-century philosopher in this essay; rather, he takes up specific ideas about the "origin" that Nietzsche presents in "History in the Service and Disservice of Life."⁹ The effort, on Foucault's part, to open up the sites of difference in historical meaning is clearly motivated by an "archaeological" impulse. By inaugurating the critique of genealogy within what appears to be the familiar ground of the problematics of archaeological "origin," Foucault ensures that the links between archaeology and genealogy are not forgotten.¹⁰

The question of "origin," central to Foucault's archaeology, serves as a site for the "disclosure of differences" (Major-Poetzl 36). This is achieved by revealing

the play of limits within the field of values in which discourse attains to its heterogeneous truth-signifying positions. In the essay, Foucault enumerates the different notions of "origin" that appear in Nietzsche--"Ursprung," "Entstehung," "Herkunft," "Abkunft," and "Geburt." Since the idea of "origin" itself lies at the philosophical core of humanism, its possible dispersal as strategic sites (rather than a fixed point), disrupts the very basis of humanistic epistemology. Once subjected to the forces of genealogical contestation, "names" lose their self-verifying status as "concepts," and become agents in the "war" about truth. Thus, nominality becomes part of genealogy's critical strategy; it provides the analyst with the most apparent exterior form of discourse--"names." This exteriority interrupts the representative status of a binary, "inside/ outside" discourse, which is often deployed in critical history's sovereign discourse of power. The genealogical critique that Foucault subsequently develops in *Power/ Knowledge* operates on the connection between a nominalist analysis and the analytics of power: this is evident in Foucault's continuing and obsessive pursuit of the relationship between different forms of "origin."

The "names" of origin point to certain "ideas" of origin, but Foucault sees these names as functioning in different ways in Nietzsche's texts. Instead of a philosophical understanding of "origin" that would place it within the continuist framework

of history or to the originary moments of its constitution, Foucault links the names given to "origin" to the specific deployments of knowledge as the latter constitutes the operative force of "truth." The idea of origin is predicated on a will to truth that the "critical history" of modernism institutes as the condition of knowledge. As we will see later, Foucault explains that this "will," although not acknowledged in critical history, indeed, occupies a strategic position of power within it. The conditions imposed by this will function within " a new economy of power relations" ("The Subject and Power" 210). But this will also operates within the genealogical critique, since the latter is implicated in those relations. In other words, genealogy is not to be perceived as occupying the region outside the relations of power, but as something that offers a possibility for redefining the limits of power by being constantly engaged in the constitution and transformation of power. Therefore, as strategy, genealogy's methodological tasks are different from critical history's interpretive modes.

"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" defines genealogy as "operat[ing] on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (NGH 139), in place of a seamless world of signification. What seems on the surface as the "historical" task of reading "historical texts" is now conceived as the genealogical task of working on the "archive." The term "archive"

problematizes the very status of the historical text. Unlike the latter, whose authority is based on knowledge predicated on a closed and finalized system of signification or its hermeneutical imminence, the archive marks the differential relations of "truth" as they are posited within the domain of knowledge. Furthermore, as Foucault contends, this knowledge cannot overcome the "singularity of events" that is eliminated in the "monotonous finality" posited by critical history (NGH 139). In fact, at this point, this singularity, as originally conceived in archaeology, indicates the distance that history creates between its own text and those that are "without history--in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts" (NGH 139-40). It is clear to Foucault that the epistemological question on which knowledge is based is already marked by a historical differentiation between what constitutes "knowledge" and what does not. In order to highlight this idea, he addresses the site of engagement of these so-called a-historical entities within the domain of truth. Foucault explains that these a-historical entities are constantly engaged in playing "different roles" (NGH 140), actions that mark the distance from "knowledge" and its "other." This distance also functions as dissimulation because it no longer marks the region of possible signification, since signification is controlled by the pure, singular, and static space of knowledge as "truth." Nor is it the space between the origin and the manifestation of meaning. Rather, it is that which intervenes in the space of

posited truth, and itself becomes "dissimilar." Displaced from its pure space as the regulator of a truth, the transhistorical and metaphysical origin in the humanist text is, thus, interrupted by genealogy. So is its continuum, which is now relocated as the "invention, a sleight-of-hand, an artifice" (NGH 141). In the long run, this notion of historical emergence is aligned with the "complicities inscribed" (Gordon "Afterword" 237) in institutional formations of truth. Thus "origin" becomes an impossible place since it is inextricably linked to the play of limits that differentiate that space.

The truth of origin, as Foucault shows, is heterogeneous, and its heterogeneity marks the "history of error we call truth," in which one discovers "the very question of truth, the right it appropriates to refute error and oppose itself to appearance" (emphasis added; NGH 144). The question of "truth" and "error" is linked to the idea of the "event" that cannot be subsumed under a metaphysical binary system that evolves through the logic of its own contradiction and resolution. Rather, the event moves across the entire body of culture, infiltrating even the human body in diverse ways. Therefore, the will to knowledge, implicated in the dynamics of truth and error, is also maintained by its links to the constituted limits of the "body":

Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally

imprinted by history and the process of history's
destruction of the body. (NGH 148)

In *Disciple*, the political technologies of the body are seen to reflect this will to knowledge; they are both useful and productive in generating its truth (see 25-27).

As Foucault explains in "Theatrum Philosophicum," written a year before "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," the "event" dissociates the point of reference in historical meaning by radically differentiating the relationships between origin and continuity, outside any transcendent finitude. In genealogy, the event indicates that the "acute manifestations" of history cannot be perceived as an ideality, but as the contested singularity within a field of forces: "the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of the masked "other" (NGH 154). Here, in a typically Nietzschean passage, Foucault conceptualizes the "event" in terms of an alterity that might at first seem to be an appropriation of the dialectical struggle between strong and weak forces. The next statement, however, avoids any such "dialectical" conception of the event: "the forces operating from history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to *haphazard* conflicts" (emphasis added; NGH 154). What is striking about these two statements is that, while the first anticipates Foucault's idea of the insurrection of subjugated knowledges as leading to the

recovery of the "masked other," the second clearly precludes any clear differentiation of dominating and dominated discourses. This qualification indicates that the relation of power between the self and the other cannot be conceived in binary terms. Thus it is possible to assert that Foucault's understanding of the emergence of the "masked other" is a manifestation of the limit beyond the binary. In other words, by refusing to constitute the relationship of dominant and repressed discourses in the form of a binary, Foucault draws our attention to those capillary relations that constitute the network of power, to those interdependencies of limits that constitute the relations of dominance and suppression. The impulse to "look from above and descend to seize the various perspectives," which Foucault sees as the essential gesture of genealogy, is not aimed at securing knowledge through a synoptic differentiation of "truth" and "error," but at "disclos[ing] dispersions and differences, leav[ing] things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity" (NGH 156). The "impertinent vibration of identities" (TP 183) cannot be held together within the condition of repetition in representational history's will to knowledge. Similarly, the memory of history becomes "in its own right, a genealogical analysis" by securing the differential force of that will to knowledge (instead of being its mere repetition), thereby pointing to a "scene where forces are risked in the chance of confrontations, where they emerge triumphant, where they can also be

confiscated" (NGH 159). Thus, genealogy's concept of knowledge is figured not as something that "slowly detach[s] itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason" (NGH 163), but as an entity that is inscribed by the resolutely com-plicitous conditions that continue to act between thought and its empirical roots. For Foucault, the former is typically represented in critical history's gesture of "liberation,"--a knowledge that is rehearsed by "detaching us from every real source and for sacrificing the very movement of life to the exclusive concern for truth" (NGH 164).

Present in these speculations about the relations of power and knowledge within the domain of truth is the question of intelligibility that Foucault had earlier problematized in *Archaeology*. Like archaeology, genealogy opens the question of intelligibility not as a special function of limits operating as natural boundaries of empirical discourse; nor does it completely internalized intelligibility within specific domains of institutional authority. The will to knowledge associated with the play of power can only be conceptualized by tracing the limits of the domain of truth and by delineating the productive mechanisms that are effected by it. Genealogical analysis cannot itself conceptualize this will within an purely, epistemological/intelligible domain; it can only mark the sites on which "truth" is inscribed by the objectifications of knowledge. Foucault's own theorization of such

objectifications is clearly enumerated in a latter work, *The History of Sexuality*, vol.1:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which the force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another (92)

In this later work, the descriptive force of a genealogical critique is shown to be necessarily aligned with the study of "contradictions," indicating that the play of forces, which constitute the relations of power and operate through contradictions and gaps, themselves harbor a "metacritical" logic that lends itself to a critical assessment. Often, this "metacritical" logic is available to the genealogist in the effects and mobilities of power, and in their complex strategies of operation. But genealogy's meta-critical logic is rendered possible not by seeking a series of progressive and causal links between forces and institutions (the logic of cause and effect is after all supported by a metaphysical continuum), but by locating and studying the functional

dynamics connected to the network of existing institutional domains.

Critics like Berman have contended that, in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault's assertions about the critical function of genealogy share common characteristics with those developed by the Frankfurt School philosophers. They base their claims on the fact that genealogy's stated purpose of examining "the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematizing thought is designed to mask" parallels the Frankfurt School's critique of the dominating effects of instrumental reason. It is clear that Foucault sees genealogy as making possible the "re-emergence of low-ranking knowledges" by facilitating the entrance of these illegitimate knowledges into the domain of "truth." But, it seems to me, that this "recovery" is effected by constructing these knowledges not as complete and independent systems opposed to one another, with one knowledge dominating and suppressing the other, but as forces of the "differential knowledge" through which the regime of truth is effected within the body of discourse. This means that the relationship of dominating and dominant discourses is not always static or given but is always reinscribed within a larger field of capillary forces. One such example of dominant discourse that Foucault offers is modern science. In fact, the "scientific" status of such discourse is not so much a function of power centered around a dominant discourse as much as it is a

function of being defined by "the harshness with which it is opposed to everything surrounding it" (P/K 82). By emphasizing the oppositional aspect, Foucault constructs an alterity that determines the force of the Same, not through an analysis of causal relations, but through a delineation of the dispersed effects of relations of power, engendered in scientific discourses.¹¹

Although Foucault's initial reflections on genealogy as the "historical knowledge of struggles" in *Power/ Knowledge* might suggest that genealogy takes sides on the battle over truth, and therefore, elides the differential play of forces, it might be worthwhile to recall what Foucault says about the aim of such knowledge: Genealogy works toward recovering "the rude memory" of these struggles in order to "to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (P/K 83). Genealogy is therefore not instituted as a new epistemology or a discourse about "truth." The "historical ontology of ourselves" that genealogy attempts to establish is rendered as the play of forces that are locked in contestations and oppositions, and it is in these dynamics that it becomes conscious of its own emancipatory/tactical role. The word "tactical" clearly indicates that it has no fixed cognitive role but depends on the strategic position that the genealogist identifies for him/herself within "the multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (*Discipline* 26). As Foucault says, "one could

proceed to multiply the genealogical fragments in the form of so many traps, demands, challenges" (P/K 87). In the genealogical view, knowledge does not move forward through some grand continuum, but is always clustered in strategies of "truth." This is the Nietzschean perspective that most noticeably informs Foucault's conceptualization of genealogy.

Thus, the idea of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" must be read as the effect of a tactical and, therefore, as a newly-defined interventionist use of genealogical knowledge to gain perspective on "truths" that are "embedded in a comprehensive complex of institutions effective for socialization" (Honneth 187). The spirit with which genealogy conducts the "emancipat[ion] of historical knowledges from the subjection" of centralizing powers is political, since its purpose is to "render them. . . capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse" (P/K 85).¹² As the work of the Frankfurt School theorists indicated, the scientific techniques of "instrumental reason" allow disciplinary knowledge to be disseminated through the processes of control and technical innovation in modern, capitalist society.¹³ What Foucault's genealogy opens up are issues that address specific ways through which the power/knowledge nexus is constructed at the sites of disciplinary techniques. This leads to questions about power as constructed through the dissemination of knowledges, and through their progressive normalization.

Foucault asks: What kinds of subjectification of the individual are effected in these relations, and how is the "other" implicated in these subjectifications? Given the forms of subjectification, what might be the "strategic requirements of the social struggle," from which genealogy derives its framework of reference? Foucault's response to these questions will be elucidated in the following section.

Discipline, Power, and Limits

The effects of normalization, characteristic of the function of power, are fundamentally tied to the limits inscribed on the body of the subject. Foucault explains that these limits are part of the interrelated matrixes in which that body becomes the site for the many negotiations of power relationships that come into play in society. In *Discipline*, Foucault specifies three different procedures of control in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which point to the constitution of the body as the subject of legal power. These three forms are the surveillance of routinized activity within the institutions of education and work, the techniques of judging the body by normalizing judgment about it, and the methods of "examination" that brings together the first two in order to "qualify, to classify and to punish" (see Honneth 187). Foucault notes that the first two stages of law--monarchical and reformist--consisted first, in making punishment the ceremonial sign of sovereignty and second, in

defining the procedures for constructing individual selves as juridical subjects. The third stage, represented by the deployment of modern techniques of normalization, was linked to specific, "modern" institutions whose object is the "human body." The "body" is an important site of engagement of forces of power in the modern age because the "signs" that it "emits," as an embodied/controlled object have large-scale productive and reproductive implications in society: "Power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (*Discipline* 25).

The capacity for individual experience of the "self" is the effect and consequence of these disciplinary techniques; the limits of "selfhood" are inextricably tied to the imperatives of bodily conduct. With the study of the "political technologies of the body" becoming the basis of an "effective history," Foucault's genealogy concerns itself with delineating "the appearance, the articulation, and the spread" (Rabinow & Dreyfus 113) of such institutional inscriptions. Concurrent to this history is the "pleasure of analysis" induced through such objectifications of the body. Thus, the project of analysis is itself tied to the production of knowledge.

The technologies of the body, exercised by surveillance and observation, by the attachment of "norms," and by the inducement of normalization, are all geared toward installing a form of subjectification that modern humanism recognizes and

constructs as "free subjectivity," investing it with a "sovereign right" that aligns such subjectivity with power. This is how the limits of the modern subject are constructed. *Order* identified "man's" status as the subject and object of knowledge within the discursive system of modernist humanism. By providing an explanation for man's being as finite, and yet transcendent, *Order* also engaged in analyzing the form of human subjectivity constituted within the discursivity of the human sciences--man as a living, laboring, and speaking being. In *Discipline*, such a conception of subjectivity is clearly predicated on the disciplines of subjectification, and on the ability of the techniques to present "man" in his/her free subjectivity so that she/he can be inserted into the productive, political field of power relations.

Foucault argues in *Power/Knowledge* that the function of critical history has been to define these power relations within the "juridical theory" and the "Marxist economic functionality theory," both of which assume that the human agent is essentially a free and independent entity, with a power endowed in the form of a "sovereign right," a right that comes into being by virtue of its location as a "subject." Indeed, in the juridical theory, Foucault contends, power is seen as right that one is able "to possess like a commodity, and which one can transfer or alienate through a legal act or contract" (P/K 88). Consequently, power is concretized within the system of exchange as something that every individual

possesses by virtue of being a free subject. In the Marxist paradigm, political power is seen to be consolidated through the development of the forces of economic production, maintaining class domination: power is exercised by agents who control the forces of production. Another corollary to this form of power/ domination is the hypothesis that power "represses nature, the instincts" (P/K 89) as much as individuals and classes. In this theory, power is aligned with the theory of the suppression of pleasure.¹⁴ In addition, Foucault enumerates three types of analysis of power, from which genealogy attempts to free itself, namely, "the notion of the localization of power," "the notion of subordination," and "the notion according to which power, within the order of knowledge, produces nothing but ideological effects" (Morris, *Michel Foucault* 59).

The notion of the localization of power operates from the assumption that it is possible to correlate the discrete, local elements in the political system to given power structures. Thus, power is always subordinated to a mode of production, responsible for its maintenance, continuation and reproduction, within the politico-economic system. Within this context, the notion of ideology, Foucault contends in *Power/Knowledge*, "refers to something of the order of a subject" (P/K 118). Foucault's resistance to these forms of analysis is founded on one basic principle--that they maintain the will to knowledge across a "truth" that is itself a product of critical history's

construction of power as a "centered" and emancipatory force. This position has several critical ramifications that are crucial to our understanding of genealogy's relationship with the politics of "truth." First, in discussing the limitations of the concept of ideology produced by Marxism, Foucault argues that such a notion creates an opposition between "truth" and "error," based on the dichotomy of the scientific and non-scientific. On the other hand, genealogy focuses on studying the historical effects of truth that "are produced within discourses which are themselves neither true or false" (P/K 118)--in the propositional/critical sense. Any prior positing of this dichotomy precludes the possibility of discerning the microphysical relations of power that invest subjects with the authority to represent the truth about themselves. Second, the notion of an ideologically-constructed subject clearly assumes that it is possible to recover an essential subjectivity once the constraints of power are discerned or eliminated. Lastly, since ideology is seen as a secondary derivative of material and economic determinants, such theory creates a binary of the primary (infrastructure) and secondary (ideological superstructure), which ultimately secures a will to knowledge to institute the "truth" about reality and power within an idealist, empirical system (see "The Discourse on Language" 232).¹⁵

Given the conceptualization of power and its limits in humanist critical history as something that is "given," or "recovered" by an emancipatory act, Foucault argues for its

radical reconstitution in order to delineate the will to knowledge that functions within the productive dynamics of culture. This "will to knowledge" does operate upon power in order to release the "truth," but is itself tied to the network of relations across which power is constituted. Indeed, genealogy's will to knowledge is not a unity but is a derivative of these dynamic relations. It does not stand outside them. Foucault explains that power "only exists in action," that it is "a relation of force," and "not primarily the maintenance and reproduction of economic relations" (P/K 89). In opposing these monolithic figurations of power, Foucault proposes a Nietzschean scheme that positions power not at a sovereign space of origin but at those productive sites where the relation of forces that constitute power can be "established at a determinate specifiable moment, in war and by war" (P/K 90). "War," in Foucault, does not represent an outbreak of conflict, nor is it a literary metaphor; rather, it indicates the continuing contestations of truth within the domain of knowledge, marking the limits of the "manifold forms of domination." embedded in the discourse of "right"--"not simply the laws but the whole complex of apparatuses, institutions, and regulations responsible for application" (P/K 95). It also serves as the means to capture the possibility of resisting the forms of knowledge that assert their singularity by accessing the only truth. Indeed, genealogy is itself to be located at a "deter-minate specifiable moment"--at the

threshold of the crisis of critical history and human sciences, with its analytic machinery geared not toward recovering the "truth" about power, but toward opening the limits of power networks and marking the sites where power becomes microphysical. In other words, genealogy allows a perspective on the play that power relations engender within our bodies by examining and operating from them.¹⁶

Referring to the "action-theoretic interpretation" of Foucault's theory of power, Axel Honneth observes that the perpetual battle conducted in the name of power is bound "to situations of direct confrontation between subjects" (155). Here, it might be instructive to recall that from Foucault's genealogical perspective, the sites of power--the King in the sixteenth century and the "uniform edifice of sovereignty," represented by the humanist theory of "right"--invariably point to the "multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism" (P/K 95). Thus, social conflict reflects not the clash of power assigned to specific entities, but the "confrontation between "subjects" constituted and disciplined within the productive field of the technologies of the body--where the imperative to truth functions as an organizing principle in constituting the forms of subjectivity.

It is in this context that Foucault directs his attention to those "capillary points" in the field of power relations where "power surmounts the rules of right which organize and delimit it, and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in

institutions, and equips itself with instruments and eventually violent means of material intervention" (P/K 96). If the subjection/subjectification of the individual is to be construed within these investments and interruptions of the "rules of right," one has to abandon seeing power at the level of "conscious intention or decision." Because the centrality of intention necessarily divides the range of power into a binary relationship of dominator/dominated or active/passive, it seeks to recover the hidden motivations of the human agent who might be seen to possess power or suffer from its lack. The subject/object relationship is fixed and given in this conception of power.¹⁷ Instead, genealogy aims to study power "in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, . . . where it install itself and produces its real effects" (P/K 97). These effects, Foucault argues, are productive, "induc[ing] pleasure, form[ing] knowledge, produc[ing] discourse" (P/K 119). But these productive effects cannot be located by directly and transparently correlating the discrete and local spaces of institutions with specific distortions or manifestations of power, possessed or exchanged. Nor can these effects be studied in terms of "the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures" (P/K 114), both of which refuse to see power as something that "traverses and produces things" (P/K 119); instead, the symbolic and the signifying

structures emanating from it, invariably fall back on a humanistic idealism to generate and sustain its critical force.

Foucault argues that the idea of the "State" often functions in this "symbolic" way within the humanist theory of power. By utilizing the ideas of power as dependent on State apparatus, humanist theory of power institutes the binary of the "law"--domination and repression (P/K 122). Without actually discounting the role of the State, Foucault suggests that such a conception creates necessary and natural limits between power and powerlessness, which overlooks the strategic function of power.¹⁸ Genealogy shows that these limits often extend beyond the field of the State, creating a power that is "rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power." Furthermore, the great forms of domination and negativity in the domain of power analysis are not as monolithic as they might seem to be, that is, their prohibition function is derived from sources that are structured around the microphysical relations established within the networks, "invest[ing] the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology" (P/K 122). Therefore, in place of the Marxist analysis of power centering around the theory that power "is that which abstracts. . . negates the body, re-presses, suppresses" (P/K 124), what emerges in Foucault's genealogy are the technologies of power--"their concrete and precise character, their grasp of a multiple and

differentiated reality" (P/K 125). *Discipline* shows that the shift in power relations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries does not indicate a corresponding shift in the possession of sovereign power per se, but rather, a adoption of the technologies of surveillance and normalization, which are no longer exercised to repress individuals through a centred power's unilateral and dominating function, but instead aim at "obtaining productive service from individual in their concrete lives" by gaining "access to the bodies of individuals" (P/K 125). Of course, to consider this prerogative of power--of gaining access to individual bodies--as a function of centered power or as the play of ideological falsification is to misconstrue Foucault's intent. Power, argues Foucault, is incorporated in the socius, not by invading the body directly and restricting its freedom but by giving it new realities within an institutional and discursive system. As Homi Bhabha notes, this is the reason power/knowledge "places subjects in a relation of power and recognition that is not part of a symmetrical or dialectical relation ("The Other Question" 158). The process of subjectification as a placing of the subjected body within a dominant discourse necessarily means that the latter, too, is strategically placed within it. For example, as school discipline "succeeded in making children's bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning," and other technologies of power undertook the "administration, control and direction of

the accumulation of men" (*Discipline* 125), their discourses were implicated in these tactical constructions.¹⁹ Therefore, the genealogical critique of power interrupts any transcendental rationalism that elides the dynamics of constitution and construction, making possible a new "politics of truth." Foucault asserts

. . . truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth. . . truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which one is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (P/K 131)

The mastery of the body is to be studied in the positive, not the negative, effects of modern mechanisms of power. These effects are to be seen as political tactics and not as

indicators of law or of a technology of power shared by the single matrix of law and science (see *Discipline* 23-24).

The production of truth is, therefore, at the core of genealogical analysis. As *The History Of Sexuality Vol.1* demonstrates, the "pleasure of analysis" in the domain of sexuality is discursively tied to the "multiplication and intensification of pleasure connected to the production of truth about sex" (71). In other words, it is the practice of analysis, with its modern, complex forms of surveillance and objectifying norms, which constructs the object that is referred to as "sexuality." The multiple forms of incitement and interdiction are intrinsically connected to these objectifications, and are often tied to processes which, "through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them" (*History of Sexuality* 93). Power is not to be seen as sustaining its function by preserving static forms of domination or by retaining its role as emancipatory agency; rather, power is perceived in action, in the formation of strategies effecting the above-mentioned conditions, whose "design" often crystallizes in the "state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies" (*History of Sexuality* 93). What this means is that power induces pleasure not within the binary space, but within the proliferating and ever-extending domain of truth. This "truth" is objectified not in the spirit of a specific unilateral, will to knowledge; rather, this will and the

objectification of truth are both produced and reproduced within the "complex strategical situation" (*History of Sexuality* 93).

Since "truth" is inscribed in forms of institutional discourse, and subject to "constant economic and political incitement," its status as "object" is predicated on the diverse forms of "diffusion and consumption" (P/K 131). In this view, the limits of truth are seen to be directly implicated in the dynamics of diffusion and consumption of that truth. Therefore, instead of fighting the battle "'on behalf' of the truth," genealogy intervenes in the "battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays" (P/K 132). In other words, by operating from the exterior and the local, genealogy strives to challenge the limits of a universal truth within the domain of power by extending the conditions of the will to knowledge into the capillary domain of power. By diversely establishing the relations of limit--that is, by revealing the formations of incitement and interdiction of truth--genealogy makes possible a interventionist critical discourse of power that is not predicated on a humanist conception of emancipation.²⁰ This, then, is the operative status of genealogy--one that is consolidated by defining a new politics of truth, a politics that "attack[s] the relationships of power through the notions and institutions that function as their instruments, armature, and armor" ("Revolutionary Action" 228).

In the final stages of Foucault's delineation of genealogy in *Power/ Knowledge*, one discerns the final shape of the trajectory of thought of the limit. Though Foucault's subject is "power" and its "limits," genealogy does not view the latter as inherent to any given structure of power, but as points of contact in the large, capillary body of culture. Power operates, not because it has special agency or because its limits offer it a special privileged access to the truth about human nature or the body. As stated before, power is the effect-condition of limits that are continuously located and dispersed within culture. Often such localization and dispersion crystallize as centered power, but even in these conditions, this power depends on the continual circulation of limits within local sites of operation. As Leslie Thiele observes, "[p]olitical struggle [in Foucault's view], is not strictly a negative concept. It may always be construed as struggle *against*; but it may also be a struggle *for*" ("The Agony of Politics" 919). By interrupting the circulation of limits and questioning their regulatory function, genealogy introduces a new politics of truth through which power can be critiqued and its limits opened up for revision and change.

The critical implications of the new politics of truth are far-reaching. In such a theory, culture ceases to be a site of meaning, but a site for the production of truth. Such productive activities are always informed by differential relations: cultural realities are links in a chain, and as

Etienne Balibar notes, these chains are "constantly being enriched with new intermediate and extreme terms" (Race 46). Balibar contends that the polymorphous nature of concepts like race or nation is the direct product of their connection with "the whole set of social normalization" (Race 49). The idea of the "limit" is crucial to an understanding of such production because the limit articulates each concept in its specificity and yet determines the condition in which such specificity becomes a link in the chain of truth. Relations of power/knowledge occupy the site of truth by being engaged in marking extremely dynamic territories--from the specific to the general. The limits of these territories constantly bring into focus the productive basis of the history of difference.

NOTES

¹Foucault's statement in *Archaeology* is particularly relevant here: "[History], in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbs, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities" (7). For a discussion of the loss of history's "imagined totality," see Rossi *From the Sociology* and of Foucault's contribution to new historicism, see Leinwand 477-90.

²Though Paul Patton agrees that archaeology is concerned with delineating "relations between discursive events and historical processes exterior to discourse," he adds that "the focus of 'archaeology' is on the system of constraints interior to discourse itself" (111). This position, like many others, draws from a singularly conceived idea of the "interior/exterior" dichotomy that Foucault always attempted to disrupt in his critiques.

³Jeff Minson argues that the notion of *pouvoir-savoir* is "a problematic notion to the extent that it entails a relational totality, the relations in question being essentially relations of domination" (13). But Foucault's point seems to be that domination, in its articulated form, is itself the effect of microphysical relations of power that cannot be unilaterally conceived through the logic of legalism which is binary and which sees power within the dyadic and oppositional relations of domination and subjection.

⁴Héctor Mario Cavallari suggests that this new ontology is based on "the existence of general systematic connections linking discursive relations of cognition to constitutive social relations of power" (55). This comment clearly highlights Cavallari's epistemological concerns, though he admits that the question of cognition within this new ontology is also linked to institutional relations across which power is distributed.

⁵For a neat and helpful summary of the fundamental features of "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," see Major-Poetzl, 36-42.

⁶In "History of the Systems of Thought," the course description offered by Foucault in his first year at College de France, he

⁶In "History of the Systems of Thought," the course description offered by Foucault in his first year at College de France, he describes Nietzsche's ideas on the "will to knowledge" in the following manner:

--knowledge is an "invention behind what lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other; --its production is not the effect of their harmony or joyful equilibrium but of their hatred, of their questionable and provisional compromise, and of the fragile truce that they are always prepared to betray. It is not a permanent faculty, but an event or, at the very least, a series of events; --knowledge is always in bondage, dependent, and interested (not in itself, but to those things capable of involving an instinct or the instincts that dominate it); --and if it gives itself as the knowledge of truth, it is because it produces truth through the play of a primary and always reconstituted falsification, which erects the distinction between truth and falsehood. (*Language*, 202-03)

⁷Deborah Cook rightly points out that these metaphysical concerns are also opposed in the works of such philosophers as Nietzsche, the later Heidegger, and Derrida ("Nietzsche" 299).

⁸It is worth noting that even Jonathan Arac, a sensitive reader of Foucault, refuses to acknowledge the link between Foucault's earlier works and his genealogy. See "The Function of Foucault at the Present Time," 74.

⁹The Nietzschean strands in Foucault's conceptualization of power are explicated in Dews' *The Logics of Disintegration* (177-86).

¹⁰Rabinow and Dreyfus contend that although Foucault himself sees archaeology as complementing genealogy in "the Discourse on Language," works such as *Discipline* and the first volume of *History of Sexuality* reverse "the priority of genealogy and archaeology." They assert that "Foucault's elaboration of genealogy was the first major step toward a more satisfactory and self-consciously complex analysis of power" (*Michel Foucault* 104-06). Although this position is incontestable, it might be worth noting that the conditions of possibility for a genealogical critique are, to a great measure, determined by archaeological analysis.

¹¹Peter Dews notes that "the apparent level of abstraction of Foucault's discussion of what is frequently used together as a single entity, 'power-knowledge,' belies the extent to which his work is concerned with the status of scientific discourse, and in particular, the administrative role of the human sciences, in modern industrial societies" (*Logics* 171). Dews comment brings us closer to a discursive understanding of Foucault's genealogical critique. In the first instance, genealogy is to be regarded as an intellectual/critical reaction to the discourses of sovereignty that characterizes "critical history." Critical history's discourse of humanism often opposes the sovereignty and hegemony of scientific discourse. In opposing the latter, genealogy clearly avoids adopting the posture of the former, preferring to conceive of its own "oppositional" role within the network of local, instead of global, knowledges. See "Revolutionary Action" 232-33.

¹²Axel Honneth notes that "in opposition to Adorno (with whom, however, he shares the theme of the control-oriented character of the modern sciences), Foucault derives the conditions of scientific knowledge not from a framework of reference oriented toward instrumental access to nature, but rather from a framework of reference placed within the strategic requirements of the social struggle" (171).

¹³For a study contrasting Foucault's ideas on "reason" and "liberty" with those of the Frankfurt School theorists, see Berman, 12-26. See also Gold 298-99.

¹⁴Foucault's problematization of the "juridical model of desire" in psychoanalysis is explained in Judith Butler's *The Subjects of Desire*, 221.

¹⁵John Frow's understanding of ideology closely follows Foucault's: "There can be no single model of ideological structure because there is no hard and fast line between the 'real' and 'symbolic.' The distinction is a socially constructed reality which constructs both the real and the symbolic and *this distinction between them*. It assigns structure to the real at the same time as it is a product and moment of real structures. It therefore covers a spectrum of semiotic systems from both 'realms'" ("Discourse" 204).

¹⁶Note, for example, Foucault's comment in "History of Systems of Thought": "we are faced with the unavoidable fact that the tools that permit the analysis of the will to knowledge must be constructed and defined as we proceed, according to the needs and possibilities that arise from a series of concrete studies" (*Language* 201). The "theoretical models of the will to knowledge" in our time are available in the links between forms

of "subjectification" and the available political technologies of the body.

¹⁷In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault proposes that by eliminating the notion of a constituent subject, genealogy "can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework" (117). It is important to note that this "historical framework" cannot be the history of transcendental finitude on which the human sciences are based, nor can it serve as critical history's Archimedean frame of reference. This frame does not allow direct access to the "truth" of power-centered points of reference or of systems of subordination in the juridical-economic theories of power.

¹⁸Rose Gillian argues that Foucault's conceptualization of power "relies on the theological and military terminology of the feudal stage: body and soul; war and deployment; strategy and tactics." Asserting that the "elisions of method and thesis, technology and technique, strategy and tactic, are the sleights-of-hand," she accuses Foucault of dissolving "politics into 'powers'" (174). Gillian's argument represents the view that Foucault's theory concerned with the technologies of power, and "detached from any general theory of social change" is ultimately nihilistic and reactionary.

¹⁹Part 3 of *Discipline* outlines the development, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of new techniques for the control of individuals, and the regulation of social functions by positing the object as an object and target of power. For a perceptive discussion of these techniques, see Patton, "Of Power and Prisons" 120-26.

²⁰Didier Eribon, Foucault's biographer, says: "One of Foucault's main preoccupation in the last years of his life was to conceive of history in terms of 'games of truth,' the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought" (323).

CONCLUSION

LIMITS AND CRITIQUES: AN EXEMPLARY ISSUE

This study aims at securing a comprehension of the idea of the limit in Michel Foucault's prominent works--an enterprise that depends largely on closely reading, establishing connections between, and negotiating the different facets of his evolving thought. It also opens new avenues for rethinking the nature and function of contemporary cultural critiques. In fact, reading Foucault in this manner leads one to achieve a critically informed perspective on how these critiques are continually engaged in identifying, interrogating, and revising some notion of the limit, whether it be narrowly defined along "textual" lines or given a more comprehensive, "discursive" dimension. As a way of concluding this study, I shall offer some brief and general remarks on "postcolonial" theory--both as its status as theoretical discourse is understood in relation to the boundaries of the broadly-defined discourses of "poststructuralism," and as it is seen to undertake the revisionist task of re-situating the historically constituted limits of colonial authority within cultural texts. It will not be my effort to provide a comprehensive view of these relations, but a series of comments that bring into focus some of the key issues pertaining to the idea of the limit.

"May a margin function as a leading edge?" asks Jonathan Arac in *Critical Genealogies* (7). In the mid-eighties, it became apparent that if there were going to be a rapprochement between Marxist studies and post-structuralism, it had to be under the aegis of post-colonial theory. This is because this theory was essentially a critique of the binary, "philosophical" text of colonialism and imperialism, which had already been heralded by post-structural theory. What was left was the adoption of Marxist ideological critique to push the boundaries of this philosophical text into the muddied waters of imperial and neo-imperial "history." Thus in a sense, post-colonial theory approaches the philosophical text from the perspective of the historical experience of colonialism, but it does so by rupturing the continuity between the philosophical continuum and the historical transcendentalism that grew out of the former. Broadly speaking, post-colonial theory confronts the limit between the two and attempts to historicize that continuity.

Whether post-colonial theory itself entered the critical arena of Anglo-American academy solely by contesting the imperatives of western imperial discourse is open to debate (see Ella Shohat), but it is clear that, in its efforts to deal with the ideologies implicit in traditional western discourses as well as the histories of imperialism, it opened up the vast areas of "limiting" discourses for scrutiny. As a result, it was not only able to identify the historical boundaries or limits of these discourses and the ways in which they implicated

the "other" (the colonized), but was also able to identify a critical strategy that utilized the idea of the limit to reinscribe what Spivak calls the "marginalia" and revise the yet unchallenged, normative relations between text and context, and encoder and receiver (see Spivak, "Explanation and Marginalia").

This marginalia was constructed as a mobile matrix for presenting a revised sense of the limit as the latter pertained to the discursive constructions of race, gender, class, and nation. More than anyone else, it was Gayatri Spivak whose introduction of the term "subaltern" helped to historicize the idea of Western history and its continuum and also to challenge the natural boundaries across which this history was concretized as a history of nation, race, and class. Extending Edward Said's arguments in *Orientalism*, Spivak's attempts to read imperial discourse as a constant negotiation with its own historical inscription of the colonized are significant. Indeed, the term "post" in post-colonial theory is not an indicator of a simple historical belatedness of the colonized in the space of knowledge, but of the elisions effected in the Western historical consciousness that enabled this consciousness to understand its own formation. Thus, the "post" marks the renegotiation of this historical continuum and the insertion of the breaks across which it constituted itself and its own authority. Similarly, for the privileged receivers of this history in the de-colonized nations, for the members who adopted and secured the name of the "nation" in order to seize the

authority of colonialism, this history ceased to be the limit between the power of the colony and that of the new nation. Instead, this history was revealed to be part of the complicitous relations shared between "colony" and "nation," relations whose capillary forces helped stabilize and control the subversive force of the "other"--the national "subaltern." The subaltern was seen to stand in relation to the nation in the same way as the "colony" nation had stood in relation to the colonizing metropolis. The two "histories," therefore, are part of a larger discursive system whose continuities depend on specific investments of power within the locus of knowledge. This is, in my opinion, an example of post-colonial theory's utilization of Foucault's ideas about genealogy, and, indeed, has been acknowledged as such by Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee. Indeed, Spivak reminds us that, as post-colonial consciousness secures a new transnational authority, post-colonial critics must painfully "unlearn" their own privileges and those offered by national histories (see Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic* 31). Such unlearning means not to conflate the finiteness of the history of colonization and decolonization with the transparent discourses of evolutionary and teleological history, or to simplistically categorize the idea of the "nation" as the binary "other" of the colonial, but to refuse to constitute post-colonial subjectivity as an extension of the western, Enlightenment ethos.

Prominent post-colonial critics, such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad, Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha (the latter two are members of the "Subaltern" Studies group) have introduced the problematics of post-coloniality in diverse ways. The very fundamentally critical categories and objects of literary and historical scrutiny--text and context, the critic and the reading public; ideas of human agency and subjectivity; of nationhood and culture, aesthetics and politics--are currently being subjected to their limited and limiting functions. If "truth," as Foucault argues is the site for contesting discourses, post-colonial theory opens this site of truth by situating these discourses within the specific discursive frameworks in which they are objectified. Thus, "text" and "context" cease to be aligned, in their traditional, limited bearings, but are seen to participate in appropriating each others "truths" for installing their authority in their own histories. Questioning the limits of the articulable--within the domain of nationhood and culture, aesthetics and politics--remains an on-going critical task for post-colonial critics, even if it means contextualizing the historical, geopolitical, and cultural space of "post-colonial" theory and interrogating the limits that are imposed on it.

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