

## THE PATRILINEAL DISCOURSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: READING FOUCAULT READING KANT

*Odd confluences made this study. I first read Foucault's enlightenment essay<sup>1</sup> while immersed in feminist critiques of Kant. Shortly thereafter, Thomas McCarthy visited Richmond and mentioned that he had the French original of the essay. When I later requested this, he sent me instead a copy of a Magazine Littéraire interview with Foucault about the essay, said it was the only French version that he was aware of, and suggested contacting James Schmidt at Boston University. I contacted James Schmidt and received in return a copy of his own most recent piece on Foucault and an apology for having once been in possession of the French original and having lost it. He suggested contacting the editor of the Foucault Reader, Paul Rabinow. I contacted Paul Rabinow, who told me that all of Foucault's texts were to be found at the Bibliothèque Saulchoir in Paris, which, unfortunately, does not make copies, and that I would have to go there myself.*

*Tempted to approach the dean for an urgent travel supplement, I decided instead to explore domestic alternatives and call the translator of the essay, Catherine Porter, at SUNY-Cortland. I also settled on an interim project title of "Where is What is Enlightenment?" The operator, whose name was also "SUNY-Cortland," said that there was no Catherine Porter on the faculty. I began to lower the receiver in an act of resigned closure, when she hastened, "No, wait, Catherine ... sure, she got married ... changed her name to Lewis. I'll connect you." A secretary then answered whose name was "International Communications and Culture." She informed me that Catherine Porter Lewis was on sabbatical in Paris and gave me an address. I wrote her in Paris, and she kindly replied that the original French manuscript was locked in her office back in Cortland, and she would not be returning for quite some time. I was somewhat encouraged but nonetheless resigned to a long wait, when, two weeks later, a manila envelope arrived from SUNY-Cortland that contained the French manuscript and a pleasant memo from the departmental secretary announcing the discovery and signed simply "Angie."*

---

<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"; in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

*I am reminded of Robin Lakoff's<sup>2</sup> observation, verifiable in most graduate departments, that men have last but women first names. As it turned out, the successful path was not a hierarchy, but a horizontal network, unnamed and never fully articulated, of subjects with nominal fluidity, with metonyms, with other's or first or no names, sharing information within private spheres. The vertical path of descent from the father, of patronyms publicly known, fully and individually articulated, yielded but dissimulation.*

*Perhaps a different kind of archaeology would illuminate an unnamings discourse of power, of other muted voices, of disempowerment that is itself never fully spoken, and whose actors are never fully articulate(d).*

\* \* \*

The English translation of Foucault's unpublished French manuscript<sup>3</sup> addressing Kant's statement on enlightenment appeared in 1984, 200 years after the publication of Kant's essay. Foucault meant to entitle his essay as Kant did, but instead he gave it the interested and partially correspondent title *What is Enlightenment?*<sup>4</sup> This is only a partial correspondence, because the full title of Kant's essay is *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*<sup>5</sup> Foucault's title suppresses the fact that Kant's essay is not framed as a question, but as a definitive answer. This is present in the perfectiveness of the initial substantive; it is not an *Antwort* but a *Beantwortung*, not a simple response to the question, but the perfective and definitive resolution of the question itself. This is underscored by the interposition of a colon, which acts to objectify and organize the answer, and more forcefully by the fact that the text itself begins with a definition. Foucault's title is an allusion and not an identification, a partial reading that enables Foucault to frame Kant's answer as an incipient instance of problematization and difference. He

---

<sup>2</sup>Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" (unpublished French manuscript). I am deeply and, here, seriously grateful to Catherine Porter Lewis and to Angie for providing me with a copy of the manuscript.

<sup>4</sup>Curiously, the title of the French manuscript is hand-inscripted in English.

<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* in *Kants Werke. Akademie-Textausgabe*, 9 Bände (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 8:33-42. All subsequent passages from Kant are referred to only by volume and page number.

claims that, with Kant's text, "entre discrètement dans l'histoire de la pensée une question à laquelle la philosophie moderne n'a pas été capable de répondre, mais dont elle n'est jamais parvenue à se débarrasser."<sup>6</sup> He sees Kant's text as "la question lancée, voici deux siècles, avec tant d'imprudence: Was ist Aufklärung?"<sup>7</sup>

The use of *discrètement* supplies meanings of nuance and sensitivity to Kant's gesture. This is supposed to be a discrete and sophisticated disabling of philosophical discourse. The use of the term *se débarrasser*, which conventionally means *to get rid of*, is root related with *embarrassant*, which carries meanings similar to the German *peinlich*, and evokes the notion of imprudence. Thus Kant is supposed to have made philosophical discourse uncomfortable with a *peinliche Frage*. This is the fresh (male) kid, who individually and imprudently asks an embarrassing question.

Foucault then represents German and Jewish traditions as hierarchically interconnected in a grand metanarrative. The reader is told that, because Moses Mendelssohn and Kant both addressed the enlightenment question two months apart in the journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, "L'Aufklärung allemande et l'Haskala juive reconnaissent qu'ils appartiennent à la même histoire," even though the texts are reciprocally unaware of each other's existence. Nonetheless, their appearance in the same journal is, for Foucault, "une manière d'annoncer l'acceptation d'un destin commun, dont on sait à quel drame il devait mener."<sup>8</sup> This specious and interested narrative is also a forced dovetailing of the German and Jewish traditions according to events that were to occur one and a half centuries later. This oblique allusion to the holocaust is a euphemizing thereof, for the holocaust is signed both as drama and as an *histoire*,--a story or fiction. Foucault's procedure works to evoke images that serve to empower the representation of Kant and help situate the essay as an ominous occurrence at the incipience of a great historical drama. Not only is the text a beacon for a movement; it is also the beginning of modernity.

The phrase "annoncer l'acceptation d'un destin commun" also brings up fatalistic images of Germanic tragic heroism, of the

---

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

*Schicksalsheld* who stoically accepts his own fate, a fate that is often an embodiment and indication of a macrocosmic cultural change. This theme resonates as a contrabass for the fiction of the philosopher at the crossroads of history, and it resonates deeply, as the *Leitmotiv* of distant thunder. In addition, the notion of agency is strengthened by the use of the term *annoncer*, which acts to transform a simple juxtaposition of discrete texts into a conscious act of choral proclamation.

Kant's text itself is explicitly hierarchical, in that it liberates the German bourgeois philosopher to unfettered public debate while confining the functionary to a state of mechanical servitude. Hierarchical ranking is also evident in Foucault's juxtaposition of the German and Jewish intellectual traditions, to which his discourse does not grant parity: the German tradition is lexically privileged. The text pairs the "mouvement philosophique allemand" with "la culture juive," "la pensée allemande" with "la culture juive," and "la philosophie allemande" with "la pensée juive."<sup>9</sup> In these doublets, the German tradition receives the intellectually more privileged term, since philosophy outranks thought, thought is nobler than culture.

Foucault then proceeds to distinguish previous attempts by philosophy to reflect on its own present according to three categories. The present either belongs to a distinct era of the world (as in Plato), heralds a forthcoming event (as in Augustine), or is seen as the point of transition to a new world (as in Vico).<sup>10</sup> Kant's reflection on the present is summed up in a statement, which can be viewed as a microcosm of Foucault's misreading: "Or la manière dont Kant pose la question est tout à fait différente ... presqu'entièrement négative."<sup>11</sup> Here Foucault transforms Kantian closure into a synchronic and Saussurian indeterminacy: "la question concerne la pure actualité ... il cherche une différence."<sup>12</sup> The interjection of the term *différence*, the observation that Kant's definition is framed negatively as an *Ausgang*, and the projection of synchrony into the text all combine to situate the essay at the nascence of (post)modernity.

Close reading of the text, however, reveals that Kant's reflection

---

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

on the present easily falls into each of the three categories that Foucault attempts to set in contradistinction to Kant: the epochal, heraldic, and transitional. This is evident in the following passage from Kant:

Leben wir jetzt in einem aufgeklärten Zeitalter? ...Nein, aber wohl in einem Zeitalter der Aufklärung ...davon haben wir deutliche Anzeigen ...das Zeitalter der Aufklärung oder das Jahrhundert Friedrichs.

(8:40)

Here the present is clearly a separate (monarchical) epoch, an age of enlightenment that is in transitional progression toward an enlightened age, and for which there are clear *Anzeigen*, indicators of future development. In addition, Kant states "daß das Feld geöffnet wird" for humans to develop in the direction of enlightenment. This description is at once epochal, portentous, and transitional and resists Foucault's synchronic and differential reading.

Foucault rightly observes that the "Aufklärung est un processus qui nous dégage de l'état de 'minorité.'"<sup>13</sup> This is a reference to the initial definition "Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit" (8:35). Here Foucault moves toward a linguistic appreciation of Kant's concept of enlightenment but does not go beyond the superficial aspects. He observes the crucial opposition between *Aufklärung* and *Unmündigkeit* and translates the latter as *minorité*. This glosses over the overdetermination of the term *Unmündigkeit*, which is a substantivization of the adjective *unmündig*. It conveys more the condition of being a minor (non-adulthood) rather than the quality of immaturity itself, which is more securely located in the semantic field of *unreif* or *unerwachsen*. In its radical form the term plays upon the resonances of *Mund* and represents minors as those who are in a condition of not being able to speak for themselves. In the enlightenment essay, Kant directly represents the state of unenlightenment exclusively by lexical choices that are derivatives of the root *Mund*, which appears in various forms twenty times in the text, not only in the terms *unmündig/Unmündigkeit*, but also in the representation of the caretakers of the unenlightened as *Vormünder*, those who speak for and before the unenlightened. The *Vormünder* are those upon whom one is (orally) dependent for the articulation of thought.

The most striking aspect of Kant's description of unenlightenment via oral metaphors is that it frames the discussion of the public sphere.

---

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

During this discussion, which privileges the unbound male scholar, references to the oral are entirely absent. They cease as the discussion begins and reappear as the discussion ends. Indeed, Kant characterizes the public use of reason as performed by a "Gelehrter ...vor dem ganzen Publikum der Leserwelt" (8:37). The latter represents the public sphere as the sphere of the reading public. This is not the public but the published use of reason in a sphere that is determined by considerations of gender.

Jane Flax's<sup>14</sup> recent reading of "What is Enlightenment?", highlights the "gendered geography"<sup>15</sup> and "gendered dichotomies"<sup>16</sup> in Kant's construction of the public and private spheres. Flax holds that the private sphere is associated with the woman's world, with domesticity and child-rearing:

The power of domestication (woman) is so great that its overcoming requires the counterforce of an entirely different sphere: the public world ...in this account autonomy is understood as the opposite of connection: walking alone, not holding someone's hand. Good guardians enable us to grow up and leave home/childhood, but to do so they must have access to the public world.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Flax sees the public sphere as the domain of escape from the maternal-familial complex. Flax's reading is supported by the semantic field of the term *privat*, which also contains meanings of domesticity, intimacy, and sexuality. These connotations are supported by Kant's application of the term *häuslich* to this sphere. Thus the private sphere has personal, emotional, and sexual connotations - attributes that are excluded from the sphere of reason and enlightenment. The enlightened male subject is thus located in a position that is independent of and superordinate to the domestic/maternal/feminine. It is a position that effects a monosexual dialogue, a forum of unbinding and coincidental communication among autonomous male subjects. In this state, one "genießt einer uneingeschränkten Freiheit, sich seiner eigenen Vernunft zu

---

<sup>14</sup>Jane Flax, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

bedienen und in seiner eigenen Person zu sprechen" (8:37).

The private sphere, on the other hand, is represented as "sehr enge eingeschränkt" (8:37) as a *Mechanism* and a *Maschine*, and as consisting of *passive Glieder*--a term that can denote members, bodily parts, family members, and sexual organs; these are meanings that resonate throughout this text.

If Kant's essay has, indeed, problematized philosophical discourse, it has done so by foregrounding the paradoxical dyad of the public and private uses of reason. Similarly, Foucault wonders "comment l'audace de savoir peut s'exercer en plein jour, tandis que les individus obéiront aussi exactement que possible?"<sup>18</sup> This paradox serves to suspend discourse, leaving the question unresolved and maintaining the isolation of the published sphere of scholars. In the dyad of scholar/functionary, it is the scholar who occupies the privileged position of social and political critique. The scholar functions *en plein jour*, in a space of openness, light, and freedom that contrasts with the confined and dark spaces of the private sphere. Oddly, Foucault leaves unread the class conscious power moves in this dyad, especially when he reads *räsonieren* as "un usage de la raison dans laquelle celle-ci n'a pas d'autre fin qu'elle-même; 'räsonieren', c'est raisonner pour raisonner."<sup>19</sup> This avoidance strengthens his synchronic and differential reading of the text but ignores the exclusionary, masculinist, and elitist elements, which culminate in the final laudation of Frederick the Great, who, by virtue of his absolute and military authority, can declare "was ein Freistaat nicht wagen darf: räsoniert, so viel ihr wollt und worüber ihr wollt, nur gehorcht!" (8:41).

Foucault then attempts to offer a closer reading of Kant's term *Menschheit*, which he uses in its German form and translates as *humanité*.<sup>20</sup> He then asks whether this is *humanité* in the sense of *humankind* or *humanness*. The ambiguity is present in French as well as in English, since both *humanity* and *humanité* are double-entendres; but not in German, which clearly supplies the term *Menschlichkeit* to access the semantic field of *humanness*. The question that Foucault failed to ask is to what extent the term *Menschheit* opposes mankind to humankind to the exclusion of womankind. One could also inquire as to the inclusivity

---

<sup>18</sup>Foucault, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

of Foucault's use of the collective masculine noun "les hommes."

Foucault's celebration of the heroic in Kant's text is most visibly present in his misreading of Kant's motto *sapere aude*, (8:35) which means "dare to know," and which serves in Kant's text to embolden the process of individuation. In invoking this motto, however, Foucault actually reverses Kant's syntax to read *aude sapere*. This blind switching thus foregrounds and valorizes audacity over knowledge, while the Kantian text foregrounds the latter. In addition, Foucault translates the term as "aie le courage, l'audace de savoir."<sup>21</sup> In doing so, he offers two glosses for *aude*, thus doubling its textual thrust.

Using Baudelaire as a pivotal example, Foucault characterizes "l'attitude de modernité" as "la discontinuité du temps: rupture de la tradition, sentiment de la nouveauté."<sup>22</sup> In general, Foucault's conception of modernity displays traces of resistance to relativity and phenomenology: "La modernité n'est pas un fait de sensibilité au présent fugitif; c'est une volonté d'"héroiser" le présent." It is characterized as "l'attitude qui permet de saisir ce qu'il y a d'"héroïque" dans le moment présent."<sup>23</sup> A characterization of modernity of the hero who seizes the permanent in the fleeting present is replete with fictions of a masculine transcendence and resistance of the transitory present. It actualizes

un mode de rapport [au présent] qu'il faut établir à soi-même ... un ascétisme indispensable. Etre moderne: ce n'est pas s'accepter soi-même tel qu'on est dans le flux des moments qui passent ... l'homme moderne ... est celui qui cherche à s'inventer lui-même.<sup>24</sup>

This quest to find the eternal (self) in the present consists in "ressaisir quelque chose d'éternel qui n'est pas au delà de l'instant présent, ni derrière lui, mais en lui."<sup>25</sup>

Foucault's definition is problematized further by his characterization of the modern idiom of inquiry as "un type d'interrogation

---

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.



philosophique qui problématise ... la constitution de soi-même comme sujet autonome."<sup>26</sup> He states this in a context that valorizes audacity, autonomy, isolation and protection of the published scholarly sphere, and social stratification. He thus celebrates the text as the incipient moment and monument of a "heroic" modernity that is transmitted diachronically from Kant to Baudelaire and ultimately to Foucault himself. Operating in the same manner that he attributes to his enlightened forefather, Foucault situates himself *discrètement* at the receiving end of this patrilineal tradition by saying that "cette critique n'est pas transcendante, et n'a pas pour fin de rendre possible une métaphysique: elle est ... archéologique."<sup>27</sup> Foucault did not, however, proceed archaeologically in his own reading of Kant. I would like to demonstrate here a possible archaeological inquiry that reconstructs a discourse of power based on masculinist textual traces.

When Kant, in the essay on (un)enlightenment, says that women are unenlightened, he refers to them as "das ganze schöne Geschlecht" (8:35), using a phrase to be located between the initial characterization of unenlightenment as a state of "Faulheit" and "Feigheit" (8:35) and of the description of the unenlightened as "Hausvieh" who are confined in a "Gängelwagen" (8:35). The term "das ganze schöne Geschlecht" (8:35) is exactly the same phrase that begins the third section of the *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (2:205-256) (1764), in which Kant bifurcates beauty and sublimeness along the lines of femininity and masculinity respectively. The feminine is beautiful, but the masculine is sublime. The inroads of this gendered discourse also lead to the section of the *Anthropology* entitled "Der Charakter des Geschlechts" (7:303-311), often cited in feminist critiques of Kant, but yet to be read for its examples of mechanisms of displacement and denial within its patriarchal project.

This text configures woman as the dominator who is to be distrusted. At home she holds a "Regiment" (7:304) and wages domestic war with her tongue ("den Hauskrieg mit der Zunge") (7:304). The positing of woman as the aggressor thus vindicates male domination. He has "das Recht des Stärkeren" (7:304) and the right to use his strength, because woman can render him *entwaffnet* and *wehrlos*. Thus, in preemptive defense, he assumes the dominating position. Otherwise, she will act out her agenda, which is the conquest of the entire male species ("die Eroberung des ganzen Geschlechts") (7:305).

---

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

It is precisely in this representation of woman, however, that the voices of democracy and misogyny collide. Oppressive urges become themselves repressed by the censorship of a democratic morality and transformed into euphemized justifications of hierarchical order:

Wer soll dann den oberen Befehl im Hause haben? ...Die Frau soll herrschen und der Mann regieren; denn die Neigung herrscht, und der Verstand regiert. (7:304)

This is a clear attempt to invoke egalitarian discourse in order to repackage the hierarchical relationship in a form that simultaneously validates but does not embarrass male dominance. Here a primitive master/slave dyad is reprocessed for bourgeois consumption. The transformation consists in displacing the problem into political discourse and then denying dominance and servitude by affirming their opposite - egalitarianism. The inversion allows the primitive dynamic to slip in undercover, detected subliminally but not superficially.

A similar occasion of communication via displacement and denial is found in a gratuitous anecdote that is ostensibly intended to illustrate the function of jealousy. The anecdote appears as a footnote and requires closer scrutiny:

Die alte Sage von den Russen: daß die ihre Ehemänner im Verdacht hielten, es mit anderen Weibern zu halten, wenn sie nicht dann und wann von diesen Schläge bekommen, wird gewöhnlich für Fabel gehalten, Allein in Cooks Reisen findet man: daß, als ein englischer Matrose einen Indier auf Otaheite [Tahiti] sein Weib mit Schlägen züchtigen sah, jener den Gallanten machen wollte und mit Drohungen auf diesen losging. Das Weib kehrte sich auf der Stelle wider den Engländer, fragte, was ihm das angehe: der Mann müsse das thun! (7:304)

The dynamics of this passage as well as the semiotics of its marginalized situation as a footnote effect an intricate solution to the problem of communicating spouse abuse affirmatively to the male German reader. This is not only distanced from the center of discourse, but it is also transformed into a joke.

In *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*,<sup>28</sup> Freud demonstrated that the technique of jokes is triadic in nature. It involves

---

<sup>28</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*, in *Studienausgabe*, 10 Bände (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1982), 6:9-219.

a narrator, an audience, and a third person object at the expense of whom the joke is told. Communication between narrator and audience presupposes an implicit shared hostile attitude toward the outsider that is subject to mechanisms of guilt, censorship, and repression. The pleasure of the joke is gained through the lifting of censorship by the techniques of displacement and condensation.

The joke at hand is configured in a dialogue between the narrator and a projected male German audience whose shared hostility toward the feminine is checked by socio-political codes of gentlemanliness and egalitarianism. The repression involved evokes primitive reactive mechanisms of tension reduction by physical force. These urges must be expressed, however, in a way that is sufficiently transformed so as to escape censorship. It is the swift and unnoticed escape that catalyzes the pleasurable reaction.

The dissimulating transformations here involve interpolations of displacement and denial. The point of departure of the displacement from Germans to Russians is itself a denial: we do not do this; the Russians do. The displacement is then followed by another denial: the Russians do not really do this either; it is merely a myth. Russia thus offers a convenient metonym for the displacement. The next displacement, in which the affirmation is to emerge, is to India, further along horizontally and, on a Eurocentric scale of civilization, vertically further down on the metonymic chain of substitutions.

The ultimate outsider here is the repressive ethical code that checks masculinist violence. The feminine is represented as the appropriated other, as property common to the male narrator and audience. The juxtaposition of two cultures constitutes the possibility of disjuncture and of comic reversal of expectation. The English gentleman, precoded for a Western sense of propriety, becomes the fool who is fooled by the appearance of impropriety. The comic moment expels the ethical censor, diffuses censorship, and validates male hostility by introducing the desired figure of the masochistic woman.

In his misreading of Kant, Foucault ultimately becomes himself an object of scrutiny if we apply to him his own system of unmasking ideologies. He writes a fiction of a diachronic intellectual in heritage of "great" ideas and suppresses recognition that these ideas (e.g. autonomy, disconnectedness, transcendence of history and a superordinate view thereof) had already been subject to the critique of some feminist

theorists.<sup>29</sup> In Foucault, one cognitive paradigm actually involves the passing on of "heroic" ideas from fathers to sons - a subliminal fiction that history is made by great autonomous men.

This is Foucault's Fourth Critique, that ostensibly "doit se détourner de tous ces projets qui prétendent être globaux et radicaux,"<sup>30</sup> but which clearly itself succumbs to totalizing diachronic structures. This critique, we are told, should ask, "comment nous sommes-nous constitués comme sujets de notre savoir; comment nous sommes-nous constitués comme sujets qui exercent ou subissent des relations de pouvoir,"<sup>31</sup> yet his own cognitive repression produces a power-oriented misreading that leaves Kant's masculinist discourses of power and binary oppositions unread and belies Foucault's own project of "un travail d'enquêtes diverses,"<sup>32</sup> which now appears instead to be "une quête héroïque."

The University of Richmond

THOMAS PAUL BONFIGLIO

---

<sup>29</sup>cf. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>30</sup>Foucault, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

## MICHEL FOUCAULT: THE LAST GREAT FRENCH HUMANIST

One hardly risks contradiction if one asserts that, of the French poststructuralists, it is Foucault who in recent years has been by far the dominant presence in the United States--at least since the de Man and Heidegger scandals substantially diminished the standing of Derrida some half a dozen years ago. Not only has deconstruction been displaced in large measure by New Historicism, but it is Foucault who has been the most significant French influence in *cultural studies* and *multiculturalism*, since the latter replaced *postmodernity* as the most significant and charged objects of debate in academic circles sometime in the mid to late 80s.

I should like to suggest here that the principal reason for this preponderance of Foucault's influence in the United States is that his work--more easily than that of the other French writers of his generation--enables one to continue working within a metaphysic of the subject and to prolong an intellectual project by no means inimical to liberal bourgeois humanism all the while appearing to call the latter fundamentally into question. (In this regard, the work of Foucault and the New Historicists performs a function in the United States similar to that fulfilled by Yale deconstruction in the 70s and 80s).

Given Foucault's own vituperations against the philosophy of the subject and against humanism, and the anathematization of Foucault by the apologists of the latter--from Sartre in the sixties to Ferry and Renaut in the eighties--my reading of Foucault may cause some initial surprise. This reading--Foucault as the last great French humanist (one more area in which Foucault has displaced Sartre, the former object of this once honourable and now egregious label)--this reading is, however, by no means entirely without precedent: in what is still probably the best-known study of Foucault in the English-speaking world, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow develop a related criticism with regard to the notion of "archaeology" as developed in *The Order of Things* and, above all, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. These authors then proceed to exempt Foucault's subsequent works from their strictures. Now, there is very little of anything in Dreyfus' and Rabinow's book I am able to agree with; and as I suggest below, their criticisms are unfounded; I shall argue, however, that the later works are, in their own way, as "subjectivist" and humanist, in the Heideggerian and Derridean senses of these terms, as the earlier ones are for reasons altogether different from those advanced by Dreyfus and Rabinow.

At the outset, I must recall at some length Foucault's own powerful account of the age of "man"--elaborated in the chapter of *The Order of Things* entitled "Man and his Doubles"--because it is in this account that we can begin to detect the limits of Foucault's attack on humanism. Foucault situates the onset of this age very precisely at the close of the eighteenth century, distinguishing it carefully from the humanism of the Renaissance or the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which, "while they may well have granted a privileged status to human beings in the order of things, were nonetheless unable to conceive of man."<sup>1</sup> For Foucault, the emergence of "man" is marked by a radical shift in the reasons deemed to be at the basis of the finite, limited, character of human knowledge. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the positive determination of thought within finite forms--life, the body, language--entails a simple inadequacy of the latter to *represent* the infinite. For this period, it is this negative relationship to the infinite which is anterior to and founds empirical existence itself, and not just the limited knowledge one may develop of the latter. For the nineteenth century ("modern thought," as Foucault puts it), on the other hand, it is history, work, language and so on which determine not just the limits of knowledge but its form and content; just as these limits of knowledge, in their turn, in a tormented circularity, make possible finite knowledge of life, work and language. "Man" emerges in the interstices of the following paradox: humanity is that which makes history, language and work possible; humanity is also, conversely, that which is made possible by the latter. For example, "man" is both more and less than the language which we speak: we alone would appear to have produced it, and yet it always precedes us, always prescribes and lays out our possibilities. Needless to say, not only does "man" emerge in this paradoxical space but so do what the French call the "*sciences humaines*." The latter are defined by a constant attempt to overcome their own paradoxical emergence by rendering explicit, representing and exhausting the "unthought" conditions of their own existence by means of what Foucault calls an "analytic of finitude"--an account which will finally assimilate the radically Other of these conditions of existence into the Same: "... the whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought--of reflecting the contents of the *In-itself* in the form of the *For-itself*, of

---

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p.318, translation modified.

ending man's alienation by reconciling him with his own essence."<sup>2</sup> Like other poststructuralists, Foucault holds Marx and Hegel to be the foremost exemplars of this drive. Thus, in the Hegelian phenomenology, "... the totality of the empirical domain was taken back into the interior of a consciousness revealing itself to itself as spirit, in other words, as an empirical and a transcendental field simultaneously."<sup>3</sup> Hitherto "unthought" conditions of possibility of knowledge are retrieved from outer darkness, brought into the light and represented in thought. That signification in language, for example, is always a function of the system in which it is imbricated is a permanent challenge to human attempts to represent the very systematicity of the system itself, a challenge to which the *sciences humaines* constantly try to rise. The circularity of this process (the representation is now itself a part of what was originally being explained) makes it easy to see why this drive entails the human sciences in an endless process of "demystifying themselves,"<sup>4</sup> an interminable pursuit of "the truth of all truth."<sup>5</sup> Inevitably, this pursuit opens up a bottomless pit of relativism: for example, in historicism (a mirror-image, for Foucault, of the analytic of finitude) "... the positive knowledge of man is limited by the historical positivity of the subject who knows, with the result that the moment of finitude is dissolved in the play of a relativity from which one cannot escape and which itself constitutes an absolute."<sup>6</sup> With this observation, we already have some indication of the pointlessness of Dreyfus' and Rabinow's demand that Foucault's "archaeological discourse itself . . . be accounted for and relativized."<sup>7</sup> Such a demand remains strictly within the *épistémè* of the human sciences. As do such

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.327.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.364.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.341.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372. Translation modified.

<sup>7</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.99.

related complaints that archaeology is an "ahistorical discipline."<sup>8</sup>

In the final chapter of *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that "man" and his "doubles" began to be left behind when psychoanalysis--and then ethnology and finally linguistics--exceeded the bounds of representation--the mainstay of the older analytic of finitude--and made any anthropology or general theory of humankind otiose:

Whereas all the human sciences advance towards the unconscious only with their back to it, waiting for it to unveil itself as fast as consciousness is analyzed, as it were backwards, psychoanalysis, on the other hand, points directly towards it with a deliberate purpose--not towards that which must be rendered gradually more explicit by the progressive illumination of the implicit, but towards what is there and yet is hidden . . . . psychoanalysis moves towards the moment--by definition inaccessible to any theoretical knowledge of man . . . at which the contents of consciousness articulate themselves, or rather stand gaping, upon man's finitude . . . unlike the human sciences, which, even while turning towards the unconscious, always remain within the representable, psychoanalysis advances and leaps over representation, overflows it on the side of finitude. . .<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the Freudian "mythology" of Death, Desire and the Law "designate(s) the conditions of possibility of any knowledge about man."<sup>10</sup> Conditions of possibility which, for psychoanalysis, cannot, in contradistinction to the human sciences, be represented. Similarly, ethnology "like psychoanalysis questions not man himself, as he may appear in the human sciences, but the region which makes possible in general a knowledge of man."<sup>11</sup>

Now, none of this is very felicitously expressed and these concluding pages to *The Order of Things* constitute little more than an adumbration of the precise nature of the shift to post-humanism that is alleged to have taken place. The shift is essentially announced rather than comprehensively and cogently demonstrated. Which is one reason why sympathetic commentators such as Dreyfus and Rabinow could get so much wrong and declare that Foucault's position does not significantly

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97. I shall limit the delineation of my differences with these authors to these observations. I do not have the space, or the inclination, to engage at length with what I take to be a mostly misguided account of Foucault's work.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.374.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.375.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.378.



differ from what preceded it; and why the most irritating misreading to which these pages gave rise--that "the end of man" meant not merely a decentering of humankind but its outright abolition (often also read as an abolition of the subject)--could enjoy any currency or credibility at all.

Foucault might have made his position clearer had he more explicitly pointed to the fact that what was new about his conception of linguistics, for example, was that it no longer considered its field to be composed exclusively of traces of human activity (without remainder). Comparison with the two volumes of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* can be helpful here in clarifying the novelty of what Foucault is trying to convey: Sartre's book is a work which, with its powerfully conveyed sense of history as an enormous crushing process which conditions in minute detail the existential possibilities and very identities of people, is as anti-individualistic as anything Foucault ever wrote; nonetheless, in its account of the unmastered dimension of that history as no more than a *practico-inert* (the accumulated traces of human activity petrified in matter as an "anti-dialectic" which alienates human freedom), the *Critique* remains squarely within the tradition of what Heidegger called a "voluntarist" humanism. Similarly, as an attempt to redeem the ostensibly impersonal process of History as, in the final analysis, human *praxis* which can therefore be understood and mastered by human beings, Sartre's *Critique* falls under Foucault's definition of the human sciences as an attempt to bring within the purview of consciousness all the conditions of possibility of the latter; and as such, of course, a project of this kind remains within a philosophy of subject and object. It will be recalled, from a passage quoted earlier, that this was precisely Foucault's objection to historicism, or the investigation of the historicity or "relativity" of the human sciences (an undertaking with which his own work is so often erroneously confused):

Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences. *But it establishes it solely at the level of the positivities*: the positive knowledge of man is limited by the historical positivity of the knowing subject, so that the moment of finitude is dissolved in the play of a relativity from which it cannot escape, and which itself has value as an absolute. To be finite, then, would simply be to be trapped in the laws of a perspective which, while allowing a certain apprehension--of the type of perception or understanding--prevents it from ever being universal and definitive intellection. All knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language that have a history. .

..<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.372-373. Emphasis added.

The crucial qualification here is, "But it establishes it at the sole level of the positivities . . . , "i.e. at the sole level of the subject ("man") and object (also "man") referred to in the rest of the sentence. How crucial this clause is will become apparent shortly.

In the meantime, what Foucault has in mind as an alternative locus for this "critical relation between History and the human sciences" becomes clearer in the subsequent *Archaeology of Knowledge* in which the notion of *archaeology* is itself finally defined as "The never completed, never wholly achieved uncovering of the archive [which] forms the general horizon to which the description of discursive formations, the analysis of positivities, the mapping of the enunciative field belong."<sup>13</sup> This sounds anodine enough, especially if one makes the mistake of believing that what Foucault is referring to by the archive or discursive formations is of the domain of *language*. Misreadings in this area have been understandable given Foucault's own somewhat intermittently clear vision of the strange new realm he had stumbled into. Thus, readers are easily misled by definitions of the archive like "It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements."<sup>14</sup> Here, on the other hand, is a passage which is rather more helpful:

. . . from the kind of analysis that I have undertaken, *words* are as deliberately absent as *things* themselves; any description of a vocabulary is as lacking as any reference to the living plenitude of experience. We shall not return to the state anterior to discourse--in which nothing has yet been said, and in which things are only just beginning to emerge out of the grey light; and we shall not pass beyond discourse in order to rediscover the forms that it has created and left behind it; we shall remain, or try to remain, at the level of discourse itself . . . I would like to show that "discourses," in the form in which they can be heard or read, as they can be read in their form as texts, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. . . . A task that consists of not--of no longer--treating discourses as groups of signs

---

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p.131.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

(signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this "more" that we must reveal and describe.<sup>15</sup>

It is in this kind of passage--more frequently found in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* than elsewhere in his works--that Foucault expresses the position fundamental to poststructuralism as a whole, the ultimate consequences of which he himself--I shall argue here shortly--never fully grasped or committed himself to: namely, that while it is doubtless possible to distinguish between "words" and "things," together they form a seamless web or "general text" (Derrida) in which--yes--that which is no longer quite of the order of "words" forms "objects" like madness and homosexuality (Foucault), but in which "things" and "objects" are no less apt to constitute a language, "code" or "articulated order" all on their own (Baudrillard). Poststructuralism's transformation of how, henceforth, we must think of these notions--discourse, objects etc.--is, even today, still not fully grasped; which is why, more than twenty years after these works first appeared, one still finds denunciations of poststructuralism as an idealism of the text (or discourse), as an epistemological nihilism and so on. In the poststructuralist corpus, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is unusually explicit and helpful on this subject. For example, among the multifarious elements which make the emergence of the objects of the discourse of psychopathology possible in the nineteenth century, Foucault distinguishes the following: the family, the work environment, the religious community (which all define madness by exclusion); the medical profession, the judiciary and the religious authorities; the relationships between these bodies and the different norms they have adopted; the relationship between therapeutic confinement within hospitals and confinement within the prison system. And so on and so forth (the enumeration and description of these elements and their relations runs to several pages).<sup>16</sup> Foucault concludes, notoriously, that the object in question (madness, for example) does not already exist before it is "discovered" by the discourse of psychopathology (hence the accusation of idealism); rather, it comes into existence "... under the positive conditions of a complex bundle of relations. . . . These relations are established between institutions,

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40ff.

economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization."<sup>17</sup> Foucault then adds the following crucial qualification: "... these relations are not present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is being analyzed; they do not indicate . . . the immanent rationality, that ideal nervure that reappears totally or in part when one conceives of the object in the truth of its concept. They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects . . . in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority."<sup>18</sup> A page earlier, Foucault asserts that it is these relations, "at work in psychiatric discourse, which have enabled the formation of the entire panoply of this discourse's objects."<sup>19</sup> These relations, while they may well be "at work" (*à l'oeuvre*) in discourse, are nevertheless not internal to discourse: they do not link concepts and words, nor do they establish "a rhetorical or deductive architecture" between sentences and propositions.<sup>20</sup> Nor, however, are they "outside" of discourse; for this would presuppose that objects and discourse are formed independently of each other, or that they occupy different realms of existence. Rather, these relationships determine the network of relations which discourse must establish if it is to be able to discuss, analyse and classify certain objects. These relations, therefore, are neither a function of *language* nor a function of *context*, but a function of discourse itself as *practice*.<sup>21</sup>

Very well.

The question which needs to be addressed here, however, is whether all of this truly constitutes a decisive break with humanism. Foucault, his disciples, and his many critics, clearly all believe so; and, indeed, on first reflection the belief seems to be justified; especially given the following passage which can, I maintain, be applied to all that has been outlined above, even though, strictly speaking, it describes the conditions for the "rules for the formation of concepts":

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44, translation modified.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46, translation modified.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

. . . the rules governing the formation of concepts, however generalized the concepts may be, are not the result, laid down in history and deposited in the depth of collective customs, of operations carried out by individuals. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Like so much of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, this is clearly directed at Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Sartrean notion, discussed earlier, of a "practico-inert": that which constrains or "alienates" individual freedom ("situation" or context, cultural structures etc.) is no more than the accumulated and congealed deposit of previous human activity which has acquired a momentum, or inertia, all of its own.<sup>23</sup>

Foucault continues the passage quoted immediately above in the same vein, making explicit the degree to which these remarks on the subject of the formation of concepts are, as I have suggested, part of a broader articulation including the formation of objects and so on:

. . . they [the rules governing the formation of concepts] do not constitute the bare schema of an entire labour conducted in obscurity, in the course of which concepts would be made to emerge through illusions, prejudices, errors, and traditions. The preconceptual field allows the emergence of the discursive regularities and constraints that have made possible the heterogeneous multiplicity of concepts, and, beyond these the profusion of the themes, beliefs, and representations with which one usually deals when one is writing the history of ideas.

In order to analyze the rules for the formation of objects, one must neither, as we have seen, embody them in things, nor relate them to the domain of words; in order to analyze the formation of enunciative types, one must relate them neither to the knowing subject, nor to a psychological individuality. Similarly, to analyze the formation of concepts, one must relate them neither to the horizon of *ideality*, nor to the empirical progress of *ideas*.<sup>24</sup>

All of this certainly tempts one to conclude that Foucault's position is beyond humanism. This conclusion appears irresistible after the following passage in which Foucault declares that the subject of a statement is never the same as the author of any particular contingent verbal formulation, but

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>23</sup> The Introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in particular, is full of implicit references to Sartre, especially pp.19-20 of the French edition (Gallimard, 1969) (the English translation, strangely, omits a footnote which contains a very direct allusion to Sartre's attack on Foucault which appeared in *l'Arc*: "Jean-Paul Sartre répond," Interview with B. Pingaud, *l'Arc*, 30 [1966], 87-96).

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.63 (translation modified).

rather a vacant space which makes the latter a possibility for, in principle, any number of authors:

So the subject of the statement [*le sujet de l'énoncé*] should not be regarded as identical with the author of the formulation--either in substance, or in function. It is not in fact the cause, origin, or starting-point of the phenomenon of the written or spoken articulation of a sentence; nor is it that meaningful intention which, silently keeping ahead of words, orders them like the visible body of its intuition; it is not the constant, motionless, identical-to-itself home of a series of operations that are manifested, in turn, through the statements. It is a determinate, empty place that may in fact be filled by different individuals.<sup>25</sup>

At the very least, this unequivocally goes beyond individualism. (In passing, one should perhaps emphasize the extent to which this kind of passage invalidates any reading of Foucault which suggests that it was ever his intention to deny the existence of subjectivity [in the colloquial sense of the term] or to dissolve it in discourse. The intention was always--as this passage abundantly demonstrates--to show what makes forms of subjectivity possible). But, of course, in this regard alone --i.e. going beyond individualism--there is nothing novel to anything Foucault is doing here, insofar as both the Hegelian dialectic and Marxism had already made this move. Whether any of the above goes beyond *humanism*--not at all the same thing as individualism--whether, in other words, it advances significantly beyond the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics is altogether another question.

In order to answer this question, we must make a detour through Heidegger and Derrida's dismantling of the Hegelian subject. (Heidegger is the principal source of inspiration for the assault launched against humanism and the philosophy of the subject in France in the sixties. As we shall see, Foucault, unlike Derrida, either never fully understood Heidegger's position, or else chose not to accept its ultimate implications). Readers of Hegel's *Science of Logic* will recall that identity and difference emerge as the outcome of a meditation upon pure being: the realization

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95. I have substantially modified Sheridan Smith's translation. He has betrayed Foucault's intention with the conspicuously unfortunate translation of the third sentence in the French original (the second sentence in the English translation). Thus, Sheridan Smith translates "*Il n'est pas en effet cause, origine . . .*" by "*He is not in fact . . .*"; whereas the third person singular pronoun *Il* refers back to *le sujet de l'énoncé* (the subject of the statement) which Foucault is expressly characterizing as not human. The correct translation should therefore be "It." Sheridan Smith's unwitting slip is a helpful reminder of the tenacity of the humanist delusion: Sheridan Smith simply cannot conceive that the subject of a statement can be anything but human.

that pure undifferentiated being ("the indeterminate immediate") is the equivalent of pure nothingness, and that, translated into Aristotelian logic, this equivalence reveals itself as the tautologous "verbiage" of  $A=A$  in which "nothing" is said, this realization is the first moment of "becoming" (being turns into nothing) and it is what enables the first pair of identities and the first difference to appear: namely the difference between being and nothingness.<sup>26</sup> Now, this manner of proceeding is precisely what Heidegger had denounced as early as his great *Nietzsche* study as the *nec plus ultra* of a tendency which began with Descartes: the process whereby "... man becomes the measure and the center of beings."<sup>27</sup> For, clearly, in the Hegelian system what we have is a mind--Absolute Spirit, in the final analysis--engaged in meditations upon its own thought processes. And while Absolute Spirit may have been more than "man" to Hegel, that it is an hypostasis of merely human cogitation is perfectly plain to us. Heidegger described the Hegelian system as the acme of subjectivism and onto-theology, because in it the ground of all beings, Absolute Spirit, is construed as an unconditioned subjectivity. In Heideggerian terms, Being is turned into a being--just another being--but one which is magically free of the welter of determinations, negations and difference which condition all other entities. In contrast to the Hegelian system, Heideggerian Being (which for reasons of space I cannot discuss here) and Derridean *différance* do not locate the determination of the identity of entities in subject-centred differentiation or negation; in the case of *différance*, identity is endlessly deferred throughout the "whole." What this means--in terms of the now impossible language of ontology--is that the meaning or identity of anything is intricately with everything else in the universe (I shall explain this assertion below). Those who are surprised by the simultaneous mention of Derrida's name and "ontological" considerations of this kind--in other words, those who still, at this late date, subscribe to the view that this work constitutes an idealism of the text (in the colloquial sense of the latter term)--such readers are referred to the distinction, made as early as the *Grammatology*, between *text* in the colloquial sense and the "general text" or "play of the world."

The point is worth emphasizing because this erroneous linguistic turn given to the Derridean *text* has also been attributed (by enemies and

---

<sup>26</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989), pp.82-83 and p.411ff, especially p.415.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell *et al.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), IV, 28.

enthusiasts alike) to Foucault's notion of *discourse* which, as we have seen earlier, is explicitly described as beyond both words and things as these have been differentiated hitherto. Thus, the English translation of the title of Foucault's inaugural address at the Collège de France, *l'Ordre du discours*, reads as *The Discourse on Language*.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to be quite clear as to what distinguishes Derrida's position so radically from earlier ones. As a point of comparison, we can refer to the most powerful and sophisticated account of identity and difference to have preceded Derridean *différance*: the Marxist explanation of commodity fetishism. I evoke Marxism here because the difficulties it got into in the 1960s are, of course, central to an understanding of the development of poststructuralism and they will make it easier to grasp what is at stake in the confrontation of Foucault with Derrida. It matters little here how closely we cleave to Marx's own account of commodity fetishism, or whether we adopt the language of any one of the more recent versions of the Marxist tradition like Althusser's or that of the Hegelian Marxists. If we follow the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, then we will tend to explain the exchange-value of a particular commodity (and hence its glamour or lack thereof, its social meaning or *identity*) with special emphasis on the totality of *social relations* (socially necessary labour time, an entire dialectic of social contradictions etc.) which give rise to a particular value. If, on the other hand, we adopt the theoretical language of Althusser and his collaborators, then we will tend to subordinate such contradictions to a mode of production as *structure*. In neither case, is it a matter of reducing strictly singular elements of a complex whole to mere expressions of a totality, the differentiated parts of which would all contain the totality as an *essence*, or concept (in the manner of Hegel). The limitation of Marxism, in this regard, is not that it presents a danger of homogenization or *reductionism* (as in "economism"), that bogeyman of liberal bourgeois thought. Hegelian Marxism, for example, has shown itself to be particularly adept--most spectacularly in the last work of Sartre, the astonishing (and disgracefully underread) biographical study of Flaubert--not just at avoiding this pitfall but at demonstrating with extraordinary subtlety the irreducible singularity of an individual existential adventure within a larger narrative of class-struggle and so on.

No, our quivering, precious individual sensibilities--our "differences," as they say (in unison)--are safe. The limitation, which is common to Marxism and the work of Foucault, lies elsewhere. It becomes

---

<sup>28</sup> "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.



evident as a direct result of the Heideggerian dismantling of the philosophy of the subject and the appearance on the philosophical scene of *différance*; and it resides in the fact that the latter both entail the following consequence: when attempting to explain the emergence of any phenomenon in the social field, any cultural artefact or the "formation of objects," the limiting of the pertinent relations, structures, determinations (whatever you choose to call them) held to be relevant to this emergence can no longer, henceforth, be restricted to the merely human domain. By contrast, Foucault, as I shall demonstrate in a moment, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, does exactly this.

In the meantime, however, it is necessary to clarify the shift introduced by *différance* announced directly above. The truly disconcerting import of *différance* lies in its disqualification of any *ground* or *sub-jectum* ("that which underlies") as the Being of beings. (One should add that the assault on the philosophy of the subject--as Heidegger's emphasis on the etymology of the word suggests--was not only aimed at *human* subjects; if anything other than a human subject seems strange or inconceivable, then this is only a function of our persistent humanism.) This disqualification of a ground is the consequence of taking seriously the idea that there can be no entity--Hegel's Absolute Spirit, for example, or God--which is itself unconditioned, and therefore able to perform the function as sole ground of other entities. This is the meaning of the notorious statement to the effect that "there is no outside to the text"--the text in the sense of what Derrida calls the "general text" or the "play of the world." Furthermore, if all entities are conditioned, they must all be conditioned by the entirety of the universe, in the sense that nothing in the universe can be what it is without the simultaneous existence of everything else. This is, of course, an elementary truth of our modern natural science; but its consequences have only been felt in the social sciences for a relatively short time. For example, this idea is the (mostly unacknowledged) underpinning of the repudiation, in recent years, of all forms of "determination in the last instance." The real reason there can be no such thing should not be that it offends our liberal bourgeois sensibilities (which is generally the secret motivation behind ostensible objections to "reductionism," "totalitarianism" and so on) but that a "determination in the last instance" could only qualify as such if it were, itself, unconditioned by anything else. Failing this, whatever conditions the determination in the last instance becomes the new form of the latter, and so on *ad infinitum*.

It is necessary to point out that this difficulty is not obviated if, in contrast to a more traditional kind of Marxism with its emphasis on the narrowly economic, one adopts the significant improvement of Althusser

and makes of the entire mode of production a "complex whole," an "articulated structure with a dominant" ("*[une] structure articulée à dominante*").<sup>29</sup> (The principal or dominant contradiction here being that between forces of production and relations of production.)<sup>30</sup> In this view of matters, the "economic" domain figures as merely one element (albeit a dominant one) of a whole which is constituted by the myriad relations among all the levels of the social formation: "... each contradiction, each essential articulation of the structure, and the general relationship among the articulations in the structure with a dominant, constitute so many conditions of existence of the complex whole itself."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, "... the secondary contradictions are essential to the very existence of the principal contradiction. . . they constitute in a real way the condition of existence of it, just as the principal contradiction constitutes their condition of existence."<sup>32</sup> The problem with this formulation is that, by conceding that the dominant contradiction owes its existence to all the others, the way is opened to one's wondering as to how that one contradiction can continue to be dominant, or even how it could ever have been so in the first place. One is all too swiftly led, in other words, to asking--with Baudrillard, for example--whether the primacy given to political economy in the interrogation of social reality is not itself the final ruse of a form of social domination which depends on this image of itself (as subordinated to the economic) in order to function successfully.<sup>33</sup> (This much said, let me hasten to add that my reiteration of the problematization of Marxism in the sixties and seventies in France should not be taken as a call for a summary abandonment of Marxism. Marxism [like the work of Foucault, as we shall see shortly] must be retained; but it needs to be hooked up to a transhuman order of things. In this regard, Derrida's recent warning against a facile dismissal of Marxism in our present circumstances is

---

<sup>29</sup> Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1965), p.210. I prefer this translation of *structure à dominante* to the, at best, misleading, "structure in dominance" so often used.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Le miroir de la production* (Paris: Casterman, 1973).

timely).<sup>34</sup>

I have embarked on this discussion of Marxism because it illuminates the case of Foucault, to which we can at last return. The difficulties presented by Althusser's "structure with a dominant" closely parallel what I shall now demonstrate to be Foucault's residual humanism. It will be recalled that we were trying to establish how thorough-going Foucault's attempt to move beyond humanism really was. We had established that, for Foucault, in order to analyze the rules for the formation of objects, we could not embody them in words or things; nor could we relate the formation of enunciative types or concepts to knowing subjects or the history of ideas. Rather, an object (madness, for example) comes into existence ". . . under the positive conditions of a complex bundle of relations . . . between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification . . ." <sup>35</sup> This emphasis everywhere in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* on relations, on the "dispersion" of statements and "their simultaneity which is not unifiable," <sup>36</sup> undoubtedly constitutes a move beyond a totalizing humanist subject. This move, however, is incomplete because the relations in question are--as the above passages make plain--always exclusively at work within an ambit which is human or, more precisely, *social*. While it may well be the case that the decisive relations which permit the existence of a particular object are neither present to a mind--collective or individual--nor the products of humanity (even of a humanity which does not know what it is doing, as in Marxist alienation)--while all this may well be the case, the entities and practices among which these relations are established by Foucault are nonetheless always exclusively social. (This is equally true of Althusser, with the additional problems entailed by the "dominant" in his structure--i.e. like Foucault's, Althusser's liquidation of humanism is incomplete). This is in flat contradiction with the following avowal of intent:

It is a matter of deploying a dispersion that can never be reduced to a single system of differences, a scattering that is not related to absolute axes of reference; it is a matter of operating *a decentering that leaves no privilege to any*

---

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

center.<sup>37</sup>

It is as if even Foucault's post-humanism can only operate within the reassuring perimeter of a humanist notion: namely, that (thoroughly bourgeois) "civil society" which has been the unquestioned paradigmatic boundary for human self-understanding since at least Vico's *The New Science* of 1725, probably the best-known early expression of the exemplary humanist view that we are the authors of our own "world of nations or civil world."<sup>38</sup>

One might add--lest I am accused of concentrating unfairly on Foucault's early work--that, if anything, the tendency I have tried to identify here--a residually humanist concentration on civil society as a privileged center of differential relations--becomes more overt towards the end of Foucault's oeuvre. This is one reason I have chosen to devote most space to the fiercely and explicitly anti-humanist early works: it is more difficult to make my case with reference to them; and it seems to me that once one has made the case for the early works one scarcely needs to spell out the extent to which it can be done for the later ones. I have no intention, however, of being critical of the much-touted, and frequently misunderstood, "return of the subject" in the final works. The correct response on this score was succinctly made by Deleuze:

It is idiotic to say that Foucault discovers or reintroduces a hidden subject after having denied it. There is no subject, but a production of subjectivity: subjectivity is to be produced, at the right moment, because there is now a subject.<sup>39</sup>

Foucault did not "return" to the subject for the simple reason that he had never abandoned it in the first place. As we have seen above, in the early works he had been concerned to articulate the matrices of relations which

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205 (translation modified and emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> It is true, of course, that Vico, unlike Foucault, does locate the principles of civil society within "our own human mind": "the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could hope to know" (Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. T. Bergin and M. Fisch [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948], p.331).

<sup>39</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), p.154.

made a place in which subjectivity could emerge *possible*. There is strictly no contradiction between an exercise of this kind and the accounts of "practices of the self" which mark the final period of Foucault's writings. This is a good point at which to make clear that it has not been my intention to dismiss Foucault's accounts of madness, sexuality and so on on the grounds of their egregious humanism. The fact that these accounts--accounts of bundles of relations which operate their effects independently of human subjects--are nonetheless held to act among entities within a strictly human domain does not necessarily invalidate any of them. Who, after all, could not be swayed by these magisterial studies? It is important to stress, too, that to complain about humanism is by no means to evacuate humanity from one's theoretical discourse. People do constitute themselves through practices of the self. And societies do regulate themselves (today) and individualize and subject (*assujétir*) people through the agency of the State (among other things). I take these to be facts--as solid and provisional as any fact supplied by the natural sciences. And there can be no doubt that Foucault has been instrumental as few have been in directing us down a path, beyond humanism, which I should like to see us pursue further. What I would suggest at this point is that one can nonetheless imagine intricating Foucault's analyses within a much larger transhuman framework which might well radically alter our understanding of them. At the very least, it would no longer seem admissible today--given the ecological crisis and what it has taught us about the inseparability of everything about ourselves, from our bodies to our social institutions, from the biosphere--to continue to work with a notion of "society," or humanity, as a closed system. Despite Foucault's considerable debts to Heidegger, it would seem that he never fully assimilated--and our contemporary practitioners of cultural studies have most certainly yet to do so--Heidegger's warnings about the modern "anthropological" notion of "culture" and "world-view" as "the transition of metaphysics into its final configuration."<sup>40</sup>

I anticipate that it may be argued, at this point, that I have exaggerated the extent to which our humanist tradition has drawn a boundary around civil society as the paradigmatic object of human self-understanding. It is true that, within this tradition, there have been plenty of endeavours which have ostensibly cut across, or have been hostile to, humanism: investigations of human biology, neurophysiology or genetics, for example. Even these approaches, however--by virtue of their dominant

---

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, IV, p.149; see also pp.17 and 86.

tendency to represent the *soma* (or, more broadly, "nature") either as an unrelated, contingent, support or point of departure from which the "social" then takes its independent course, or as a *rival* locus of theoretical explanation for the social (as in genetic reductionism)--even these approaches have tended to reinforce, rather than significantly contest, a long habit of interpreting (in practice, if not in principle) the social as a *separate*, and not just distinct, domain from everything else which makes us what we are. The unreduced enclaves of Foucault's secret allegiances to this tradition--his privileging one "center," namely civil society--seem increasingly quaint in the context of recent work in a wide array of different fields which is complicating and challenging the divides we have operated between culture and nature, humanity, its machines and animals, and the environment. I am thinking of writing by Bruno Latour (in philosophy of science), Michel Serres (on the "natural contract"), Félix Guattari (on the "three ecologies"), Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern ("*la terre-patrie*"), Donna Haraway (on simians, cyborgs and "the reinvention of nature"), or Ravi Batra (on economic cycles as bound up with biological ones), to name only some of the most prominent figures in this new field. This work suggests that we may have to drop altogether the notion of culture, as currently understood (i.e. as a residue of humanism/anthropomorphism [Heidegger/Derrida and others]), and ultimately conceive of the objects of cultural studies, for example, along the lines of *cosmic events*.

Now, clearly this will have to be done without relapsing into explanations based on teleologies or biological/natural *conati*, for these would constitute a continuation of the metaphysic of the subject (in the strict sense of the term, as employed by Heidegger and Derrida). (In other words, "nature," for example, would become the new *sub-jectum* or ground.) To those--both opponents and promoters of poststructuralism--who have chosen, mistakenly, to see in the latter a "nihilistic" assault on truth, irresponsible relativism, a will to fragmentation and a resolute hostility to an invocation of any notion whatsoever of the whole or "totality," it may come as a surprise to learn that it is the notorious notion of *différance* which has made possible, for the first time in our tradition, a discourse of the whole which is no longer burdened by that freight of phallogocentrism, onto-theology and so on from which we would like to free ourselves. It is often forgotten that the hostility of Heidegger and Derrida to the notion of totality was only directed at the version of the latter as an organization of entities around a project or *telos*. If, by contrast, the identities of entities are not determined by a center which grounds them in a system of differentiation and negation, then they are

endlessly deferred throughout an infinite "whole" which itself cannot be thought or made the object of a concept. As stated earlier, in the now impossible language of ontology, this means that the identity or meaning of anything must be intricately with everything else in the infinite multiplicity of the universe. The latter, however, cannot be said to exist as a totality in the manner that term has often implied: i.e. it cannot be a matter of *already constituted* entities *interacting* within a system (as in many accounts of the modernist artwork, for example). This for the reason that, if each entity achieves its identity by means of its deferral through everything else, then its own contribution to the meaning and identity of everything else must already come to it from the whole "before" it can begin to make such a contribution. It must, in other words, always already be divided from itself in its own being. The very inadequacy of this language of ontology, which I have mobilized in the immediately preceding sentences, suggests the extent to which Being/*différance* is an unfathomable enigma to thought. In its very inadequacy, however, this language should convey the extent to which things no longer *are* in any traditional, substantial way. Which explains why poststructuralism has operated under the aegis of the feminine principle (by which I do not mean anything biologically female). (Irigaray, better than anyone else, has demonstrated how philosophy had generally worked with a notion of the entity which was on the model of the phallus as indivisible *thing*). Clearly, henceforth, we are constrained to think of all entities, including ourselves, as simultaneously *nothing* and *everything*. This vast Embrace of Being, if you will, should make apparent why, far from entailing an abdication from ethical and political choice (as has sometimes been claimed), *différance* imposes instead an enormously expanded sense of responsibility for all entities to the precise extent that we are all inextricably bound up with all of them. Furthermore, bearing in mind the exemplary analyses of Irigaray, we must conclude that Foucault's residual humanism, as defined here--and that of the majority of the current practitioners of cultural studies--elevates humanity to the same status as the Phallus in psychoanalysis: an unconditioned (except, in the case of humanity, by itself) *sub-jectum* or ground of the system of difference.

It is in the light of these novel circumstances that the vestigial humanism of Foucault, and his many theoretical progeny in New Historicism and cultural studies, needs to be reconsidered. More than most, Foucault himself has taught how inseparable power and knowledge always are. While his work has unquestionably been of major importance to those of us who seek to liberate ourselves from the toils of the subjection (*assujettissement*) and individualization at work in the modern

world, the fact that Foucault, New Historicism and cultural studies have failed to call into question the *terrain* of social conflict chosen by the social engineers, policy wonks and other disciplinary minions of the liberal bourgeois social order--a humanist notion of "society"--suggests that the war may have been lost in advance.

Rice University

PHILIP R. WOOD



## NOTICES BIOGRAPHIQUES

**Cilas Kemedjio** a reçu un Doctorat 3ème cycle de l'Université de Yaoundé sur l'oeuvre de Maryse Condé et d'Edouard Glissant et travaille sur la question théorique dans les littératures antillaise et africaine à Ohio State University.

**Alice Ramos** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at St. John's University.

**Serge Meitinger:** Né en 1951 en Bretagne. Enseigne la littérature française à l'Université de La Réunion depuis 1988 après huit années passées à Madagascar. Spécialiste de la poésie française moderne: thèse sur Mallarmé (à paraître chez Rodopi, Amsterdam). S'intéresse aussi aux grands courants de la pensée philosophique et des sciences humaines. Ecrit des poèmes.

**Ladelle McWhorter** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Richmond. She has finished articles on Foucault and Bataille, recently edited *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, and is currently writing a book on Foucault and gay political practice.

**Lawrence R. Schehr** is Professor of French at the University of South Alabama. His book, *Flaubert and Sons* appeared in 1986. His two most recent books, *The Shock of Men*, and *Alcibiades at the Door*, will be appearing in late 1994 with Stanford University Press. He is currently completing work on two other volumes, *The Ruptures of Realism*, dealing with nineteenth-century writing and *Parts of an Andrology*, a book on representations of the male body in realist and post-realist fiction.

**Ruth Larson** is Assistant Professor of French at Texas A & M University.

**Thomas P. Bonfiglio** is Associate Professor of German at the University of Richmond. He is the author of *Achim von Arnim's Novellensammlung 1812: Balance and Mediation* and has published articles on romanticism, romantic science, and feminist studies of Kant.

**Philip Wood** is an Associate Professor of French Studies at Rice University. He is the author of *Understanding Jean-Paul Sartre* (University of South Carolina Press, 1990) and two forthcoming books on recent French thought, from existentialism to poststructuralism, to be published by Stanford University Press.

# **ANNONCES ET NOUVELLES**

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The Nineteenth Annual International Conference of the Merleau-Ponty Circle will be held on the campus of Berry College in Rome, Georgia, on September 22-24, 1994.

This year's themes are politics, morality and religion in the works of Merleau-Ponty. Send two copies of your paper and a one-page abstract to Dr. Michael B. Smith, 5021 Berry College, Mount Berry, GA 30149-5021. The deadline is May 15, 1994. En anglais seulement, hélas!

\* \* \*

**Cultural Center of Cerisy-la-Salle**

**September 11-19, 1995**

**EXCESS AND HARMONY:  
MICHEL RIO AND JMG. LE CLEZIO**

Abstracts: 1-2 typewritten pages in triplicate to be sent before December 1, 1994, to one of the following organizers:

Professor Serge Meitinger. 47 Pentes de la Source, 54 rue de la Source, F 97400 St-Denis de la Réunion, France.

Professor M. E. Kronegger, Romance & Classical Languages, 313 Old Horticulture Building, Michigan State University, West Lansing, Michigan, MI 48824, USA.

ev  
of  
an  
co  
ph  
ob  
(w  
ca  
co  
co  
  
in  
in  
(")  
as  
et  
ar  
th  
of  
be  
u  
of  
el  
D  
if  
o  
w  
a  
h  
e  
re  
ir  
it  
n  
a  
a  
w  
n  
  
c  
n

The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning

*Institut Mondial des Hautes Etudes Phénoménologiques*

Weltinstitut für Fortgeschrittene Phänomenologische Forschung und Bildung

*Istituto Mondiale di Ricerca e di Studi Avanzati di Fenomenologia*

Instituto Mondiale De Altos Estudios Fenomenologicos

國際現象學學會

President: a.-T. Tymieniecka

The International Society  
of Phenomenology and Literature

President  
Marlies Kronegger

Host Institution  
Department of Philosophy  
Karl-Franzens Universität  
Graz, Austria

SYMPOSIUM

IDEALS OF/FOR HUMANKIND

August 22 - 25, 1994

Our topic will open new interrelations of literature and philosophy,  
and examine in particular the values of harmony and excess (violence) in the  
modern world. Our sessions are also open to the past ideals which can  
enhance the values of the future.

Send abstracts in English, French or German before May 1, 1994, to:

Professor M. E. Kronegger  
Michigan State University  
Department of Romance & Classical Languages  
313 Old Horticulture Building  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1112  
Fax 517 336 3844

PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DU MIRAIL

## KAIROS

Revue annuelle de la Faculté de Philosophie  
de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail

Directeur : Jean-Marie VAYSSE

### BON DE COMMANDE

à retourner aux :

Presses Universitaires du Mirail  
Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail  
56 rue du Taur  
31000 TOULOUSE  
Tel. 61.22.58.31 - Fax 61.21.84.20

Je, soussigné.....  
demeurant.....  
.....  
.....

commande ... exemplaires du n° 4 (1993) de **KAIROS** (*Le logique*), au prix  
de 90 F l'exemplaire

... exemplaires du n° 3 (1992) de **KAIROS** (*L'histoire*), au prix  
de 90 F l'exemplaire

Participation aux frais de port : 15 F pour 1 ouvrage, 5 F par ouvrage  
supplémentaire

- Je joins mon règlement à la commande
- Je souhaite recevoir une facture
- Je désire recevoir votre catalogue en ..... exemplaire(s).
- chèque bancaire
- chèque postal