

**Relationality, Polemics, Incommensurability:  
Thinking the Political at the Intersections of the  
Work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault**

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## Abstract

This thesis is focused on the intersections of ontology and politics in the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In particular it concerns the ways in which these two thinkers offer accounts of (ethical, social, political) relations which exceed a traditional dichotomy between transcendentalism and empiricism. Both Derrida and Foucault show universal foundations to originate in an anterior play of differences 'between' the transcendental and empirical. However, as this thesis shows, each thinks this anterior 'medium' of relations in radically incommensurable ways: as *differance* or aporia in Derrida and as power and problematization in Foucault. As such, each necessarily views the other as failing to account for the 'true medium' of relationality and so of its violent effacement and disavowal. This incommensurability, it is argued, results in a polemic between them which is explicit in their competing accounts of Descartes' *Meditations* and implicit throughout all of their work. This thesis traces the polemic between Derrida and Foucault across their accounts of subjectivity, ethics and politics. It is argued that in their engagements with each of these fields they employ parallel politicizing strategies which are nevertheless wholly exclusive of one another. The incommensurability between Derrida and Foucault reflects a broader problematic which any political thought affirming its own finitude cannot explicitly recognize. Post-foundational accounts of relationality, it is claimed, violently exclude competing philosophical strategies without the capacity of accounting for this exclusion.

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# Guide to Abbreviations

## Friedrich Nietzsche

- 'WP'= *The Will to Power*  
'GM'= *On the Genealogy of Morality*  
'BGE'= *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*  
'GS'= *The Gay Science*

## Martin Heidegger

- 'BT'= *Being and Time*  
'IM'= *Introduction to Metaphysics*  
'N1'= *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*  
'N2'= *Nietzsche: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*  
'N3'= *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*  
'NW'= "Nietzsche's Word: God is Dead"

## Jacques Derrida

- 'AP'= *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another At) The 'Limits of Truth'*  
'DI'= "Declarations of Independence"  
'FoL= "The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority"  
'GoD'= *The Gift of Death*  
'OG'= *Of Grammatology*  
'PoF'= *The Politics of Friendship*  
'PSY'= *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*  
'RO'= *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*  
'SoM'= *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*  
'TDJF'= "To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis"  
'WD'= *Writing and Difference*

## Michel Foucault

- 'AK' = *The Archaeology of Knowledge*  
'BB'= *The Birth of Biopolitic: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*  
'CS'= *The Care of the Self*  
'CV'= *Le Courage de la Vérité: Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres, Cours au Collège de France, 1984.*  
'DP'= *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*  
'EW'= *Michel Foucault: Essential Works (Three Volumes)*  
'FS'= *Fearless Speech*  
'GSA'= *Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres: Cours au Collège de France 1982-1983*  
'HH'= *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*  
'HS'= *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*  
'OT'= *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*  
'PK'= *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*  
'STP'= *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège France 1977-1978*  
'UP'= *The Use of Pleasure*

## Alain Badiou

- 'BE'= *Being and Event*  
'TW'= *Theoretical Writings*

# Introduction

## For a Post-Foundational Political Thought

If there is a fundamental claim which might be said to delineate what has variously been called post-structural, 'post-foundational,' post-essential or post-metaphysical political thought today it is that there is an inherent and irreducible contingency to all forms of social order. That is, the common response to the crisis of essentialist universalism which defines the vague and contested outline of a post-foundational paradigm lies in the affirmation of the contingent and plural nature of any ground or foundation of the political. In turn, there is a corresponding shift of theoretical focus to the mode or means by which particular foundations are constituted. Thus, to affix the qualifier 'post' to foundationalism or essentialism signals the recognition that an account of the political can be reduced neither to foundationalism nor to anti-foundationalism.<sup>1</sup> The former is refused since, in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger in particular, it is affirmed that a principle grounding or ordering social relations which is transcendent to those relations themselves cannot be derived. Thought has no access to an Archimedean position beyond the (relational) terrain of its articulation. Moreover, the possibility of a totally anti-foundational political theory is discounted since, as Jacques Derrida has perhaps shown most of all, to claim to have totally exceeded the foundational is itself a foundational or essentialist move. Anti-foundationalism implies the capacity to totally circumscribe, master and exceed a foundational 'inside' and thus in turn repeats the transcendent move it is meant to escape. Post-foundationalism in short, does not usher in a nihilistic celebration of a total absence of order or normative principles but rather affirms that any ordering principle or ground is contingent, partial and never immutable.

The assertion of the contingency of any order of social relations marks in turn the need for a re-articulation of philosophy's relation to politics. Therefore, Jacques Rancière's critique of what he calls 'archipolitics' is indicative of a broader post-foundational *zeitgeist* which seeks to question the constitutive principles that have governed political thought. The

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<sup>1</sup> On this point see Hugh Silverman, "Introduction." Gianni Vattimo, "The Truth of Hermeneutics." and Basil O'Neill, "Truth as Fundamental and Foundational." Collected in Hugh Silverman (Ed.) *Questioning Foundations: Truth/Subjectivity/Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993. See also Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Pp.11-15.

demand – which Rancière argues originates with *The Republic* – that the polis should reflect the order of ideas represents the denial of the contingent nature of the political inherent to the tradition of political philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Rancière seeks to undermine the subsumption of politics to competing principles of order from which sovereign authority is derived, which Hannah Arendt refers to as the displacement of the political by an “external force which transcends the political realm.”<sup>3</sup> For Arendt, philosophy’s positing of principles that might govern the political reflects the former’s desire to master and escape the unpredictability and contingency of human action.<sup>4</sup> Implicitly building on Arendt’s claim, Rancière argues that the tradition has related to the political as a ‘paradox’ to be resolved by the philosopher whose role is to determine the “harmonious essence of a just or good society.”<sup>5</sup> Philosophy engages in politics, Rancière argues, only in terms of its desire to “achieve politics by eliminating politics,” by governing its contingency through a transcendent ground.<sup>6</sup> Despite their broad differences from Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe too are exemplary of the critique of archipolitics which, in their terms forms a ‘retreat of the political.’ A withdrawal or retreat of the political *qua* political, they argue, has been effected by the metaphysical tradition’s positing of an “essential [...] co-belonging of the philosophical and the political.”<sup>7</sup> The philosophical and the political have until now functioned, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe claim, as mutual limits insofar as the latter is related to as the object of philosophy, a relation defined by philosophy’s “total domination of the political” constituted in its desire to empirically realize itself.<sup>8</sup> The political withdraws or retreats insofar as it is never thought in itself, but always displaced, effaced and dominated by philosophy’s desire to order and master it.

Consonant with the critique of ‘archipolitics’ is a critical assessment by post-foundational political thinkers of the aspiration to transform political philosophy into a political science. Grounded in various economic or behaviorist principles and competing

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2 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. (Trans., Julie Rose). Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999.

3 Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. London: Penguin, 1993. P.97, 115.

4 *Ibid.* Pp.109-114.

5 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*. P.64. See also Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of Rancière’s account of archipolitics in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 1990. P.190

6 *Ibid.*

7 Jean-Luc Nancy & Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Opening Address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political.” *Retreating the Political*. (Ed. & Trans., Simon Sparks). Pp.107-121. See p.109

8 Jean-Luc Nancy & Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “The ‘Retreat’ of the Political.” *Retreating the Political*. Pp.122-134. P.123



methods for pursuing its task, politics becomes conceived as the competition over the distribution and management of power, interests and resources. The sum of these practices is in turn named 'political system' and becomes the object of a science of politics. This desire for objectivity is extended to the beliefs, ideals and values which animate political activities usually through idealized and abstract accounts of political agents.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the political is confined by an epistemological discipline to an institutional ensemble and what Arditì and Valentine call its "day-to-day administrative rivalries."<sup>10</sup> Political science, driven by what Claude Lefort says is a "desire to objectivity," sees politics as existing only if it can be measured as behavior, procedure, the distribution of resources or people.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Lefort claims, political science fails to account for the fact that the scientist and his/her objects are constituted within a socio-political and historical context which invests the object with meaning, or in other words, that his/her practice is itself political, inseparable from the socio-political horizon in which it is constituted.

If the broad claim articulated by the thinkers discussed here and shared by many others is that political philosophy and political science displace or disavow the political by defining it by the terms of another field, be it metaphysics, science or economics, then the common aim of post-foundational political thought, I would suggest, is to seek to think the political in itself and not to ground or order it through the principles of a field which exceeds it. The sheer fact of our being-with-others anterior to its determination by some ground or principles, the patent plurality of an indeterminate and contingent relationality becomes the object of thought. The aim in other words, is to think the social 'bond' without ground, to relate determinate social relations to the indeterminate, the contingency of an 'unbond' from which they emerge. Once the gesture of grounding or determining a social order is displaced by the foundational question of how a given order is grounded relations appear as radically contingent. Once any ground or order is affirmed as contingent, the question of relation, of the binding-unbinding of pure singularities or differences themselves rather than the search for the terms by which they can be organized and ordered, emerges as a central one for political thought.

The refusal of the archipolitical and scientific desire to displace the political therefore

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9 Benjamin Arditì, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. P.12

10 Benjamin Arditì and Jeremy Valentine, *Polemization The Contingency of the Commonplace*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. P.13

11 Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*. (David Macey, Trans.) Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988. P.11

alters the aims of political thought and the terrain it seeks to elucidate. The locus of thought shifts to the event of the determination of social relations themselves. The unities and identities which were previously central to political analysis begin to lose their privileged place. Particular conceptions of the good society, the subject, man or consciousness functioning as the grounds of inter-subjectivity are supplanted by a primacy of the 'inter' itself. That is, of the contingent status of the 'bond' or community anterior to its determination, reduction or restriction through the constitution of particular hierarchies, obligations and orders.

### **Rethinking the Question of Relation**

It is from out of this broad characterization of post-foundational political thought that the fundamental paradox which this thesis engages issues. While for all of their differences, Nancy, Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, William Connolly, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben and especially our protagonists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault (to name but a few), have brought political thought to question its foundations, they have also put in question the possibility of severing philosophy from the political conditions within which it arises. While politics can no longer lay claim to secure grounds, the gesture of rethinking political ontology cannot be separated or abstracted from the social relations from which it is articulated. If an account of the nature of the political in terms of the contingency of the relations that make it up is to be coherent, it must I argue, entail the affirmation of the situatedness or particularity of any such account. No Archimedean position exists beyond the relational from which the latter can be described. An irreducible opacity haunts every post-foundational political thought; every account has an uncircumventable partial and finite status such that a paradox emerges: *how are we to think the differences and divergences between political ontologies which provide an account of the nature of the relational while simultaneously affirming the finite and political status of that very account?* On what grounds might we think the fundamental differences between thinkers insofar as post-foundational political ontologies recoil back upon the authority and totalizing nature of their claims in asserting their own finitude?

Engagements with these considerations have thus far only been incomplete. Stephen K. White, whose work represents one of the more well known attempts to define a post-

foundational political paradigm, is instructive of the limits of such attempts hitherto. White has proposed, in defense of accusations of the thoroughgoing relativism of post-foundationalism, that contemporary continental political theory should be conceived in terms of what he calls, echoing a concept coined by Gianni Vattimo, “weak ontology.”<sup>12</sup> White argues that to describe ontology as ‘weak’ denotes two indispensable elements which post-foundational accounts of the political share. First, in the absence of transcendental grounds there is, as William Connolly has also argued, an ‘essential contestability’ to political concepts and theorems. White maintains this does not mean we should or could jettison conceptual apparatuses and frameworks altogether and I would add that to do so, as we will see, would be to return to the errors of empiricism and positivism.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, ‘weak ontologies’ are consequently not ‘anti-foundationalist’ as their less rigorous critics and supporters alike often affirm, yet nor do they qualify their own theories or accounts as “incontestable” as a traditional foundational account would.<sup>14</sup> In other words, weak ontologies do not amount to what Jean-Francois Lyotard has infamously called ‘meta-narratives,’ totalizing accounts of the world.<sup>15</sup> But given their inescapably theoretical status they necessarily form “generalizations” insofar as they stand for different political ontologies. As White puts it, “[w]hat sort of engagement there will be between one small narrative and another only takes shape within the conception, however implicit, of a ‘grand’ or at least grander narrative.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, White’s imposition of the qualifier ‘weak’ to post-foundational political ontologies denotes both the now commonplace affirmation of the absence of any final normative ground for political theory while at the same time affirming that there is nevertheless implicit in all theory a ‘grounding’ and thus, at least a partially totalizing move.

Accordingly, White’s argument resonates with my own articulation of post-foundational political thought. Yet my claim is that the implications of this formulation must be pressed further, in the direction of an essential paradox: *post-foundational political ontologies affirm their own contingency and particularity yet simultaneously, necessarily efface that particularity insofar as they are couched in the productions of ‘grander’ narratives.* As we will see,

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12 Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. See also Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*. (Trans., John R. Snyder). Cambridge: Polity, 1988.

13 *Ibid.*, p.8. See also William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

14 *Ibid.* p.11

15 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, Trans.) Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1984.

16 Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation*. P.12

Derrida may affirm the contingency of any particular deconstruction and Foucault may affirm his genealogies as particular exercises of power. But insofar as these accounts of the contingency and finitude of their own philosophies still rely upon a presumption of what 'is' they are irreducible to the grounding move of articulating a 'grander' narrative.

Therefore, if recent political thought has sought to think the contingency of all foundations or universal grounds, what has generally gone under-theorized is what I suggest is the way in which political thought is itself politicized once post-foundational premises are accepted. If, as White argues, principles and concepts are both irreducible and yet the result of particular conditions of existence, then I argue that 'weak' ontological accounts are *more finite* than they affirm and can be politicized in ways exceeding the limits of their own grander narratives. In short, what Connolly conceives as the "essential contestability" of political concepts which results from the impossibility of deriving a neutral language or *metalangue* to describe political phenomena, can be extended the essential contestability of political ontologies themselves and in turn, orients enquiry towards the constituent points of divergence between them.<sup>17</sup>

### **Engaging with Derrida and Foucault**

It is with these hypotheses of the contingent and contestable status of political ontology in mind that I situate my comparative analysis of the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Typically either corralled together as harbingers of post-modernism, prophets of nihilism, privileged pillars of *la pensée soixante huit*, as young conservatives, or conversely, differentiated only through the partisan demand to take sides which leads to the condemnation of one through theoretical strategies indebted to the other, rarely is the possibility of an extensive and productive dialogue between them undertaken. This thesis seeks to do just that, to trace the exchange of theoretical positions which takes place between these two thinkers; an exchange which is explicit in the polemic which emerges out of Derrida's reading of Foucault's first book, *Madness and Civilization* and, with the exception of an essay of Derrida's and occasional veiled references on the part of both, is largely implicit and at the background of all of their work. In tracing the moments where their works converge but also, perhaps more significantly, where they deviate – the moments where the possibility of dialogue between them ultimately breaks down – we attain not only a more

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17 William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*.

nuanced view of their respective oeuvres but can also begin to draw out implications which extend beyond their work to engage with the ways in which philosophy's relation to the political is theorized. The interstices between Derrida and Foucault provide an opportunity to begin to re-articulate the terms in which the political, broadly conceived, can be understood today.

The polemic between Derrida and Foucault concerns on the one hand, the question of how to think the locus of the event by which relations are determined and on the other hand, each account's success in affirming its own relational status. If relation denotes the processes that operate between terms to condition or effect their individuality then no identity can be abstracted from the (social, economic, sexual, linguistic, cultural, etc.) relations from out of which they emerge.<sup>18</sup> Thus, every relation implies a particular authority, hierarchy, order and violence since it determines and arrests in some way what are ultimately irreducible differences. The debate between Derrida and Foucault lies not only over what this relational process 'is,' how it operates and how its contingent nature can be revealed, because the medium of thought must also be relational and thus (partially) conditioned. In other words, when engaged in polemics against one another I argue that fundamentally, each accuses the other of failing to think the 'true' medium wherein relations are determined and accordingly, of failing to fully assume the partial and finite nature of their own account insofar as its point of departure lies in a determinate relational field. While both think a relational medium anterior to any identity, subject or ground, each thinks this medium differently and as such, their philosophies are at their core incommensurable. If each affirms the essential situatedness of his thought, insofar as it is inscribed within a grander narrative which the interlocutor rejects, each thus views the other as having failed to situate it adequately. In this light, the debate or polemic thus suggests that a conception of incommensurability should supplement recent articulations of contingency in political theory.

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18 I appropriate this definition of relation from Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. London: Verso, 2006. Rudolphe Gasche offers a similar definition in *Of Minimal Things: Essays on the Notion of Relation*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Pp.2-10. For a history of the status of the concept of relation see Julius R. Weinberg, *Abstraction, Relation and Induction*. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1965. Pp.68-78.

## Outline of Chapters

It is around the insight that the polemic between Derrida and Foucault takes the form of two 'grander' yet finite narratives that the central questions which animate thesis are organized. Chapter 1 introduces the terms through which the polemic takes place by locating the origins of our questions in the work of both Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Nietzsche and Heidegger are important thinkers for an engagement with post-foundational political thought since both, perhaps more than any other philosopher, introduced a thinking which proceeds from the primacy and contingency of relations. Nietzsche posits that the subject, identity and truth are preceded by anterior fields of relations between forces. Similarly, for Heidegger the subject's relation to an object or to others emerges from out of a primordial Being-in-the-world. Anterior to the determinate is the unconcealing of Being; the disclosure of a world is antecedent to any particular way of inhabiting that world.

Moreover, in insisting upon the irreducibility of contingency both posit the irreducibility of the violence of all relations. If there is no natural order or ground of the political which thought can recover then every order cannot but be unnatural and violent. Nietzsche situates the origin of every truth in a field of struggle while in Heidegger's lectures of the mid-1930s in particular every ordering is said to be effected in an originary polemos. Positing violence as originary presents a fundamental aporia for thought: the means by which ethico-political orientations have traditionally been derived are withdrawn. That is, both Nietzsche and Heidegger affirm the absence of normative grounds yet their responses to this absence nevertheless prove inadequate. Nietzsche's 'grand politics' and Heidegger's attempted recovery of the pre-Socratic origin of metaphysics ultimately repeat the grounding move and its consequent denial of originary violence. Yet they provoke what might be said to be the fundamental question governing the polemic between Derrida and Foucault: once one invokes the irreducibility of violence - of all relations and of one's own philosophy - on what basis is a philosophical ethics and politics to be derived?

The polemic between Derrida and Foucault over the status of Descartes' *Meditations*, the focus of chapter 2, might be said to revolve around this very question. Each thinker accuses the other of obscuring both the true locus wherein Descartes' rational subject is differentiated from an absolutely mad alterity and of veiling and renouncing the violence of

his own account of that event and concordant appropriation of madness. Ultimately, each thinker is accused by the other of failing to think the 'true' medium or terrain where relations are determined. That at stake in this dispute are two irreducible 'grander' narratives is unmistakable once we demonstrate in the second part of this chapter that the critique of Derrida's transcendentalism or Foucault's empiricism cannot ultimately be maintained. How then are we to think and articulate the discrepancy between these two oeuvres?

In chapter 3 I suggest that it is ultimately a matter of the pursuit of two differing strategies of accounting for the relational which marks the divergence between Derrida and Foucault. Their ontological differences are tied to methodological ones. Like Nietzsche and Heidegger, both seek to perform a sort of meta-questioning which shifts the site of philosophical interrogation from the desire to order and organize to an analysis of the conditions which make particular orders or hierarchies possible. The Derridean formulation of aporia and the Foucaultian formulation of problematization are two competing modes through which these conditions are located and interrogated. Yet if we affirm that Derrida and Foucault posit two modes of questioning which move between the affirmation of a finite locus and a grander narrative which accounts for the conditions of possibility of order can an ethics be said to orient their own questions? That is to say, once we assert the impossibility of appropriating a pre-ordinal ground and thought appears limited to avowing the contingency of its conditions (as aporetic or problematic) then Derrida and Foucault appear to be left without any foundation by which relational existence can be negotiated.

These questions form the focus of chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 takes up Derrida's and Foucault's explicitly ethical works in order to examine the divergent ethico-political orientations they construct. By thinking a violence more pervasive than the empirical and which cannot be transcended both thinkers risk being incapable of identifying violence at all. The escape from this dilemma in both cases is grounded in an articulation of an economy of violence governed by two opposite poles of a better and a worse violence. This in turn provides a means by which the refusal of a non-violent standard or ground nevertheless provides an ethical orientation.

Chapter 5 engages with a series of questions related to the nature of politics which follow from what I suggest are two competing economies of violence which emerge from

Derrida's and Foucault's ethico-political orientations. Following the discussion of their divergent methodologies in chapter 3 and their distinct ethical orientations in chapter 4, this chapter explicitly takes up the central question posed at the outset; that of philosophy's relation to politics. This chapter examines the displacements of archipolitics each thinker develops in order to examine both how their correlative yet distinct ethical orientations constitute the political terrain upon which dominant logics or systems are to be resisted and how we are to think the disparity in the political strategies which their works evoke? Here, their incommensurability, elaborated throughout the thesis, is claimed to hold political import in itself. To the extent that Derrida's and Foucault's accounts are self-affirmingly finite and situated there is no position beyond the relational which they both seek to express from which the polemic between them can be decided. Their incommensurability points to a broader polemical/political space which cannot be described as such since it only emerges *between* Derrida and Foucault, confirmed only in the equality of their incommensurability, a polemical space that can only be inferred. The political must be seen as essentially polemical yet it must also be admitted that no single discourse can fully depict this polemical space since to do so is to restrict these polemics. Considering the political as polemical in these terms serves to introduce a notion of radical democracy. For if no single onto-perspectival theory can be said to depict the political as such, this also means that 'radical' democracy cannot be reduced to any such account. Accordingly, ontological incommensurability allows us to posit a notion of the democratic which is simply defined as being in excess of any of its particular descriptions. Any account of the democratic and by extension, of the relational will be exceeded by a democratic field in which it is enunciated. Philosophy is politicized, but also democratized.

Finally, chapter 6 asks if the schema of philosophy's relation to politics derived from the question of relation in Derrida and Foucault can be extended beyond the specificity of their 'onto-political' accounts? Is there a limit or paradox *internal* to Derrida and Foucault which allows us to construct a 'perspectival' schematic but marks these two thinkers as insufficient? Might a politics of *indetermining* or un-bonding the relational exhaust the political possibilities of a thought affirming its own relational status? Positing an engagement with recent political ontologies centered upon a notion of universalism, and Alain Badiou's work in particular, allows us to begin to outline the ways in which universalizing onto-political strategies might be amenable to the notions of polemics and



incommensurability developed through the work of Derrida and Foucault. Badiou's work certainly poses a challenge to the account of political thought developed in this thesis and it is through his work and that of others who share some of his fundamental critiques of post-foundationalism that the possibilities for broadening my concept of incommensurability might appear.

Such a project however, would have to proceed from out of the fundamental claims developed in this thesis. That is to say, through an analysis of the contingency of the relational that any account of determinate social relations itself proceeds from out of its situatedness within the determinate. By tracing a polemic between Derrida and Foucault in terms of their accounts of (de)politicization, the polemic between them is shown to result from their pursuit of two parallel yet radically incommensurable philosophico-strategic accounts of repoliticization. It is the question of relation which produces an analysis of their philosophical accounts of the political without effacing the fact that philosophy is in itself political, that is, inextricably tied to determinate relations. It is thus by tracing the polemic between Derrida and Foucault as two ways of thinking the event of the political that we can demonstrate that there exists a politicized or polemical space that exceeds their accounts and which appears only negatively – inferred at the points of their incommensurability. And it is this incommensurability itself which points to a broader account of the relational. In other words, if there is broad agreement among post-foundational thinkers of the polemical nature of all political concepts, then the object of debate should be transformed from the traditional question of the grounds of legitimacy to competing (and possibly incommensurable) accounts of the polemical; of the violence and determination of relationality itself.

### **Some Preliminary Qualifications**

With the exception of the first and last chapters, the scope of this thesis is defined by the construction of a continuous dialogue between Derrida and Foucault on a series of questions revolving around a focus on the political as the relational. This is not a stylistic decision but a methodological one insofar as it serves two fundamental conditions if my central claims are to be successful. First, the pursuit of a dialogue between them shows they construct similar and analogous philosophical and political orientations. Second, it demonstrates both the coherence and the equality of their work. As such, their mutual

critiques or what I will call circumscriptions of one another can be maintained only from within their particular 'grander' narratives. The polemic between them is irreducible insofar as each pursues a different and incommensurable 'grander' narrative which necessarily constitutes the other as having failed to affirm his position within this terrain. It is thus the moments where the dialogue between Derrida and Foucault breaks off, in the silence and incommensurability between them that a relational locus which exceeds both accounts and points to a perspectivism more radical than either thinker is able to affirm. It is a terrain visible only in the breakdown of dialogue.

If my hypothesis is correct and their works should be situated in a broader series of questions around relationality and political ontology why then privilege Derrida and Foucault as exemplars? Something more of the situatedness of my own project should be affirmed here. At the outset, this thesis began as an investigation of the status of the relational in Foucault's work. Motivated by dissatisfaction with recent critiques of Foucault's ethics often animated by Derridean concerns, a turn to the work of the latter was inevitable. Yet once I had turned to the question of the difference between Derrida and Foucault it became clear that their apparent incommensurability posed a problem and paradox which each chapter of this thesis can be understood as an attempt to grasp.

In a sense Derrida and Foucault are, it is my *hypothesis*, nevertheless only exemplars of a broader problematic of the finitude of relational ontologies. Yet, in a very Derridean sense, given the irreducibility of finitude which must accompany all accounts of relation, there can be no 'essence' of the relational which exceeds the status of the exemplary; any account of the relational as I describe it can only be partial. Thus, there is ultimately no philosophically legitimate reason why Derrida and Foucault should be chosen as exemplars. That being said, the primacy accorded to these two thinkers in this thesis issues from the explicit dialogue and polemic between them. The dialogue itself, obviously most pronounced in the cogito debate, is what first points us to the notion that the divergence between Derrida and Foucault suggests the possibility of beginning to think a concept of relation whose definition is initially limited to an affirmation of being in excess of both thinkers. It is in tracing the terms upon which they themselves see the interlocutor's work as inadequate which indicates the relational as it appears in the interstices between them. But then, where shall we begin? With the question of beginnings and origins and the authors of its most radical articulations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.

# Chapter 1: Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Question of Relation

*The aim is lacking. 'Why?' finds no answer.'*  
Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

*Man is like the rose. Without 'why?'*  
Friedrich Holderlin<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

If we begin with Nietzsche and Heidegger it is because they are both crucial to any attempt to think the question of relation. While their influence on Derrida and Foucault is immense my aim will not be to take its measure; I will not be trading in intellectual histories nor tracking influences. Rather, my concern here will be to begin to suggest what it might mean to think the relational and the paradoxes and challenges with which such a thought must engage. An encounter with Nietzsche and Heidegger is fundamental to such a task since both, perhaps more than any other thinkers, think the primacy of relations, that is, as prior to their terms. Nietzsche posits that the subject, identity and truth are preceded by an anterior field of relations between forces. Similarly, for Heidegger the subject's relation to the object or to others emerges from out of a primordial being-in-the-world. Anterior to the determinate is the unconcealing of Being; existence within a disclosed world is antecedent to any determinate relations within that world.

Moreover, both think relation as irreducibly violent. Nietzsche sets the origins of transcendent truths in a field of struggle while in Heidegger's lectures of the mid-1930s in particular, every ordering or determination is the result of an originary polemos. Crucially, both distinguish the violence of origins from what Nietzsche calls the will to truth, the desire for stability and security in first principles. Finally, both affirm the irreducible situatedness of thought. Both Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism and Heidegger's existential category of thrownness or facticity form attempts to think relation from within particular and determinate relations.

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. (Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale, trans.) New York: Vintage, 1968. [Hereafter referred to as 'WP.']. WP, p.9.

2 Quoted in Reiner Schurmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. (Christine-Marie Gros, Trans.) Bloomington, Indiana, UP, 1987. P.58

My aim in this chapter will be three-fold. First, I will begin to suggest, through readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, the terms by which an account of the political pursued through the question of relation proceeds and the types of questions and paradoxes which emerge from such a trajectory. Second, the Heideggerean encounter or *auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche is suggestive for my overall argument since it forms the model for Derrida's and Foucault's critiques of one another. Elucidating the form of what I will call Heidegger's 'circumscription' of Nietzsche within the limits of metaphysics is instructive since Derrida and Foucault effect similar moves on one another. Finally, Derrida's and Foucault's Nietzschean critiques of Heidegger and their evocations of a genealogical method point to the fundamental moment of convergence between them. It is in terms of their appropriations of Nietzschean genealogical themes that it is possible to show that these two thinkers share an ethico-political orientation which ultimately, makes a dialogue between them possible. We turn first to an account of Nietzschean genealogy.

### Nietzsche's Genealogy and Relationality

The *Genealogy of Morals* revolves around Nietzsche's distinction between two expressions of will to power which amount to two moral systems of differentiation; two systems of denoting actions and individuals deemed 'good' – admirable and praiseworthy – and their consonant opposites.<sup>3</sup> The moral system of the 'strong' masters with which *The Genealogy* opens is characterized by a naked will to power – a pre-reflective expulsion and experience of power. These 'noble' masters' will to power never met any impediments to its expression; they asserted their own goodness as an expression of strength prior to any measure by external criteria.<sup>4</sup> Moral differentiation was consequent to strength; those weak slaves, unable to assert their goals and desires directly, were only consequently labeled as 'bad.' Noble morality was a self-sufficient and affirmative one such that the nobles' self-differentiation was not constituted upon a relation of dependence to the weak. Each of the three essays of *The Genealogy of Morals* recounts the event, and continued implications of, the 'slave revolt' in morals whereby this noble and aristocratic distinction between good and bad is overturned through the emergence of a new system of differentiation: slave morality.

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3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality*. (Douglas Smith, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. [Hereafter referred to as 'GM.']

4 GM,I: 7

Nietzsche derives the origins of morality and metaphysics in the slaves' *ressentiment* against life and their vengeance against the nobles from what is a crucial supposition: metaphysical values are derived from a field of struggle. Morality is, as he puts it, "the doctrine of the relations of supremacy."<sup>5</sup> The erection of a system of moral values premised upon the principles of Judeo-Christian monotheism not only provided the instruments for a self-affirmation as a chosen people but also the construction of a metaphysical world that would allow the destruction of master morality. The slaves, Nietzsche argues, constructed a vision of the world that licensed and celebrated their own position and character while simultaneously branding the strong as evil.<sup>6</sup>

By assuming the irreducibility of struggle and violence, Nietzsche's questioning of the "value of values" returns metaphysics to the violent exclusions and dominations which he shows are concordant with the elevation of any system of values.<sup>7</sup> There is no single meaning of the good since any system of moral differentiation originates with social and political struggles. To claim that "[t]his world is the will to power – and nothing besides!" as Nietzsche does, implies that struggle and domination are inherent to every claim to truth.<sup>8</sup> Underlying Nietzsche's claim is a vision of the world as ephemeral, transitory and always in motion; a world composed of events and as nothing more than a "determination of degrees of relations of force."<sup>9</sup> The crime and error of Christian slave morality and metaphysics is thus to have sought to fix, determine and transcend this cosmological drama and so, to have "robbed of its innocence the whole purely chance character of events."<sup>10</sup> Slave morality functions as a 'herd' morality; it posits an 'other' "imaginary" world against which actions are measured and standards are developed to which all must conform.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, in opposition to the will to truth which characterizes slave morality, genealogy asserts the perspectival and partial nature of universalizing moral claims in order to cultivate a sense of their dubiousness and place their hegemony in question.<sup>12</sup>

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5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. (Walter Kaufman, trans.) New York: Vintage, 1996. [Hereafter referred to as 'BGE']. BGE:19.

6 GM,I:7

7 GM, P:6

8 WP, p.550

9 WP, p.552,

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. (Walter Kaufmann, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 13

11 cf. Daybreak:10

12 David Owen, *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. London: Acumen, 2007. P.46. Owen argues that the

Nietzsche interprets man in terms of nature; the subject, identity or agent are but effects of a surface of relations between forces. The will to power, Nietzsche argues, is continuous with, and defines life itself so that the function of a custom or institution are only markers of a will to power that has become master of something less powerful. All living creatures including humans are governed by a desire to express or discharge power.<sup>13</sup> Yet because humans are self-conscious creatures our will to power is never expressed directly but always mediated by particular perspectives through which we interpret and understand our power. Interpretation becomes central to the way we experience our own will to power. Accordingly, will to power can function as an evaluative standard, particular perspectives on the world can be evaluated in terms of the degree of enhanced potential of will to power which they allow us to experience and not the extent to which they correspond to reality. From this perspective herd or slave morality is made to appear destructive since its cardinal belief that the pain and suffering of existence is a punishment for sin and guilt represses will to power.<sup>14</sup>

### *Will to Truth*

The result of slave morality's victory over nobility is the dominance of a new mode of determining social relations. Nietzsche claims that the universalisation of values, necessary to maintain communal identity, was imposed through a form of relation between individual and community regulated and internalized through punishment. The imposition of stability and uniformity in the political sphere in turn formed the basis for a mode of relating to self and others mediated and determined by external measure or standard of universal law.<sup>15</sup> Social relations are stabilized and governed through a principle of self-denial constituted in the imposition of meaning upon existence in Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>16</sup> As such, the value and meaning of life is posited as transcending and independent of it. The desire to overcome suffering and domination is realized in the negation of existence which is seen as the source of misery. A will to power emerges which can only assert itself by denying and repressing itself. At the core of metaphysical

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burden of Nietzsche's claim does not lie with disproving metaphysics, the cultivation of doubt and skepticism is sufficient to begin to eliminate the *need* for metaphysical justifications.

13 BGE:13. See Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*. MIT: London, 1988. Chapter 4. See also Paul Patton "Power in Hobbes and Nietzsche." *Nietzsche, Feminism, Political Theory*. (Paul Patton, Ed.) London: Routledge, 1993. Pp.144-161.

14 BGE:202, 203.

15 GM, II:8

16 GM, II:7

life lies a 'will to truth': truth fulfills the demand for stability and security, it supplants the absence of any meaning of suffering by devaluing sensual life. Metaphysical ideals, Nietzsche argues, are "ideals which are all hostile to life, ideals that defame the world."<sup>17</sup> In short, for Nietzsche, man is enslaved to a myth of truth, a form of life that posits a realm external to it which then acts as its ground, a will to power which seeks to situate itself beyond all contradiction.<sup>18</sup>

If Nietzsche affirms that there is a will to power behind all values then by tracing their descent and their origins his genealogy seeks to undermine their universal and humanist pretensions.<sup>19</sup> The metaphysical move of positing local valuations as universal is de-stabilized if not displaced altogether. The meta-question of the value of values which animates genealogy is indeed a moral one; the *ethical* ideal of truth emerging from herd morality is the source of every ideal.<sup>20</sup> This ideal, which Nietzsche calls will to truth, is what Michel Haar refers to as the "moral prejudice of all knowledge."<sup>21</sup> There is a fundamental conviction "that truth is more important than anything else, than every other intention."<sup>22</sup> In short, this ethical ideal is defined by the *desire* for unity and identity over difference, dynamism and the play of forces and which in turn attempts to justify and explain the suffering of existence; a will which effaces the force, dynamism and difference at the origin of every metaphysical ideal.

### *Ontology, Epistemology and Ethics*

Does Nietzsche's genealogy exceed or transgress the will to truth? Is it too subject to the same desire for truth? Any response to this question must begin by asserting that there is a perfect continuity between Nietzsche's account of the will to power and of perspectivism. If life is will to power "*and nothing besides!*" as Nietzsche asserts, then the values of identity, stability and universality both repress the inherent force or power of knowledge and the necessarily perspectival nature of that account. No concept is total or free of perspective since every concept originates from out of the play of differences

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17 GM, II:24

18 Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language." *The New Nietzsche*. (David B. Allison, Ed.). Pp.5-36. P.18

19 Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp.125-6

20 GM, P:6; Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language." P.18

21 *Ibid.*

22 GS: 344.

between forces. "Perspectival seeing", Nietzsche says, "is the *only* kind of knowing."<sup>23</sup> The will to power as play of appearances is a dynamism that eludes identification by stable concepts or the essence of Being.<sup>24</sup>

An immediate continuity relates the ontological assertion of life as will to power to the epistemological assertion that all knowledge is perspectival. Any recognition of life as a phenomenon includes a recognition of the violent and arbitrary character of life and the partial, violent character of all knowledge. Since there is an indefinite play of forces it follows that there is an indefinite number of interpretations.<sup>25</sup> It is in this perspectival account that Nietzsche asserts, if not introduces a central insight to the question of relation: that the affirmation of relationality provokes and is inseparable from a reflection on thought's point of departure.

In this way the relation between Nietzsche's account of will to power and his affirmation of perspectivism points to a 'paradox' which exceeds the confines of Nietzsche's work to affect in some sense all post-foundational thought: if all knowledge is affirmed as perspectival, as originating from out of determinate relations and thus partial, then it seems to follow that there can be no privileged position from which the 'grander' account of will to power can be derived. To put it bluntly, if everything is affirmed as an interpretation, then it appears that the account of life as will to power too must be affirmed as such – as violent and partial event. Accordingly, there is, as Jean Granier notes, an apparent oscillation between Nietzsche's affirmation of perspectivism and the identity of some definite knowledge.<sup>26</sup> However, from this apparent circularity we should not derive Habermas' conclusion that Nietzsche, like the supposed 'young conservatives' who follow him, is guilty of self-referentiality insofar as the account of perspectivism seems to exclude the possibility of providing an account of will to power as such.<sup>27</sup> The claim that will to power and perspectivism are contradictory formulations only makes sense if one excludes the possibility that Nietzsche can inhabit a position *between* a particular perspective and a 'grander' 'ontological' narrative about life itself as preservation

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23 GM, III:12

24 Jean Granier, "Perspectivism and Interpretation." *The New Nietzsche*. Pp.190-200. P.191.

25 GS: 374

26 Jean Granier. "Perspectivism and Interpretation." P.197

27 Jurgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. (Frederick Lawrence, Trans.) Cambridge: Polity, 1990. p.74



and overcoming. The claim of vicious circularity between perspectivism and will to power first countenanced by both Walter Kaufmann and Arthur Danto and seized upon by Habermas relies upon the false assumption that Nietzsche's position would have to be extra-perspectival in seeking to account for the conditions of all perspectives themselves.<sup>28</sup>

For any thought which reflects upon its point of departure, upon its being-historical and being-relational such an oscillation between particular and 'grander' narrative is not only not vicious, it is absolutely irreducible. As Clive Cazeaux suggests, the critical appraisal of circularity or contradiction in Nietzsche relies on a particular understanding of 'ontology,' one which Nietzsche himself denies.<sup>29</sup> Kaufmann, Danto and Habermas all appear to imply that will to power refers to a fundamental realm of beings or things in themselves beyond appearances and independent of context.<sup>30</sup> Yet Nietzsche does not assert that knowledge must be of the object in itself or independent of context, he is totally consistent in claiming that knowledge is always relational and as such, never total or necessary. Will to power is, as Tracy Strong argues, a form-giving force: knowledge is a mode of will to power and thus, immanent to what it describes.<sup>31</sup> Or, as Diana Coole puts it, "will to power is not an origin but interpretation and becoming."<sup>32</sup> There is no in-itself of will to power, there are only violent and partial interpretations of it each of which is but its expression.

Understanding will to power in these terms may not free Nietzsche from the paradox of circularity but my claim is that there need not be a burden on it to do so. This argument is confirmed by a number of Nietzsche's interpreters who argue that genealogy need not refer its account to an ultimate ground but rather, that comparisons and evaluations can be made between perspectives on the basis of criteria which they share.<sup>33</sup> Points of reference can be asserted as neutral insofar as they are internal to two or more perspectives. For Maudemarie Clark these 'neutral' criteria are located in relevant beliefs

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28 Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1950. P.176, Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005. P.62 This common claim uniting these thinkers is pointed to by Clive Cazeaux in his *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy: From Kant to Derrida*. London: Routledge, 2007.

29 Clive Cazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy*. P.109

30 *Ibid*.

31 Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*. London: U of California Press, 1976. P.233-4

32 Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism*. London: Routledge, 2000. P.102

33 I owe this point to Clive Cazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy*. P.109

which differing perspectives share.<sup>34</sup> For David Owen, will to power, which he conceives as an expression of agency, is both internal to but also exceeds metaphysics since it succeeds in coherently supplying the conditions for metaphysical assertions and beliefs.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein John Richardson argues that the preservation of ambiguity between wills acts as a measure of the will to power which can cross different perspectives; in fact, it is the aptitude for crossing and multiplying perspectives which signals health.<sup>36</sup> Thus, as Nietzsche puts it,

"the more feelings about a matter which we allow to come to expression, the more eyes, different eyes through which we are able to view this same matter, the more complete our 'conception' of it, our 'objectivity', will be."<sup>37</sup>

For all of the above thinkers will to power is ultimately just a 'better' perspective because it is successful in explaining and evaluating given cultural practices thus circumscribing them in its terms and in affirming its own perspectival character.

Ultimately, the circularity between ontology and epistemology, between Nietzsche's perspective(s) and the grander narrative of will to power can be neither arrested nor circumvented. Yet the claim being pursued here is that this circle should be seen neither as vicious and contradictory nor as marking the ultimate incoherence of genealogy. Rather, its circularity forms the necessarily *ethical* affirmation of genealogy – Nietzsche's, but also, as we will see in chapter 4, Derrida's and Foucault's – insofar as it affirms its own relational status. Genealogy affirms its origins in relations of force and struggle and so relinquishes the claim to a totalizing knowledge. This affirmation of situatedness forms what Charles Scott calls the ethical 'recoil' of the genealogical discourse insofar as its apparent circularity allows it to resist "authoritatively reestablish[ing] itself."<sup>38</sup> In their circularity the authority of Nietzsche's narratives always recoils back onto them so that their authority is undermined.<sup>39</sup> Like any perspective genealogy is a determinate expression of force yet in affirming itself as such it is, to paraphrase Derrida, a 'weak force.'<sup>40</sup> Genealogy's capacity to exceed the will to truth is thus not limited to its

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34 Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. P.141

35 David Owen, *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. P.33, 46.

36 John P. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. P.279-280

37 GM III:12

38 Charles E. Scott, *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. P.15

39 *Ibid.* p.16

40 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays On Reason*. (Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Trans.). Stanford:

production of a narrative which relegates the latter to an anterior field of forces since in confirming its own particularity it refuses to ground the legitimacy and authority of its assertions. Knowledge, in other words, is not divorced from power. Yet there is also a moment in Nietzsche's work where this incessant self-undermining is disavowed. In his call for a 'grand' politics Nietzsche succumbs to the philosophical desire to legislate the political.

*'Grand Politics' and the Failure to Recoil*

Nietzsche premises the potential for an overcoming of herd morality in the formation of a 'sovereign individual' with the capacity to posit his own values: an individual with the power to appeal to himself rather than universal values as ultimate authority. It is in this sense that he calls upon humanity to "*become those we are* – human beings who are unique, incomparable."<sup>41</sup> Such an individual would mark a new 'health,' a being who would require no metaphysical grounds or security to justify the meaning of existence, an individual who would not require certainty as a condition of the good and of happiness, who would take pleasure in the instability and flux of existence. We would become those who "who give themselves laws, and create themselves."<sup>42</sup>

Just as a hierarchical slave society produced a peculiar herd morality, Nietzsche thinks a new 'morality' of sovereignty will arise out of a new organization of society – of a new pathos of distance. In this sense, Nietzsche's great error is to have tied the possibility of self-overcoming to the institution of a hierarchical and aristocratically structured society. Nietzsche is generally unequivocal: the potential for the production of a sovereign individual rests upon the insular function of an unbridgeable chasm between the perpetually weak that require metaphysical comforts to support life and the few strong individuals who can affirm life as it is. The legitimacy of an order of rank is derived from the restrictions herd morality places upon individual difference; a universalizing morality, Nietzsche argues, is "detrimental for the higher men."<sup>43</sup> He seeks a new form of society wherein the strong would act as "commanders and legislators," as creators of value for those lacking the power to do so.<sup>44</sup> Great individuals would both exceed herd morality

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Stanford UP, 2005. [Hereafter referred to as 'RO'].

41 GS, 335

42 GS, 335, 347

43 BGE 228

44 BGE 211

and form its values.<sup>45</sup> The possibility of sovereignty is balanced upon the dream of constituting a new order of rank in the form of the philosopher's (the 'free spirit's') legislation of political conditions that would guarantee the permanent enhancement of humanity.<sup>46</sup> The formation of a hierarchical society grounded in the pathos of distance is a necessary 'hygienic' principle, a chasm between healthy and sick for the overcoming of the herd.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche's 'grand politics' is thus premised on a vision of what Keith Ansell-Pearson describes as a culture of artist-tyrants for whom man is the material to be sculpted.<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche's politics thus rests on a paradox: society is delivered from the corrosion of the will to truth only by those individuals who can effect a break from it.<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche both champions but undermines his own ideal. The creator of values encourages others to become sovereign yet in commanding obedience forms blind followers.<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche's 'grand politics' posit the conditions for a non-metaphysical life yet the legislation of these conditions is itself metaphysical.

The problem of Nietzsche's grand politics points to the broader question which post-foundational political thought must face: the attempt to think a politics in excess of the will to truth or will to foundation always risks repeating the foundational move insofar as it fails to recoil upon its own authority. While Nietzsche's thought certainly opens the question of relation in positing the absence of permanent grounds, it frequently finds itself caught in the binary typology of weak and strong which he finds at the origins of morality. The question of the empirical conditions which originally form the moral differentiation between strong and weak is never fully exceeded. Debates around so-called 'post-structuralist' politics have often centered upon the problem of recoil – how can a politics be constructed around an affirmation of finitude? Moreover, the question becomes even more urgent when we posit it in terms of the divergence that occurs when, as we will see in the case of Derrida and Foucault, finitude and recoil is expressed in seemingly incommensurable terms. The competing notions of ethical recoil and the fields in which they are inscribed are both constitutive of Derrida's and Foucault's 'grand' narratives but also form the conditions of their polemic and their

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45 This is a central theme in Daniel Conway's *Nietzsche and the Political*. London: Routledge, 1997.

46 BGE 216, 257; Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*. P.6

47 GMII,16

48 Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*. p.149

49 Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*. P.10

50 *Ibid*.

incommensurability. Yet it is Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, his circumscription of the latter within the horizon of metaphysics, which forms the model for their reciprocal critiques and it is to this reading to which we now turn.

## Heidegger and the Determination of Relation

If I am correct in arguing that relation emerges and is affirmed as a central question in Nietzsche's genealogy and that there is a consequent disavowal of this question in his 'grand politics' then Heidegger can be seen to extend this disavowal to Nietzsche's work as a whole. The disavowal and determination of relation is not limited for Heidegger to the philosophical desire for a society of rank but infects all of Nietzsche's thought.<sup>51</sup> For Heidegger, Nietzsche's overcoming of metaphysics remains grounded in the subject's legislation of the world which prevails in modernity. Despite extending across almost thirty years and amounting to over one thousand pages of essays and lecture transcripts, there is a unique question at the core of the wide scope of Heidegger's readings of Nietzsche, revolving around the status of Being in Nietzsche's attempt to overcome metaphysics. Heidegger claims Nietzsche's overcoming of metaphysics ultimately fails, for while the 'revaluation of all values' may have opened metaphysics to the nihilism which lies at its essence, it nonetheless marks the exhaustion of the metaphysical desire for ground. It is the 'medium' of differentiation, the locus through which relations are determined which Heidegger argues Nietzsche fails to think – that is, the unconcealing or disclosedness of Being. It is an explication of Heidegger's understanding of Being that we will now pursue before a closer analysis of his relation to Nietzsche.

### *Heidegger, Being and the Determination of Relation*

In *Being and Time* Heidegger describes truth in the following terms: "the uncoveredness of entities within-the-world is *grounded* in the world's disclosedness. But disclosedness is that basic character of Dasein according to which it is its 'there.'"<sup>52</sup> For

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51 Heidegger sees Nietzsche's 'grand politics' as expressing the more fundamental ontological principle of will to power and as such are not central to his 'metaphysical' reading. cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*. (David Farrell Krell, Ed.) (Frank A. Capuzzi et. al., Trans.) San Francisco: Harper, 1987. [Hereafter referred to as 'N3'], P.151.

52 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Trans.) London: Blackwell, 1962. [Hereafter referred to as 'BT']. P.263

Heidegger, anterior to any determinate relation between a subject and an object or any theoretical abstraction is our primordial Being-in-the-world. As such, objects and others emerge primordially in a web of functional relations or what in *Being and Time* Heidegger calls a "totality of involvements" which together reveal the 'worldhood' of the world.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, the positing of an objective and determinate relation to objects or others to be judged or evaluated by a subject always already presupposes a prior 'disclosure' of the world through Dasein's specific actions and involvements. Anterior to any position or perspective upon the world, the world is 'existed', not as a separate object over a subject, but as a totality of involvements. Dasein, in short, discloses Being in its being-in-the-world, in its everyday involvements in the 'Da' ('there') in which it dwells.<sup>54</sup>

In this sense Heidegger is, I suggest, a thinker of relation – our very existence within a disclosed world is anterior to any particular relations within that world. Crucial to his understanding of relation is Heidegger's notion of 'thrownness.' Dasein, he argues in *Being and Time*, is 'thrown' into or "delivered over" to its possibilities and thus, to its Being.<sup>55</sup> As such, existence always already finds itself in the world in a particular way. To be always already in-the-world is to already have an implicit understanding of Being as a mode of existence and to already interpret experience according to the "mood" into which one is thrown.<sup>56</sup> Dasein is always already in Being and so Being is always already in question.<sup>57</sup> Insofar as this question cannot be abstracted from a particular relational existence to be grounded in a substantive foundation (man, consciousness, subject, etc.), Heidegger thus seeks to delineate the locus of thought – *Being and Time* outlines the 'existential categories' through which Being is thought as Being, that is, of the essential structures of the primordial 'there' of existence anterior to its particular determinations.

The basic structure of human existence is not conceived in terms of concepts or rules but the way in which Dasein exists and the way the world is disclosed through its existence. This locus is defined as the temporal 'stretch' between the horizon of Dasein's being-thrown into a particular Being-in-the-world and its 'projection' of itself upon the

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53 BT, p.189; I owe the term 'worldhood' to Charles Guignon, "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. (Charles Guignon, Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. Pp.1-41. See p.10.

54 cf. BT, p.32

55 BT, p.174

56 BT, p.32

57 BT, p.32

things of its everyday concern. Dasein, in other words, is always projecting from a past to a future.<sup>58</sup> Thus, any determination or truth proposed about the world, any account of subjectivity and any particular positing of a perspective are for Heidegger derivative of the primordial disclosedness of the world to temporal and finite Dasein. While in Heidegger's work after *Being and Time*, the absolute centrality of Dasein is partially displaced by an account of the history of the different modes of the world's disclosure or 'unconcealment' this notion of the temporality and finitude of existence would remain central. Moreover, it is through this later historical and epochal understanding of unconcealment that Heidegger circumscribes Nietzsche within the limits of metaphysics and it is a closer analysis of its terms that we will now seek to elucidate.

For Heidegger, metaphysics is the history of the 'forgetting' of Being enacted in the determination and grounding of existence in first principles or *arkhe*.<sup>59</sup> That is, metaphysics encompasses all modes of inquiry that have attempted to account for and produce a determining rule for all entities in the world.<sup>60</sup> Any metaphysical 'grounding' of Being (in *Idea*, first cause, subject, etc.) is accomplished by forgetting the question of Being, in forgetting the mode in which the world is disclosed anterior to any derivative account of what 'is.' Anterior to any metaphysical experience of the world is the unconcealment of Being itself. Metaphysics occurs as a series of historical modes of the reduction of Being – of what 'is' – to its determination as the most general quality of beings or entities (a move which Heidegger in the Nietzsche lectures and elsewhere calls 'beingness'). In conceiving Being in terms of what is present or as presence, the *presencing* of Being is forgotten. The formation of general rules about the realm of the unconcealed fails to think unconcealment as such – the sheer fact that things are and the mode in which they come to be. As Heidegger puts it, "inasmuch as Being is put in question with a view to the *arche*, Being is itself already determined."<sup>61</sup> In other words, metaphysics reifies the structures of logos as presence and thus, forgets the always located existence or 'Da' from which any notion of logic, judgment or perspective emerges.

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58 BT, p.185

59 See for instance Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. (Trans. David Farrell Krell). Harper: San Francisco, 1984. [Hereafter referred to as 'N2']. P.188. See also "The Age of the World Picture." *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (Trans. William Lovitt). London: Harper, 1977.

60 N2, p.187

61 N2, p.188

Rather than take the structures of system, logic or categories as present and determined in advance, Heidegger returns 'logos' to the temporal event and spatial 'there' of its determination. Anterior to any determinate relational system is the event of determination itself. It is this account of event which is instructive for post-foundational thought insofar as it calls for, explicitly in much of Heidegger's work of the 1930s, a re-articulation of the political itself. Heidegger contrasts the event of determination to any determinate rationality or politics and thus, inaugurates the distinction, operative in much of contemporary political theory between the 'political' as paradigmatic event and 'politics' as determinate everyday practices which occur within its horizons.<sup>62</sup> Like Nietzsche though in very different terms, Heidegger's understanding of the political will affirm the inescapability of violence and struggle in the origin. It is with these themes in mind that we now move to discuss Heidegger's account of originary violence in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

### *Heidegger's Polis*

In attempting to renew the question of Being which he argues has been occluded and disavowed by the whole philosophical tradition since Plato, Heidegger turns to the pre-Socratics with whom he claims the metaphysical question originates. As Heidegger puts it in a later essay, "the essence of all history [*Geschichte*] is determined from the Greek 'destining'" and so our experience is still derived from this originary one.<sup>63</sup> The pre-Socratics experienced the originary event of the determination of Being and thus, the "basic traits" of the Greek world, "though distorted and repressed, displaced and covered up, still sustain our world."<sup>64</sup> In other words, the pre-Socratics inaugurate what in *The Contributions* Heidegger calls the 'first inception' of metaphysics insofar as they held an originary experience of Being in relation to which we stand in a long decline.<sup>65</sup>

The 1935 essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art' exemplifies Heidegger's

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62 See for instance Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger (Contestations)*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1993, and Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*. Marchart argues that the 'political difference' is operative in all post-foundational thought.

63 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology." *Basic Writings*. (David Farrell Krell, Ed.) (William Lovitt, Trans.) London: Routledge. Pp.307-342. P.329.

64 *Ibid.* P.96

65 cf. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. See also Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. (Gregory Fried & Richard Polt, Trans.) New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. [Hereafter referred to as 'IM']. P.136



understanding of the generative and productive inception of Being in its account of the artwork as constituted in the 'strife' between concealment or 'earth' and unconcealment or 'world.' Much as it does in *Being and Time*, for the later Heidegger world refers to the horizon or clearing in which and as which Being takes place. Yet, insofar as world is always temporally and spatially situated it is never totally transparent, the openness of Dasein's finite Being-in-the-world emerges from an 'earth' which cannot be grounded because its 'giving' is the ground of intelligibility and thus appears only as "undisclosable."<sup>66</sup> Thus, as Heidegger puts it in 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' "[t]ruth is un-truth insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the uncovered, in the sense of concealment."<sup>67</sup> The artwork's significance for Heidegger lies in what he views as its power to disclose the world; to 'gather' and hold together, it sets up a world against the contrast of the earth from which it is torn, it is a being through which Being is disclosed or held open.<sup>68</sup> At the centre of the event of the inception of the world is polemos or 'originary struggle' between world and earth. "Struggle," Heidegger says, "first projects and develops the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought."<sup>69</sup>

Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, delivered the same year as 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' broadens and extends the analysis of originary polemos or strife developed in the latter text. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger sets out to think the originary violence of the opening of world against earth through the question of the polis conceived as the event of determination anterior to any determinate politics. Rather than displace the claims of the 'artwork' essay, he extends them. That is to say, the polis is not reduced to its traditional conception as made up of political institutions and citizens but includes "the gods, the temples, the priests, the festivals, the games, the poets, the thinkers, the ruler, the council of elders, the assembly of the people, the army and the fleet."<sup>70</sup> Every ordering, every emergence of a world is inherently violent insofar as it is the product of 'originary struggle' and it is this originary violence which Heidegger conceives as the 'essence' of the political anterior to both its metaphysical determination by political philosophy or any determinate politics.

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66 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. London: Harper, 1975. P.47

67 *Ibid.* P.60

68 *Ibid.* P.46-7.

69 IM, p.65

70 IM, p.163

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in attempting to think originary polemos Heidegger turns to Sophocles' *Antigone* (lines 332-75). Man is described as 'uncanny' (*deinon*) in the *Antigone* chorus, Heidegger argues, because in revealing or gathering the world his *techne* or knowledge involves "looking out beyond what, in each case, is directly present-at-hand [given as determinate]."<sup>71</sup> Man's uncanniness results from *techne*'s violent seizing and "setting" of Being from the overwhelming power of nature or *physis*.<sup>72</sup> Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek notion of *dike* is central to understanding what he means here. *Dike*, Heidegger claims, did not signify justice for the Greeks as is usually thought but rather what he refers to as "joint and structure."<sup>73</sup> *Dike* is the revealing of common ordering or primordial structuring of the world, the interpretative whole into which *Dasein* is thrown and from which it uncovers its being-in-the-world. Man's *techne* searches out or attacks beyond the power of the given, yet he nevertheless always finds himself thrown into a polemos between the ordering power of *dike* and the violence of his *techne*. It is in this polemos between the power of ordering and man's transgression of any given order that Heidegger views the uncanniness of man in terms of his "overstep[ing] the limits of the homely" to bring the uncanny itself into the open.<sup>74</sup> Man is thrown into an overpowering *dike* from out of and against which he enters into a polemos with Being, between the violence of his knowledge and work and the overpowering order of the world there occurs a "violent taming of the violent."<sup>75</sup>

With this understanding of *dike* and *techne* in mind, Heidegger interprets the pre-Socratic understanding of Being as *physis* which he translates as "emerging-abiding sway."<sup>76</sup> Being was understood as an "overpowering power" anterior to any determination, which is to say, "not yet mastered in thought."<sup>77</sup> As uncanny, man 'gathers' and brings Being into the open yet in turn is exposed to the power of Being as *physis*. The pre-Socratics understood that man does not and cannot "subdue" or master Being in opening the world; his finitude precludes the possibility of mastering the earth.<sup>78</sup> As such, at the point at which man posits himself in the midst of Being his stand against the power of

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71 IM, p.169. One should note that *techne* is broadly understood by Heidegger as making or work but also as knowledge.

72 IM, pp.170-1

73 IM, p.171

74 IM, p.161

75 IM, p.172

76 cf. IM, p.11

77 IM, p.61

78 IM, pp.167-171

nature simultaneously reveals the unmasterability of nature. Man's finitude, his 'unhomeliness' is revealed in his polemos with Being since it confirms the absence of any absolute or necessary ordering.<sup>79</sup>

If Heidegger's account of the polis as the site of this originary polemos appears abstract and far from political-philosophical questions, it is because it marks a revolutionary re-articulation of the political itself, one with which all post-foundational political thought must contend. Heidegger thinks the essence of the polis as an event of violent ordering anterior to any particular determinate order.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Greek polis is not to be understood as a city-state but as the historical site of the ordering of the world in originary violence.<sup>81</sup> The significance of the polis in Heidegger's interpretation is its status as the site or 'pole' of this violent originary differentiation. According to Heidegger, Greek 'political' experience was grounded in the abyssal and violent 'truth' of Being; the Greeks experienced the originary and irreducible polemos at the core of every founding or ordering gesture.<sup>82</sup> It is polemos, Heidegger says, which "allows what essentially unfolds to step apart into opposition, first allows position and status and rank... In con-frontation, world comes to be."<sup>83</sup> Crucial to Heidegger's understanding of the political is the distinction between inaugural and empirical violence, for while empirical violence may or may not occur, it is inaugural violence which opens the possibility of the empirical.<sup>84</sup>

### *Nietzsche, Metaphysics and Nihilism*

While the status of the pre-Socratic origin lies in its opening or disclosing of the world, metaphysics is for Heidegger the history of 'forgetting' or "turning away" from this originary truth of Dasein's relation to Being.<sup>85</sup> Thought disavows originary polemos by determining existence via principles or *arche* and thus fails to think the unconcealment or event which gives order itself.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, it is the shift in modernity to a determination of the meaning of Being through 'man' or subject through which Heidegger reads

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79 IM, p.171, 177,179

80 Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*. London: Routledge, 1997. P.115

81 IM, p.162

82 IM, p.179

83 IM, p.65

84 See John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*. P.112. See also Slavoj Zizek's *Violence*. London: Verso, 2008, discussed in chapter 4.

85 cf. IM, p.154

86 cf. N2, p.188

Nietzsche. In modernity man assumes centrality as the being from out of whose representation things find their meaning, Being is nothing more than an object of representation for a subject.<sup>87</sup> Man appears as the being who gives measure and who regulates all that is; he secures, organizes and articulates the world.<sup>88</sup> While Heidegger argues this subjectivist metaphysics originates with Descartes, it is Nietzsche whom he situates not at the overcoming, but as the culmination of this process of determining and abandoning Being – Nietzsche's thought is the final expression of metaphysics.

Heidegger's circumscription of Nietzsche within the end of metaphysics occurs through two distinct moves. First, he adopts Nietzsche's formulation of the inherent nihilism of metaphysics: "that the uppermost values devalue themselves, that all goals are annihilated, and that all estimates of value collide against one another."<sup>89</sup> Each decline of a suprasensory authority only effects the rise of another which itself is destined to fall.<sup>90</sup> It is only with Nietzsche's death of God that this process is arrested and metaphysics reaches a point where "nothing more remains to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself."<sup>91</sup> Each authority or centre is grounded on an abyss; the truth of metaphysics is nihilism, yet the death of God marks the collapse of the possibility of all arche and thus, opens metaphysics onto its own implicit logic. Second, Heidegger confines Nietzsche's notion of overcoming within the margins of the history of the metaphysical. If Heidegger will admit the Nietzschean conception of nihilism, he nevertheless thinks Nietzsche's death of God to be the consummate moment in the history of the forgetting of Being. The killing of God, Heidegger argues, is the 'destined' disempowering of the suprasensory world which is fully internal to the metaphysical logic of the forgetting Being. Nietzsche might articulate nihilism yet he never thinks its essence. Heidegger characterizes Nietzsche's attempt to form a new principle of valuation in the will to power as still metaphysical and Nietzsche as "the last metaphysician of the West."<sup>92</sup> In a sense then, Heidegger places Nietzsche within the very limits of metaphysics which the former had himself drawn.

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87 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture." *The Question Concerning Technology*. P.127

88 *Ibid.*, p.134

89 Martin Heidegger. *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*. (Trans. David Farrell Krell) San Francisco: Harper, 1977. [Hereafter referred to as 'N1'] P.156-7

90 Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: God is Dead." *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (William Lovitt, Trans.) London: Harper, 1977. [Hereafter referred to as 'NW'] P.61

91 NW, p.61

92 N3, p.8; N1, p.4

### *The Will to Power as Metaphysics*

In Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche's notion of life as a will to power which always strives to its preservation and enhancement forms the ground of the latter's overcoming of metaphysics.<sup>93</sup> Insofar as it is the preservation and enhancement of life whereby limits are placed upon the essential chaos of life only to be exceeded, will to power forms a new principle of valuation wherein "values are the conditions of itself posited by the will to power."<sup>94</sup> The essence of will to power is value itself insofar as the will to power is both what posits values and it is the principle of the revaluation of all values, yet because it exists only to overcome itself, beings have value only insofar as they are a condition of the expansion of the will to power.<sup>95</sup> The will to power, Heidegger says, becomes in Nietzsche the fundamental trait of all existence as a "will to will" more of itself.<sup>96</sup> Will to power's indefinite desire for expansion acts as the ground of all existence. Beings are evaluated and determined insofar as they form the conditions for the preservation and overcoming of the will.

Will to power can only act as the ground of forming values, Heidegger says, if the question of Being is abandoned and forgotten.<sup>97</sup> Will to power is thus nihilistic; it thinks the truth of the totality of beings (of beingness) and not Being itself. It forms the final expression of a metaphysical humanism in the form of an ontological doctrine of becoming and overcoming which evaluates and organizes the world in terms of its own desire for expansion.<sup>98</sup> Will to power is a humanist doctrine insofar as it represents a subject's desire to impose beingness upon Being.<sup>99</sup> In this sense, Nietzsche will always place the totality of what is within the confines of a single principle; the subject's self-preservation and enhancement. This totalizing condition inherent to all subjectivity is taken by Heidegger to lie in what he calls 'justice.'

### *Heidegger's Circumscription of Nietzsche*

Heidegger locates in Nietzsche the Cartesian theme of the search for something unconditional and fixed upon which to ground Being insofar as the intelligibility of all

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93 NW, p.75

94 NW, p.75

95 N1, pp.18-24; N3, pp.196-7.

96 NW, p.79

97 NW, p.75

98 NW, p.77

99 cf. N2, p.202

beings is defined as that which can be presented to a representing subject. While Nietzsche rejects the notion of a unitary, self-appropriating subject, Heidegger maintains that Nietzsche's account of subjectivity as the desire for certainty is still caught within the ambit of this question. That is, in Nietzsche the determination of the totality of beings may no longer be sought in the "cognitive subject" but through the self as body, drives and forces, yet he still determines the totality of beings purely in terms of whatever the subject as a collection of drives can re-present to itself as the condition for its own willing and self-overcoming.<sup>100</sup> Heidegger argues that the notion of 'justice' acts as the prior condition for knowledge in both the Cartesian search for certainty and Nietzsche's will to power.<sup>101</sup> In contrast to Heidegger's account of *dike* as the overpowering of ordering itself, metaphysics thinks justice or justification as judgment, certainty or assertion which determine in advance the structure of the world. Justice, in contrast to *dike*, forgets the violent opening of world.

The Nietzschean condition of justice as Heidegger understands it exceeds the modern desire for definitive and permanent security because in the doctrine of perspectivism it does not posit a single principle of security but rather the desire for security as such. Consequently, will to power as justice defines, without exceeding, the principle of determining Being for a subject: "[j]ustice is a passage *beyond* previous perspectives, a passage that posits viewpoints."<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche's perspectivism exceeds and undoes previous metaphysical claims by showing them to be perspectives yet Heidegger argues it nevertheless functions as a derivative determination of Being since it is a principle which determines as preservation and enhancement the mode in which things appear for the subject.<sup>103</sup> Truth is reduced to the demand for presence by a willing subject for whom the world becomes an object posited for its self-overcoming. Nietzsche thus remains within the bounds of a metaphysics of subjectivity even if the sovereign individual exceeds the terms of a certitude grounded upon a mental substance. Once Nietzsche determines truth as what serves the interests of the human will, subjectivist logic is brought to its final nihilistic conclusion.

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100 Robert Sinnerbink, "We Hyperboreans: Platonism and Politics in Heidegger and Nietzsche."

*Contretemps*.No.3 July, 2002. P.164

101 N3, p.239-40

102 N3, p.245

103 N3, p.236

Once the metaphysics of subjectivity culminate with Nietzsche, Heidegger argues the question of Being is forgotten and beings reach the status of 'resources' for the amplification of the will to power. All beings, including human beings, come to exist for the modern will in terms of its capacity for mastery and control in the mode of what Heidegger in 'The Question Concerning Technology' calls "standing-reserve."<sup>104</sup> In other words, the world is ordered according to the infinite desire for the will to augment itself. In determining man as "the relational centre of that which is as such" Nietzsche always determines relation in advance.<sup>105</sup> Dasein's relations to the world and to others are always determined by the will's unlimited power to calculate, plan and mold all things, relations are not seen to exceed but rather, are dispensed from the subject.<sup>106</sup> Thus, in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche the refusal of the question of relation traverses all of Nietzsche's thought. The self as self-willing absolute subject exists prior to and determines its relations to the world.

The strategy by which Heidegger's encounter with Nietzsche proceeds is what I call 'circumscription' and it is one which I will claim Derrida and Foucault pursue against one another. In shifting the articulation of what 'is' or what happens from a narrative of will to power to Being as unconcealing the definition of metaphysics and nihilism too is modified from man's enslavement to his own myths to the 'forgetting' of disclosedness. Metaphysics is not overcome by Nietzsche, Heidegger claims, since he only repeats the metaphysical gesture of determining Being as presence. While Nietzsche recognized the nihilism inherent to metaphysics in terms of the impossibility for any value to ground existence permanently and the absence of any transcendent realm which would give life meaning, he did not himself exceed this nihilism. As such, rather than enacting an opening to the question of the self's relations to others, Nietzsche's thought acts to determine relation in advance. For Heidegger there is no breach effected onto the question but rather, the metaphysical gesture of determining the self's relations to others culminates in Nietzsche's thinking. Accordingly, in shifting the limits of metaphysics exterior to will to power Heidegger views Nietzsche as caught within it, as having failed to think the point of departure and situatedness of his own thought.

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104 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology." *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. p.17

105 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture." P.128

106 *Ibid.*, p.135

## *Heidegger's Politics*

Both Derrida and Foucault, like many of their contemporaries, implicitly or explicitly appropriate the Heideggerean theme of determination. They proceed from the basic premise that any order or field of determinate relations is effected by an anterior event(s). Thus, like Heidegger, both think *arche* or grounds as effected by an anterior determination; thought 'takes place' in a 'medium' which exceeds it and which cannot be reduced to thought.<sup>107</sup> Both follow Heidegger in shifting the ground of questioning from how an order is or can be grounded to the event of ordering itself. For both, thought has an 'other' or 'outside' which is anterior to thought such that thrownness is irreducible.<sup>108</sup> Any questioning always begins from wherever it is thrown and can never totally exceed those relations. Yet Derrida and Foucault both see Heidegger's search for a 'proper' or originary determination of Being, one that leads him back to what he thinks is the event of the inception of metaphysics among the pre-Socratics as illegitimately attempting to absolutely 'differentiate' Being or unconcealing from its relation to a particular being. Ultimately, they imply that Heidegger seeks to transcend thrownness. The attempt to accede to an originary presencing and determination of Being is inescapably haunted and contaminated by the ontic or empirical determinations from which it proceeds. It is this desire for the proper – not bound or contaminated by any ontical or empirical determinations – which marks the ultimately metaphysical refusal in Heidegger.

*Being and Time* is organized around an understanding of an inauthentic Dasein who's essential being-in-the-world into which it is thrown is a public and shared mode of existence which Heidegger calls *das Man*[the 'one' or 'they']; a loss of Dasein's singularity in the anonymity and even “dictatorship” and “domination” of everyday being-with others.<sup>109</sup> This inauthentic 'fallenness' is contrasted to an authentic existence which corresponds to Dasein's primordial condition, that is, its existence as a 'stretch' between the horizon of its originary future as being-towards-death and its originary past as being-already-in-a-world. In authentic resoluteness, existence relates to itself on the basis of its finitude. In the infamous paragraph 74 of *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to overcome and to draw an accord between the apparent opposition of the singularity of

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107 I take the notion of a continuity between Heidegger and Derrida and Foucault as lying over the affirmation of a 'medium' of thought from Claire Colebrook. See *The Ethics of Interpretation*.

108 The question of the outside will be the focus of chapter 3.

109 BT, p.164



resolute Dasein and its essential being-with others in an authentic community. Yet in the move from authentic resoluteness to the communal resoluteness of "*das Volk*" the singularity of Dasein is displaced by the logic of a totalizing community.<sup>110</sup> Dasein's being-in-the-world as being-with-others is totally determined by the limits of the horizons of a pre-determinate 'authentic' community defined by what Heidegger calls a 'common' sharing of the historical "destiny" of a *volk*.<sup>111</sup> In other words, relationality is no longer in question and open but defined in advance by a single determinate 'pole' or fate. The question of the relation between Heidegger's Nazism and his philosophy notwithstanding, what is crucial for my own account is that the theorization of 'authentic community' as *das Volk* marks a disavowal of relationality.

It is this disavowal of the irreducibility of a determinate (relational) point of departure that has been at the centre of not only Derrida's engagement with *Being and Time* but also, among others, of Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben. The central insight of all three thinkers in relation to Heidegger is the impossibility of transcending Dasein's being-thrown. Authenticity cannot be, as Heidegger often seems to suggest, a flight from inauthentic existence but only an affirmation of Dasein's finitude and being-improper. Against the standard reading (which they nevertheless do not deny) through which Heidegger is said to maintain the primacy of the proper or authentic over and against everyday existence, all three thinkers show that one can take a different path. Nancy for instance claims that Heidegger's error is to fail to think through Dasein's being-towards-death as "radically implicated in its being-with."<sup>112</sup> To think death as the experience of *Mitsein* or being-with others and not only as a relation to oneself is to admit that it is precisely finitude's excess over experience which guarantees the undoing of any 'communion' or totalizing community – a community of finite singularities is 'inoperative' and inappropriable.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Agamben insists on the co-originary of the proper and improper. Inauthenticity he argues is original and positive. Being is not given in general but only partially unconcealed to finite existence and thus, there is no proper location for

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110 Heidegger uses '*das Volk*' at BT, p.436. The argument for '*das Volk*' as totalizing is made by Miguel de Beistegui in *Heidegger and the Political*. p.17

111 BT, p.436

112 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991. P.14

113 Nancy also insists on folding the proper into the improper in "The Decision for Existence." Christopher Fynsk also insists on the priority of alterity in *Being in Time* in the first chapter of his *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1993.

thought.<sup>114</sup> Existence is always thrown and improper, authentic questioning is thus only the affirmation of the possibility of the world such that the disclosedness of Being is co-originary with its dis-appropriation or concealment. Likewise, in *Aporias*, to which I will return in chapter 3, Derrida argues that the very distinction between authentic and inauthentic Dasein in *Being and Time* operates only in the reduction of thrownness. Moreover, it is their dedication to the Heideggerian theme of thrownness which both unites Derrida and Foucault as relational thinkers yet also forms a condition of the irreducibility of the polemic between them. Once one refuses to countenance the possibility of totally exceeding one's (relational) point of departure one is left without an Archimedean position from which judgment can be decided nor an ultimately proper or original stance for thought. Indeed, one is returned to the Nietzschean problematic of circularity – every grander narrative recoils upon its finite beginning.

The later Heidegger encounters a similar problem in the inscription of a binary opposition between the proper and improper. In his later work the binary is inscribed into Heidegger's account of metaphysics as the history of forgetting. Heidegger's *Abbau* or *destruktion* is premised upon the recovery of an originary presencing, unity or gathering of Being, in short, an originary experience of truth. Metaphysics as the forgetting of what makes it possible culminates in the nihilism of the will to power and Being's unconcealment as technology marks a culmination of forgetting, total oblivion of Being and a complete determination of the world as 'standing reserve.' What Derrida and Foucault both refuse is the teleology of the coming to presence of Being as what John Caputo calls a "metanarrative of Being" which thinks an original or primordial beginning which is then corrupted absolutely in modernity.<sup>115</sup> It is such a narrative which serves to announce and command a revolutionary possibility, one which we know Heidegger sought, at least until the mid-1930s, in National Socialism. While it is crucial to note that Heidegger's support for the Nazis did not necessarily follow from his philosophy it was nevertheless enabled by his belief in the necessity for a 'total' renewal of the relation to Being and the idealization of Greek experience and in this sense was neither an "accident" nor a "mistake," as Lacoue-Labarthe puts it.<sup>116</sup> In positing an originary truth,

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114 See Giorgio Agamben, "The Passion of Facticity." *Potentialities*. (Daniel Heller Roazen, Trans.) Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. Pp.185-204.

115 John D.Caputo. *Demythologizing Heidegger*. P.2

116 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*. (Chris Turner,

Heidegger is then free to find, at least temporarily, its authentic repetition in history. Thus, as Lacoue-Labarthe insists, Heidegger repeats the metaphysical move of the philosophical determination of the political.<sup>117</sup> In positing the purity of the origin and the history of its loss, he licenses the potential for any means for its recovery. The account of a total loss licenses and is complicit with the 'worst' ontic violence which is legitimated or grounded upon an ontological revolution.

## Reading Nietzsche and Heidegger through Derrida and Foucault

Derrida and Foucault will not – in the face of the Heideggerean failure or otherwise – join the likes of Habermas or Richard Wolin in seeking out the grounds for Heidegger's Nazism in the lack of an authoritative normative justification which would serve to ground legitimate political constraints.<sup>118</sup> Heidegger's failure lay not with the absence of normative grounds. The ethico-political burden upon their work, as with all post-foundational thought, is to navigate a different path, neither of the 'grounding' of legitimacy nor of locating the sources for a philosophico-political revolution as both Nietzsche and Heidegger have done. Heidegger's 'error' consisted neither in relativism nor decisionism which left him without critical resources to condemn Nazism; his error, I suggest, was that he was *not perspectival enough*. Indeed, in contrast to Heidegger both Derrida and Foucault refuse to enunciate a discourse of loss or accordingly of revolution (the political implications of which are addressed in chapters 5 and 6). Neither thinker will countenance a 'proper' dwelling for thought, an originary relation or determination from which thought proceeds and must appropriate if it is to be authentic. Thus, in a broad array of texts Derrida has sought to undermine the Heideggerean attempt to think the presencing of Being itself free from any particular ontic determinations, that is, free from empirical inscription. Being, Derrida argues in 'The Ends of Man', can only be articulated through ontic metaphors.<sup>119</sup> Heidegger's question of Being, he claims, is tied to a "metaphysics of proximity," to a question of the proper relation between Dasein and

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Trans.) London: Blackwell, 1990. See also Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, London: Continuum, 2005. P.164; John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, p.172 and Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics*. New Haven: Yale, UP, 2000. P.161.

117 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics*. P.28

118 See Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger*. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.

119 Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man.' *Margins of Philosophy*. (Alan Bass, Trans.) Chicago: U of Chicago, 1982. Pp.109-136. cf. p.131

Being.<sup>120</sup> One can trace a notion of proximity as authenticity throughout Heidegger's work: the question of Being is a question about the 'truth' of Being; the overcoming of the metaphysics of subjectivity is sought through the recovery of the question of Being in the attempt to fix or secure a new mode of "exemplary Being."<sup>121</sup> Similarly, in his only extensive engagement with Heidegger, in *The Order of Things* Foucault considers the latter to be a modern (subjectivist) thinker insofar as Heidegger conceives a finite being (Dasein) who grasps the condition of possibility of his knowledge (time, history or the destining of Being) as the grounds for his 'becoming.' Knowledge attempts to recover the ever-receding origin which makes it possible.<sup>122</sup>

With this critique of Heidegger in mind, both Derrida and Foucault should be understood to restore, in divergent ways, a form of 'perspectival' thought. Thrownness for both thinkers goes all the way down without the promise of propriety and it is the name 'Nietzsche' which for both often stands in for the refusal to countenance the possibility of purity or recovery of origin or ground. Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is a key reference point here.<sup>123</sup> For Deleuze the will to power expresses the pure play of difference, it is an expression of the world as a network of ephemeral and contingent forces caught in indefinite struggle. In other words, will to power forms the differential and genetic element of forces. Thus, in a way analogous to Heidegger, Deleuze offers a systematic reading of Nietzsche, yet in opposition to Heidegger, this systematicity consists entirely in the consistent assertion of the world as a multiplicity of forces and of the Nietzschean affirmative joy in difference. In the early programmatic essay 'La Différance' Derrida attaches the key insight from his own work to Deleuze's Nietzsche book. "Différance," Derrida says in reference to Deleuze's *Nietzsche*, "is the name of differences of forces, that Nietzsche sets up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, wherever this system governs culture, philosophy, and science."<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Foucault has also praised Deleuze's analysis of difference in Nietzsche and links his reading of Nietzsche to this notion in the essay 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' which we will discuss below.<sup>125</sup> In accordance with

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120 *Ibid.* p.133

121 *Ibid.* p.127

122 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London, Routledge, 2002. [Hereafter referred to as 'OT']. P.364

123 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. (Hugh Tomlinson, Trans.) London: Continuum, 2006.

124 'La Différance.' *Margins of Philosophy*. P.18

125 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx.' *Essential Works of Michel Foucault* (Three Volumes) (James D.

Deleuze's reading, both Derrida and Foucault shift the position of Nietzsche's thinking beyond the end of metaphysics within which Heidegger circumscribes it into the position of a rupture with the desire for ground and for the proper.

Before pursuing these two themes it is important to note a prior condition for Derrida's and Foucault's engagements with Nietzsche: freeing him from the Heideggerean reading. Derrida's and Foucault's interpretations of Nietzsche escape the latter's circumscription within metaphysics through two distinct modes of reading him. Both refuse the unifying force of the narrative which Heidegger imposes on Nietzsche's fragmentary work. Derrida argues that it is precisely the Nietzschean text which cannot be subsumed to a single identity, its heterogeneity marks out the singularity of Nietzsche's text so that "one must forbid oneself," Derrida says, "with Nietzsche above all – to force his name into the straightjacket of an interpretation that is too strong to be able to account for him."<sup>126</sup> The fragments of Nietzsche's text do not, Derrida argues, form elements of a single whole, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Nietzsche's text denotes the impossibility of the imposition of a unity. Indeed it is Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche which is metaphysical insofar as it presupposes the *telos* of a final truth in Nietzsche which can be deduced from an accurate and 'proper' interpretation.<sup>127</sup>

While also suggesting that his reading is licensed by the differential and heterogeneous nature of the Nietzschean text, Foucault refuses to offer a complete or total interpretation and instead uses passages or sections from Nietzsche in terms of his own interests and "not with the purpose of showing that this was *the* Nietzschean conception."<sup>128</sup> Nietzsche's text exerts no essential authority upon the interpreter, it invites the reader, Foucault says, "to use it, to deform it, to make it groan in protest."<sup>129</sup>

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Faubion, Paul Rabinow, Eds.) *Hammondsworth*: Penguin, 2000. [Hereafter referred to as EW I-III]. P.277

126 Jacques Derrida (with Richard Beardsworth) "Nietzsche and the Machine." *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971- 2001*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002. P.217

127 In *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. (Barbara Harlow, Trans.) Chicago: U of Chicago, 1979 Derrida takes up a brief entry into Nietzsche's notebook: "I have forgotten my umbrella" to show that it exceeds Heidegger's metanarrative and thus, Heidegger's reading cannot possibly be sustained. See also Derrida's "Interpreting Signatures" *Looking After Nietzsche* . (Lawrence Rickels, Ed). Albany: SUNY, 1990. Pp.1-18. Here Derrida once again seeks to undermine Heidegger's unifying interpretation of Nietzsche. See especially pp.52-4.

128 EWIII, p.13

129 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. London: Harvester, 1980.

Interpretation and application is sanctioned through the notion that the elements of the texts have no necessary relation to the whole and accordingly, they can be isolated without affecting the (non-existent) unity and identity of the argument. There is no claim to a final truth on behalf of the text in either of these interpretations, and furthermore, they see the absence of such a claim at the heart of Nietzsche's work. Both of these modes of interpretation yield a Nietzsche in excess of Heidegger's reading yet the textual opening is elicited through two distinct strategies which will be our focus in later chapters. In Derrida's case, it is the unity of the text which always breaks down in recoiling upon its own particularity in the attempt to seize its meaning while for Foucault it is the specificity of the elements of the text which have no necessary relation to the whole.

Both Derrida and Foucault, I argue, set out with the same genealogico-strategic orientation: to return truth to its particular and violent origins. Two central Nietzschean themes will be pursued in this regard. First, both posit language (in the case of Derrida) or discourse (in the case of Foucault) in conformity with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, as a field or network of differences, as a relational field governed by no privileged term, the position of each element is always determined in its relations to other elements. Moreover, both Derrida and Foucault repeat the Nietzschean affirmation of difference, both follow Nietzsche in affirming the absence of a transcendent ground of relation as marking the possibility of transgressing and appraising the humanism of twentieth century thought. Nietzsche is thus privileged as the thinker who, rather than marking the completion of metaphysics, thinks and affirms a difference grounded only in itself. Second, Nietzschean genealogy is explicitly affirmed by both Derrida and Foucault as a mode of thinking which opens thought to the originary violence inseparable from the self's relations to others. In this sense, I will claim that both Derrida and Foucault are genealogical thinkers.

### *Nietzsche, Interpretation, Affirmation*

Once the sign is no longer thought as intermediary transmitting some prior substance and itself becomes the object of philosophical enquiry its position comes into crisis; the unity and identity of a transcendental signified is challenged and ultimately, the possibility of a permanent truth comes into question. In several early works, namely *Of*

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[Hereafter referred to as 'PK] P.53

*Grammatology* and 'Structure, Sign and Play' in the case of Derrida and 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' and *The Order of Things* in the case of Foucault, Nietzsche assumes a singular position in the history of philosophy as a thinker who places the unity of signifier and signified in question. Perhaps more significantly, they suggest that the impact of Nietzsche's thought lies in the manner he relates to the consequences of the question of the sign and of truth: rather than mourn the impossibility of a final truth or a fully present knowledge, Derrida and Foucault read Nietzsche as a singular figure who affirms the impossibility of a permanent and final truth. It is to these readings of Nietzsche that we will now turn.

The opening sections of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* approach the question of the sign through the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure whose elision and denigration of the question of writing, repeats, Derrida says, a metaphysical gesture enacted by Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, etc. In the history of metaphysics, writing has always appeared as a "phenomenon of exterior representation."<sup>130</sup> Saussure had already shown that the relation of signifier to signified is arbitrary insofar as it arises from out of custom. Signs are thus only defined by their negative differences from one another. Yet Derrida claims Saussure preserves the security of the sign by ignoring the disturbing nature of writing. It is Saussure's own assertion of the differential nature of the sign which should not ignore the difference of writing because the appearance of speech itself only transpires within a system lacking any positive terms. As such, language in fact resembles Saussure's own definition of writing as secondary and derivative to the spoken sign. In short, Derrida radically broadens the supplementary logic which has defined writing to all signification; no sign is independent of the play of differences that compose language.<sup>131</sup> Meaning occurs only as a possibility of what Derrida 'names' *différance*, as a movement of difference and deferral constituted in the absence of full presence.

If thus far we have taken this detour through Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure to discuss Nietzsche, it is precisely because Nietzsche is situated by Derrida as a thinker who, rather than mourn the impossibility of transcendence and seek to escape from

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130 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. (Trans. Alan Bass) London: Athlone, 1981. p.25

131 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), London: Johns Hopkins, 1997. [Hereafter referred to as 'OG']. P.34

indefinite play, is able to affirm and celebrate it. Derrida says that with Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud a rupture occurs in metaphysics insofar as the centre, ground or transcendental signified of any structure or system is no longer able to act as a stable presence transcendent to structure since it becomes thought in terms of the structure itself.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, in conceiving the absence of the possibility of a centre – the absence of the possibility of a permanent ground constituted by a transcendental signified – the domain of play becomes “indefinite.”<sup>133</sup> No single element of any system can assume the desired totalizing position so that no structure is indefinitely and totally determined.

While Saussure responds to the absence of centre with a thought of structure which nevertheless closes upon itself in a privileging of the phonic substance, Derrida argues that Claude Levi-Strauss’ response (to whom Nietzsche is contrasted in ‘Structure, Sign and Play’) to the problem is distinct. Concepts are for Levi-Strauss not truths in themselves but rather, tools which are adopted from out of the tradition by the anthropologist. He thus attempts to enact a separation between method and truth in retaining conceptual tools whose value he doubts, a method which, in calling it ‘bricolage’ he distinguishes from that of the ‘engineer.’ In contrast to the bricoleur, the engineer’s discourse aspires to a totalizing knowledge and always already begins with a well-defined totality, language and lexicon and thus, theoretical work is always delimited and determined in advance. It is this binary opposition which Levi-Strauss constructs and which Derrida seeks to undermine. “The engineer is a myth,” Derrida argues.<sup>134</sup> To conceive of a subject who creates a theoretical system from nothing is a teleological ideal. Moreover, not only is the engineer a myth, but it is the creation of the bricoleur. There can be no thought beyond bricolage, it is thought’s only possibility:

“as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down.”<sup>135</sup>

By assuming that a ground cannot be posited because the empirical realm is

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132 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. (Alan Bass, Trans.) London: Routledge, 1991. [Hereafter referred to as 'WD']. P.353

133 WD, p.354

134 WD, p.360

135 WD, p.361



simply too vast as Levi-Strauss does is still to maintain the possibility of a ground; it is to relate to ground as unfulfilled desire. In contrast to Levi-Strauss' empiricism, the archetypal Nietzschean gesture is for Derrida the "joyous affirmation of the play of the world and the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation."<sup>136</sup> Underlying Nietzsche's work is an affirmation that, in opposition to the Heideggerean nostalgia for a proximity to Being, "plays without security."<sup>137</sup> There is an absence of any nostalgia in Nietzsche's work, instead it "determines the noncentre as otherwise than as loss of the centre."<sup>138</sup> The affirmation of this play of the will to power constituted by the lack of a transcendental signified is what in "La Difference" Derrida will, in asserting the proximity of Nietzsche's genealogy to his own deconstructive approach, refer to as "the 'active' (in movement) discord of the different forces and of the differences between forces."<sup>139</sup> If Nietzsche thus exceeds Heidegger's delimitation it is precisely through the question of interpretation and of the indefinite substitution of the signified.

However, Derrida also maintains that there is no prospect of choosing between these two modes of interpretation, there is no simple mode for thought to abandon its heritage - there is no possibility of an absolute rupture with metaphysics for interpretation must always engage with an inherited discourse. Nietzschean affirmation cannot absolutely break with its history, metaphysics is always active in the language that is used to oppose it. We can only, Derrida says, think between these two modes of interpretation.<sup>140</sup> And yet, almost inexplicably, despite his claim to the impossibility of absolutely choosing the Nietzschean break Derrida nevertheless seems to suggest simultaneously a utopian and terrifying possibility of an immediate relation to the pure play of differences in the concluding sentences of 'Structure, Sign and Play': "a birth in the offing, only under the species of nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity."<sup>141</sup> Even if Derrida explicitly denies the privilege of the Nietzschean gesture of an absolutely affirmative relation to difference, he simultaneously avows the possibility of just this unnameable break. Rather than being simply a culmination of metaphysics in the total domination of a boundless subject, Nietzsche is

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136 WD, p.369

137 WD, p.369

138 WD, p.369

139 Jacques Derrida, "La Difference." P.19

140 WD, p.370

141 WD, p.370

for Derrida the thinker who marks “the systematic mistrust as concerns the entirety of metaphysics” and so points to the possibility of its excess.<sup>142</sup>

The Nietzschean themes of the absence of a transcendental signified and the consequent affirmation of this absence which emerge in these early texts of Derrida’s appear in a similar form in some of Foucault’s earlier work. For instance, in ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Marx’ Foucault argues that with these three thinkers a mode of interpretation appears which reflects only itself; nothing supports or grounds interpretation; there is simply “nothing to interpretation.”<sup>143</sup> It is in this sense that Nietzsche, Freud and Marx signal a caesura with what preceded them since for these ‘masters of suspicion’ the sign does not represent a depth of hidden meaning but is instead a surface phenomenon within an inexhaustible network of relations. Nietzsche’s account of philosophy’s will to truth, capital in Marx and the relations between the conscious and unconscious in Freud all fold depth and interiority onto a surface of positivity.<sup>144</sup> The critique and reversal of depth opens a new mode of interpretation and thus, a new space or field of thought which is nothing but the space of language, the “space of distribution in which signs can be signs.”<sup>145</sup> Given this new landscape, interpretation becomes an infinite task, an infinity constituted not by human finitude as it is for Levi-Strauss but because there is nothing apart from interpretation such that its object is “inexhaustible,” it has neither origin nor end.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, much like Derrida, Foucault argues that with the effacement of depth, we can no longer conceive a universal relation between a signifier and signified.<sup>147</sup> Interpretation is founded only upon suspicion and in this sense, assumes ascendancy once the teleological question of truth is undermined.<sup>148</sup> Once language is no longer thought as a transparent representation of the world and assumes its own positivity, the dream of empiricism is extinguished.

In ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Marx’ Foucault identifies Nietzsche in particular as opening the question of language as a philosophical question. Once the being of language appears as a question unto itself, a further Nietzschean question will assume increasing

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142 Jacques Derrida, “Qual Quelle: Valery’s Sources.” *Margins of Philosophy*. P.305

143 EWII, p.275

144 EWII, p.273

145 EWII, p.272

146 EWII, p.274

147 EWII, p.276

148 EWII, p.276

importance for Foucault: ‘who speaks?’<sup>149</sup> Foucault says once we admit Nietzsche’s notion that “words have always been an invention of the ruling classes” the question of ‘who speaks’ demands a genealogy into the force that language evinces.<sup>150</sup> Once language is thought in its own positivity the question of language emerges as an interrogation of the force manifest in particular discourses and interpretations; an authority always speaks. The Nietzschean question of the ‘who’ thus acts to decentre and displace the subject which itself becomes the effect of an interpretation; the subject appears as an effect of a struggle revealed in a network of signs.

Moreover, for Foucault Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God, in marking the end of transcendence, forms the conditions for the destruction of the identity and unity of man.<sup>151</sup> Once knowledge is thought in terms of discontinuity, force and struggle, it is the sovereignty of the subject which is dissolved into relations which precede it.<sup>152</sup> Nietzsche is an un-archaeologizable figure, always in excess of the modern *episteme*, marking out and opening the space and terms of its rupture. A rupture that, rather than mourn, Nietzsche celebrates and affirms in the “laughter” and joy of man’s demise.<sup>153</sup> Much as he appears in Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign and Play,’ Nietzsche emerges in *The Order of Things* as the thinker whose rupture with the metaphysics of subjectivity is delimited by the feat of affirming the end of the possibility of positing positive grounds for knowledge. Nietzsche celebrates the possibility of a new mode of existence in excess of the formal structure of transcendence.

#### *Derrida, Foucault and Genealogy*

This ceaseless rending open which both Derrida and Foucault admire and appropriate from Nietzsche is, I argued above, the core element of Nietzsche’s genealogy. Genealogy proceeds from the historicization of truth; through an inscription of difference at every origin, interminably opening thought to the heterogeneous networks of forces which constitute truth and relation. Both Derrida and Foucault, while rarely acknowledged in the case of the former, explicitly adopt genealogy as an approach to the

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149 I owe the theme of the question of ‘who speaks?’ to Alan D. Schrift in “Foucault and Derrida on Nietzsche and the End(s) of ‘Man.’” *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche-Interpretation*. (David Farrell Krell & David Wood, Eds) London: Routledge, 1988. p.140-2

150 EWII, p.276

151 OT, p.351

152 OT, p.373, cf. EWIII, p.10

153 OT, p.420

question of origins. Both employ the genealogical gesture in their works in opposing the sanctity of the origin by disrupting and undermining the metaphysical claim to a universal truth distinct from power. Like Nietzsche, their genealogies open thought to the violence and struggles which are inseparable from thought's foundation. Both in this sense are pursuing the same broad purposes insofar as they think the origin as a play of differences and conceive genealogy as the mode by which difference is thought. These genealogical thematics mark the ultimate point of convergence between Derrida and Foucault. As absurd as it may sound, deconstruction and genealogy are both genealogical and it is thus their conceptions of genealogy that we now pursue.

While Foucault's works from the 1970s and early 80s are closely associated with Nietzsche's genealogy, less is made of Derrida's own assertion in *Of Grammatology* that, at least in this text, he too works within the scope of what he explicitly refers to as a "genealogy of morals."<sup>154</sup> Like Foucault, Derrida adopts genealogy as a means to undermine morality's claim to have acceded to a permanent and transcendent truth and to confront and undermine the claim of a truth and knowledge independent from power. In undermining morality's claim to universality deconstruction effects the Nietzschean gesture of opening the question of relation onto itself. In revealing "the nonethical opening of ethics" Derrida poses the question of a modality of relation absent a will to truth which would determine, secure and ground it in advance.<sup>155</sup> It is in 'The Violence of The Letter,' Derrida's engagement and deconstruction of Levi-Strauss' writings on the nature/culture binary divide, that the genealogical gesture emerges most explicitly in his work.<sup>156</sup> Levi-Strauss is an exemplary figure for Derrida in his characterization of writing's secondary, derivative and violent imposition upon the Nambikwara tribe of South America.

In *Tristes Tropiques* Levi-Strauss recounts his unintentional introduction of writing to what he perceives as a people who had, prior to his arrival, been wholly devoid of written language. Derrida retraces Levi-Strauss' account of the abrupt emergence of

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154 OG, p.140

155 OG, p.140

156 Gary Shapiro develops this argument in "Taming, Repeating, Naming: Foucault, Derrida and the Genealogy of Morals." *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra*. (Clayton Koelb, Ed.) London: SUNY, 1990. My own analysis is indebted to Shapiro's insights on the genealogical character of *Of Grammatology*.

violence which appears among the Nambikwara when their leaders begin to pretend to have learned the anthropologist's writing and employ this knowledge as a power to manipulate others.<sup>157</sup> Levi-Strauss presents this account as the narrative of an anthropologist, guilty of having introduced writing, and thus threatens the originary simplicity and presence of origins of the tribe. The introduction of writing is characterized as a fall from innocence, as the fall from an "authentic community [...] fully self-present in its living speech" infested from without by the corruption of the written word.<sup>158</sup> But Derrida argues that Levi-Strauss has already implicitly shown that, in symbols, property, kinship and myths, writing is already present in the community. Furthermore, the tribe is not without the elements of power relations, violence, hierarchy and rank that Levi-Strauss considers himself guilty of introducing. Levi-Strauss does not distinguish these elements because he only views them as features of the West. His thought is traversed Derrida argues, by a Rousseauist nostalgia for a natural state before writing which deconstruction disrupts.<sup>159</sup>

There is another element to the seemingly inescapable nature of the violence of writing that appears in Derrida's deconstruction of Levi-Strauss. The Nambikwara, Levi-Strauss recounts, are forbidden from revealing their proper names. But once, while playing a game, one child does divulge an opponent's name Levi-Strauss is eventually able to induce the children to disclose the names of all of the villagers. In Levi-Strauss' discourse the anthropologist's inducement of the children to divulge their proper names is presented as the violation of "a virginal space" by the guilty anthropologist who desecrates the purity of the names of the tribe's members.<sup>160</sup> Yet Derrida argues that neither the concealment nor the disclosure of the proper name constitute a primordial violence. It is the act of naming itself which already constitutes "originary violence."<sup>161</sup> To name is already to enact a violence, it is to classify and to inscribe 'within a system.'<sup>162</sup> While Levi-Strauss thinks the empirical violence of the prohibition he thus effaces originary violence for in both the introduction of writing and in the prohibition of the name, science effaces all necessary violence and posits an origin which is the object of its desire.

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157 OG, p.125-7

158 OG, p.119

159 OG, p.114

160 OG, p.113

161 OG, p.112

162 OG, p.112, 109

The disavowal of originary violence acts to master and determine it. Violence can be thought as exterior to language only in the constitution of the logocentric and metaphysical myth of self-present origins, that is, in what is a decisive echo of Foucault's work, a "presumed difference between knowledge and power."<sup>163</sup> Levi-Strauss' discourse only functions by effacing the impossibility of a present truth and of a society not constituted and maintained in violence; no relationality is free from the violence of inscription, "writing cannot be thought of outside the horizon of intersubjective violence."<sup>164</sup> Derrida's "repetition" of the genealogy of morals opens thought to this violence in undermining a truth which would present itself as divorced from power.

Two essays in particular explicitly signal Foucault's methodological debt to Nietzsche in terms of an approach which Foucault has unequivocally labeled genealogical. The first is the often cited paper delivered in 1971 titled 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History' while the second is a less frequently read series of lectures delivered in 1973 which form an initial articulation of the arguments of *Discipline and Punish* called 'Truth and Juridical Forms.'<sup>165</sup> The second of Foucault's 1973 lectures introduces what may be his earliest use of the concept of 'power relations' and which would go on to become the central methodological principle of his work until at least the end of that decade. Foucault introduces his understanding of power within the context of a discussion of Nietzsche's genealogy and the development of a metaphysics of binary oppositions in antiquity. Foucault says that a momentous rupture occurred in ancient Greece when Plato posed a disjunction between truth and power - an event that Foucault returned to in his final works on ethics and truth-speaking.<sup>166</sup> "With Plato," Foucault says, "there began a great Western myth: that there is an antinomy between knowledge and power."<sup>167</sup> The great deed underlying the Platonic dialogues was the emergence of a will to truth which posits itself as distinct from, and in opposition to, power. Prior to Plato truth and power, rather than being thought as opposites, were considered to be inseparable. True discourse was determined as speech with the capacity to inspire, to contest and to command.<sup>168</sup> With Plato the condition of truth would shift "from the enunciation of

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163 OG, p.128

164 OG, p.127, 114.

165 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." EWII; "Truth and Juridical Forms." EWIII, pp.1-89.

166 EWIII, p.32

167 EWIII, p.32

168 See Nathan Widder, "Foucault and Power Revisited." *European Journal of Political Theory*. Vol.3,

truth from a prophetic and prescriptive type of a discourse to a retrospective one that is no longer characterized by prophecy but rather by evidence.”<sup>169</sup> Accordingly, the condition of Platonic truth would be the denial that it enacts and is conditioned by power. Metaphysics originates in the denial by truth of its inseparability from power.

Foucault locates Nietzsche as the first thinker since Plato to think what he calls, echoing Derrida, the ‘logocentric’ ground of philosophy.<sup>170</sup> Truth for both Nietzsche and Foucault is a product of the will. Thus, to investigate the question of truth is always necessarily to ask the question of ‘who speaks?’ The question of knowledge is inseparable from a question of power, of authority and of will. Genealogy, in tracing the origins of truth to the power relations that constitute it, opens thought to a will to truth which marks discourse as either true or false and imbues certain discourses with authority and power. Genealogy opens ethico-political relationality as a question in undermining determinations of morality and the claims to authority of moral and political discourse.

Foucault also explicitly appropriates what he sees as a Nietzschean priority of the event as a means of undermining the unity and totality of concepts of structure, system and logic. The notion of the event acts to displace the will to truth’s effacement of its own power and authority in asserting that truth emerges from power relations. The event functions to undermine the sanctity of the origin in opening it to the violence which has constituted it. Foucault argues that the event is not thought within the terms of continuity or discontinuity but rather, as multiplicity. Events are always multiple and plural, never in excess of the multiplicity of power relations within which they are formed. Contra Heidegger, the event does not locate or subsume power relations to a single event or even a single category of event. Rather, events are always heterogeneous, immanent to power relations and thus, dissolve the unity of the origin into the field of power.<sup>171</sup> The origin as it appears in Foucault’s reading of Nietzsche, is not in excess of power, but rather, is an event of power.

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No.4, 2004. Pp.411-32. Foucault would come to refine this account of pre-Socratic truth in his final three lecture courses and in his accounts of *parrhesia* in particular. See chapters 4 and 5.

169 EWIII, p.23

170 EWIII, p.12

171 EWIII, p.116

Genealogy, as it functions in Nietzsche, Derrida and Foucault disabuses thought of any claim to transcend the violence of the political. Relations to others are inescapably established in knowledge and power. Metaphysics has, since Plato, attempted to legislate the political through a knowledge which would eradicate its own authority and effects. Philosophy has always sought to determine and secure the political through a knowledge which would deny its own political power. Nietzsche, in questioning the validity of this move, in forcing philosophy to face the verity of its own will, opens the possibility of a new way of thinking the political. No longer will relations with others be sought in legislation by the philosophical but rather, engagement with the question of relation will confront its determination by metaphysics. Derrida and Foucault do not lapse into a legislation of the political in the way that Nietzsche does because they never venture beyond the critical force of genealogy: genealogy is already a mode of engagement with the political and not simply a prior step to a new philosophical determination of the political. Genealogy provides a form of engagement with the question of relation that for both Derrida and Foucault is centered upon the question of the point of departure in particular which does not succumb to Heidegger's desire for the proper or proper origin. Instead, genealogy affirms "difference or distance in the origin," as Deleuze puts it.<sup>172</sup> It is in the pursuit of a genealogical strategy that both evade the disavowal of the relational that I claimed is commensurate with Heidegger's questioning of Being - thrownness for Derrida and Foucault is irreducible.

## Conclusion

The point here is not to reduce Derrida and Foucault to 'Nietzscheanism' nor to argue for the importance and influence of Nietzsche over any other single thinker, for instance an engagement with Heidegger and the unconcealment with Being is crucial to both (see chapter 3). Yet both seek to maintain a Nietzschean affirmation of the irreducible play of differences and the resulting inescapability of finitude that for both, functions to displace the concept of origin. Yet in so doing both are led back, we will see below, to a form of the Nietzschean paradox of circularity - of a thought affirming its particularity and finitude while simultaneously offering a 'grandeur' narrative of the field which exceeds it. And while, as I suggested (and as we will see in chapter 4) this

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<sup>172</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. (Hugh Tomlinson, Trans.) London: Continuum, 2006. P.2



circularity forms the condition for an ethical recoil and thus, the possibility of a non-normative political ethics, it also forms the condition for the irreducible polemic between them. There is no ultimate ground or position from which the divergent ways these two thinkers conceive originary difference can be resolved or judged.

In an interview revolving primarily around the question of Nietzsche, Richard Beardsworth suggests to Derrida and which the latter confirms, that there is an element in deconstruction which exceeds the Nietzschean thematic of the play of differences.<sup>173</sup> Unlike most 'contemporary French philosophy' (Beardsworth has in mind here Deleuze and Foucault in particular) at the core of Derrida's thought is the insight that the immanence of the difference of forces cannot be formulated without a 'passage' through or 'experience' of an impossible transcendental and 'messianic' promise of a future.<sup>174</sup> As Derrida puts it, "[t]he logic of force reveals within its logic a law that is stronger than this very logic."<sup>175</sup> In other words, as we will see, for Derrida the question of transcendentalism is irreducible. The play of differences cannot be conceived for Derrida, except insofar as it is thought in conjunction with a law which exceeds it. The account of the play of differences is not in itself a play of difference. The question of transcendental rules or laws cannot itself be transcended. On the other hand, Foucault associates the question of the transcendental with the disjunction of knowledge from power which he traces to Plato and which he sees still taking place in Derrida's deconstruction. A fundamental divergence between them seems to emerge here. How should this departure over how to think the origin as difference be articulated? What is at stake in this discrepancy between Derrida and Foucault? It is to these questions we now turn.

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173 Jacques Derrida (with Richard Beardsworth). "Nietzsche and the Machine." P.224

174 *Ibid.* p.227

175 *Ibid.* P.226

## Chapter Two: Derrida and Foucault Between the Empirical and the Transcendental

*Is there a single theoretical orientation which has not been accused by its detractors of having not entirely rejected the Cartesian heritage?*  
Slavoj Žižek<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In his reply to Derrida's critique of *Madness and Civilization* Michel Foucault categorizes the question at the core of the debate between them in the following way: [c]ould there be anything anterior or exterior to philosophical discourse? Can its condition reside in an exclusion, a refusal, a risk avoided, and why not, a fear?"<sup>2</sup> In question for Foucault is philosophy's persistent capacity to assert its sovereignty as a privileged mode and means of analysis of socio-political questions. Yet this depiction of the debate can be only partial for two reasons; firstly, because the stakes of the debate are broader than Foucault allows and secondly, because the depiction of Derrida as advocate and champion of philosophical discourse can only be maintained by reducing the implications of Derrida's reading of Descartes and deconstruction more broadly. In fact, the stakes of the debate are even broader. An accusation is made by each thinker against the other of repeating modern philosophy's crime of the 'Cartesian exclusion' which would reproduce the conditions of the objectification and determination of the other from a privileged and self-authorizing position. Without explicitly declaring so, Derrida and Foucault can be understood to accuse one another of actively participating in the will to truth, that is, of committing the metaphysical move which Nietzsche defined as implicitly or explicitly conceiving truth wholly in excess of relation. In short, the stakes of the debate involve two incommensurable and competing modes of critically engaging the relational. It is with these stakes in mind that this chapter is organized.

While the first part of this chapter will offer an account of the 'cogito debate' in terms of the question of relationality, the second part will build on the conclusions drawn from the debate in asking how both thinkers displace fixed and grounded orders of relations to an anterior field of a play of differences from which relations are produced. I problematize these accusations by showing how both thinkers work to displace the

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Descartes." *Le Monde*. (08/02/2008). Translation mine.

<sup>2</sup> EWII, p.395

empirico-transcendental double in an effort to think the relational medium in which the 'double' is produced. Both thinkers will in this sense be seen to inherit yet radicalize Heidegger's thesis of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity as reductive of the 'clearing' of Being through which determinate relations are given. The difference between them will thus not be a question of aims or goals of their works, but rather, of the way they proceed and the possibility of access to what each views as the anterior 'medium' in which relations are produced. Since the empirico-transcendental difference appears as a crucial element in their polemic, the reasons for their irreconcilability will become clear.

### Reading the Cogito Debate: Text, World and History

That the debate between Derrida and Foucault over *Madness and Civilization* has drawn a vast amount of secondary literature should be of no surprise given that it was the only public dialogue into which two of the most influential and widely read thinkers of the twentieth century entered. Furthermore, given the large amount of attention which this debate has proffered, it should be no less surprising that there exists a multitude of interpretations of precisely what the debate was over. However, to my knowledge none of the secondary literature has fully recognized the full scope, implications and the stakes of the debate for the question of relation and the will to truth's desire to indefinitely determine it.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Critiques of Derrida's 'Textualism'*

Edward Said, in an extended analysis of the debate and its wider implications for defining the differences between Derrida and Foucault, has argued that the fundamental point of discord lies between two distinct modes of conceiving the text's relation to the world.<sup>4</sup> For Said, the approaches of Derrida and Foucault are distinguished at the fundamental point wherein the existence of the text is to be described through either a

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3 An overview of the dialogue between Derrida and Foucault is provided by Antonio Campillo in "Foucault and Derrida: The History of a Debate on History." *Angelaki*. Volume 5, No.2, 2000. Pp.113-35. A number of texts have addressed the stakes of the debate to questions which exceed the scope of the present enquiry. For example, to the question of negative theology: Arthur Bradley, "Thinking the Outside: Foucault, Derrida and Negative Theology." *Textual Practice*. No. 16, Vol.1 (2002), pp.57-74; to the relation between reason and literature: Shoshana Felman, "Madness and Philosophy Or Literature's Reason." *Yale French Studies*, No.52 (1975), pp.206-228. For a broad overview of the secondary literature on this debate see Peter Flaherty, "(Con)textual Contest: Derrida and Foucault on Madness and the Cartesian Subject." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol.16, No.2, (1986), pp.157-75.

4 Said, Edward. "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions." *Critical Inquiry*. (Summer 1978). Pp.673-714.

deconstruction akin to “negative theology” which would demonstrate what is absent from the text (Derrida) or a discursive analysis which would place the text into its constitutive networks of language, power and knowledge (Foucault).<sup>5</sup> The difference between them is thus, as Said puts it, a question of engaging in textual analysis as either a ‘*mise en abyme*;<sup>6</sup>’ the identification of an inescapable element of negativity which prevents the text from ever indefinitely constituting itself, or a ‘*mise en discours*;<sup>7</sup>’ which identifies the broader context in which the meaning of the text is constituted.<sup>7</sup> Said is typical of those who favor Foucault over Derrida insofar as he argues that unlike Derridean deconstruction, Foucault questions the text’s “historical presentation” and thus, avoids what he sees as Derrida’s a-historicism.<sup>8</sup> Roy Boyne’s extended analysis replicates the structure of Said’s analysis insofar as he views the debate in terms of a question over the privileging of “the social real” in Foucault and its “philosophical reflection” in Derrida.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Michael Sprinker too follows Said’s contention that the polemic revolves around the question of history and method and thus he concludes that Derrida, unlike Foucault, is guilty of an a-historicism which thrusts all texts into a single and self-referential opening to their “undecidability.”<sup>10</sup> These three are typical of those analyses partisan to Foucault since, at their broadest point of agreement they cite the inability of Derridean deconstruction to historicize the text. In question is not the force and effectiveness of deconstruction’s undermining of the metaphysics of the transcendental signified, but rather of the failure to make an engaged claim to disturb a broader political and cultural space. As Said puts it,

“if everything in a text is always open equally to suspicion and to affirmation, then the differences between one class interest and another, or between oppressor and oppressed, one discourse and another, one ideology and another are virtual in – but never crucial to making – the finally reconciling element of textuality.”<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Foucaultian analysis, Said argues that Derrida is incapable of moving us beyond the text to the structures which surround it.

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5 *Ibid.* p.675, 676.

6 Derrida is hesitant in his use of ‘*mise en abyme*,’ adding immediately after, “to use the current phrase.”(Glas, p.163), This is pointed out by Rodolphe Gasché in *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. London: Harvard UP, 1994. see p.138

7 *Ibid.* p.673

8 *Ibid.* p.701

9 Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990. p.108

10 Sprinker, Michael. “Textual Politics: Foucault and Derrida.” *Boundary 2*. Vol. 8, 1980. pp.75-89. See also in this regard Damile Stempel, “History and Postmodern Literary Theory,” *Tracing Literary Theory*. (Joseph Natoli Ed.), Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1987. pp.80-104.

11 Said, p.703

### *Critiques of Foucault's 'Historicism'*

Those partisans of Derrida's position in the debate have generally sought to rescue Derrida from the charge of a-historicism by viewing the terms of the dialogue as a debate over the question of historicity, that is, the conditions of possibility of a history and history itself.<sup>12</sup> In conceiving the divergence between Derrida and Foucault in these terms Foucault's history of reason and madness appears as a negation of historicity since it assumes that the meaning of an event can be determined in its relation to a finite historical structure. Yet Derrida's reading of Descartes makes visible that all such structures are undermined by an excess which they cannot master. The error of Foucault's enterprise results from an erasure of historicity insofar as it is grounded in the *assumption* of a determinate historical structure. While the arguments raised by this approach I think unfairly and prematurely dismiss the position of Foucault's 1972 reply,<sup>13</sup> they do begin to shift the terms of the debate to what I am arguing is the fundamental difference between the two thinkers; namely the way in which each thinks the production of difference and of relation anterior to relationality's determination. Nevertheless, seeing the dissimilarity between Derrida and Foucault in these terms from the perspective of deconstruction generally precludes the possibility of seeing the way that Foucault, after *Madness and Civilization*, also sought to respond to these questions. This general failure on the part of the theorists which have taken the side of Derrida points to a further question which arises when contrasting and evaluating these two enterprises, namely, the possibility of comparing them at all.

### *Derrida and Foucault as (Ir)reconcilable?*

A very brief article by Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested that none of these characterizations of the stakes could be correct. The dialogue between Derrida and Foucault occurs, he argues, in a space between two wholly distinct planes of analysis

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12 See for instance, Ann Wordsworth, "Derrida and Foucault: Writing the History of Historicity." *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*. (Eds. Attridge et. Al.) London: Cambridge UP, 1987. pp.116-125, Marian Hobson, *Opening Lines*. pp.32-5; Geoffrey Bennington, "Cognito Incognito: Foucault's 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire.'" *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol.4, No.1, 1979. Pp.5-8

13 For instance, Hobson, in an otherwise exemplary analysis, relegates Foucault's critique of Derrida to a footnote wherein she argues that he continues to assume what he intends to prove, namely, the exclusion of the subject of madness. Hobson does not acknowledge the way in which, as we will see below, Foucault shows that the disqualification of the subject of madness occurs prior to the excess of the evil genius and thus, suggests that the excess of hyperbolic doubt is always already mastered by modern philosophical discourse and consequently, puts into question the totality of Derrida's reading of Descartes. See *Opening Lines*, p.239.

which cannot be reconciled; there is an “irreducible heterogeneity” between them.<sup>14</sup> For while Foucault’s work questions the theoretical-practical schemas of reason, Derrida’s analysis is concerned with the means philosophy employs (and always fails) to maintain its schemas and representations. Nancy’s portrayal comes closest to addressing (without ever explicitly affirming it) one of the key elements that the secondary literature has generally not recognized, that the Derridean and Foucaultian approaches necessarily view one another as erring insofar as each views the other from their respective theoretical positions; they may in fact be simply mutually exclusive modes of analysis interrogating opposed and distinct objects. Something like the mirror opposite of Nancy’s interpretation of the debate is made by Alan D. Schrift who maintains the possibility of reconciliation between Derrida and Foucault. While on the face of it, viewing their projects as reconciliatory may appear opposed to Nancy’s account, yet it is merely a more optimistic version of the same thesis since for Schrift the basis of their reconciliation lies with the fact that the difference between them is ultimately only one of “regional application.”<sup>15</sup> Their difference, for Schrift, arises in the objects of their respective analyses and not from a fundamentally distinct theoretical outlook and thus, there is no fundamental obstruction to a *rapprochement*. Yet the possibility of an immediate reconciliation can be affirmed by Schrift only in overlooking what I will claim is the way that each thinker’s discourse functions to enclose the other and consequently, make an accusation of methodological and ethical failure. Only in by-passing the fundamental differences in these modes of thinking relation can the immediate possibility of complementarity and reconciliation be thought.

### *The Debate and the Question of Relation*

As we elaborate the critiques which Derrida and Foucault unveiled at one another over what I argue is the narrower question of the interpretation of Descartes’ *Meditations* and more broadly, over the question of relation, it should become apparent that there is a degree of accuracy to all of these interpretations. However, the argument developed

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14 Jean-Luc Nancy, “Ipsa Facto Cogitans Ac Demens.” *Babel 2 Online*. (<http://www.babelonline.net>) (Accessed 23/10/2006). (translation mine). A longer English version of this article has appeared as “Mad Derrida: Ipsa Facto Cogitans Ac Demens.” in *Adieu Derrida*. (Ed. Costas Douzinas), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Nancy does not refer to the “irreducible heterogeneity” between Foucault and Derrida in this later version.

15 Alan D. Schrift, “Genealogy and/as Deconstruction: Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault on Philosophy as Critique,” *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy*, (ed. Hugh Silverman and Donn Welton), Albany: SUNY Press, 1988. pp. 193-213. p.206

below is grounded in the view (which the secondary literature generally does not address) that at the core of the debate, producing the distinctions between Foucault and Derrida, lie two very distinct ways of thinking the event or decision wherein determinate fields of relations are constituted and the implications for thinking the question of relationality. Such an account of the debate has been suggested by Leonard Lawlor and Claire Colebrook. Both Colebrook and Lawlor affirm that Derrida and Foucault (both also add Deleuze to this list) are united in seeking to think a medium or locus of pure difference or singularity anterior to its repetition, generalization or determination.<sup>16</sup> While the work of Lawlor and Colebrook has proved highly instructive for the present analysis, it is my claim that the dialogue between Derrida and Foucault can also be productively pushed in a direction anathema to their insights in the direction of the question of the divergence between them.

This claim proceeds from the insight that each of Derrida's and Foucault's accounts of the medium of differentiation implicitly claims to accede to the terrain wherein the differentiation and violence of relation occurs. Given the different ways through which each thinker views this 'medium,' each necessarily perceives the other of having failed to think it, and thus, Derrida and Foucault accuse one another of constituting a denial of the situatedness of their own discourse. Each circumscribes the other within a competing grander narrative and accordingly, accuses the other of denying the medium which each articulates. Moreover, such a denial is defined for both thinkers as the metaphysical gesture of forming a position which transcends all determinate relations. Since they do not view the cogito debate in these terms, the majority of its interpreters obfuscate what I claim are the central questions which it provokes: what is it to think the originary violence of relation? How might one proceed ethically, that is without determining given fields of relations in advance?<sup>17</sup> How are we to think the relation between the divergent responses by Derrida and Foucault to these questions? Our analysis of the cogito debate will not propose to answer any of these questions with anything resembling conclusiveness; this will be the aim of the following chapters.

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16 These themes are discussed at length in the present and the following chapters. See Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation: From Kant to Poststructuralism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. Leonard Lawlor, *The Being of the Question: Thinking Through French Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003 and *The Implications of Immanence: Towards a New Concept of Life*. New York: Fordham UP, 2006.

17 Marion Hobson's *Opening Lines* is partially exempt from this accusation, though in her text, the consideration of the 'medium of differentiation' is limited to Derrida and does not address this theme in Foucault.

However, it is in the 'cogito debate' between Foucault and Derrida where these fundamental differences appear most clearly, for it is only here that they are formulated in relation to one another.

### **Derrida on *Madness and Civilization*: Determining the Other**

Derrida's "Cogito and the History of Madness" targets the core of the archaeological project in *Madness and Civilization*: its attempt to let madness itself speak. Such an attempt cannot but betray its ambition, an archaeology of the silence of madness cannot but reproduce the conditions which always already objectify madness because, as Derrida asks, echoing Foucault's own definition of madness as the 'absence of a work:' "[i]s not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, an order, a sentence, a syntax, a work?"<sup>18</sup> The 'madness' of Foucault's enterprise, Derrida argues, lies in its attempt to transcend the language of Western reason. Such an attempt is structurally correlative to Levi-Strauss' notion of the absolute singularity of the name; like the name, madness cannot be said without being re-introduced into reason in general.<sup>19</sup> An archaeology of the silence of madness is, Derrida argues, impossible: "[a] history, that is, an archaeology against reason doubtless cannot be written, for, despite all appearance to the contrary, the concept of history has always been a rational one."<sup>20</sup>

#### *Derrida's Critique of Foucault's Denial of Originary Violence*

It is the perceived denial of the violence of all discourse by Foucault which sets in motion Derrida's critique. Foucault's project can proceed, Derrida argues, only insofar as he has violently determined madness from the outset:

"everything transpires as if Foucault knew what 'madness' means. Everything transpires as if, in a continuous and underlying way, an assumed and rigorous pre-comprehension of the concept of madness, or at least its nominal definition, were possible and acquired."<sup>21</sup>

If madness is indeed always in excess of philosophy and Western reason, then it cannot be said and Foucault must remain silent, to speak the silence of madness is inescapably to already determine it. For Derrida, Foucault can only justify his project by imagining an

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18 Jacques Derrida, 'Cogito and the History of Madness', *Writing and Difference*. Pp.36-76, p.41

19 Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*, p.35

20 WD, p.42-3

21 WD, p.49



originary presence of madness *within* history which would efface the metaphysics of his own determination of madness.

This moment of originary presence is sought, Derrida says, in the preface of *Madness and Civilization* wherein a contrast is drawn between the objectification of madness in modernity and the Greeks who, Foucault claims, had no conception of an other to logos but rather, only a distinction between *sophrosyne* and *hybris*, between moderation and excess.<sup>22</sup> In the classical age madness is made silent, it is forced to conceal that reason cannot constitute itself except by excluding unreason. Only by conceiving, Derrida argues, an originary presence of madness which existed for the Greeks; that is, a non-violent prior unity and abundance of madness and reason, can Foucault perceive his own discourse as a non-violent and non-determining return to this undifferentiated “original presence.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to positing the presence of madness, Derrida argues that Foucault is caught dating the event of division between reason and madness across two irreconcilable points. Foucault famously draws a structural correlation between the ‘great confinement’ carried out in European societies in the seventeenth century and Descartes’ *Meditations*. Derrida argues that Foucault’s argument is grounded in a contradiction: that the exclusion of madness occurs in the seventeenth century *and* simultaneously, that reason had no other for the ancient Greeks. If, Derrida argues, the event of decision occurred with Socrates’ insertion of reason within his reassuring logos, in which case the decision is essential to the history of philosophy. Consequently, the specificity of the classical age cannot be maintained together with Foucault’s simultaneous privileging of the Greeks. Conversely, if *hubris* was not in fact contained by reason in the way Foucault describes in the preface to *Madness and Civilization*, then the Socratic dialectic cannot have the reassurance of rationality that Foucault describes. Thus, the split between reason and its other in the seventeenth century would lose its mark of specificity.

For Derrida, these confusions arise because Foucault has not recognized the *a*

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22 *Madness and Civilization*, p.xii-xiii

23 WD, p.48. Foucault would come to criticize precisely the move of placing the grounds of thought as withdrawal in *The Order of Things*, see “The Retreat and Return to Origin.” Pp.358-365. Derrida and Foucault both associate this move (and the turn to the pre-Socratics) with Nietzsche and Heidegger.

*priori* grounds of the opposition between reason and its other, he has failed to think the “common root of meaning and nonmeaning” and thus, the point wherein “the original *logos* in which a language and a silence are divided from one another.”<sup>24</sup> From Derrida’s perspective the crucial difference between he and Foucault is that the latter does not adequately question these grounds insofar as he finds the opposition grounded *within* history and as a consequence, his thought does not accede to the point of division or difference which is anterior to a determined history. Foucault’s thought collapses the *economy* of historicity into the historical, the *de jure* into the *de facto*, and the transcendent into the empirical.<sup>25</sup> To accede to a point completely beyond reason would be to position oneself beyond language itself. Accordingly, the archaeologist inhabits an impossible transcendental and Archimedean position. The archaeology of silence fails because it does not accede to the locus where the conditions of possibility of reason, history, language etc., structure the limits within which Foucault’s analysis functions. As Derrida puts it, “[i]t is the meaning of ‘history’ or *archia* that should have been questioned first, perhaps. A writing that exceeds, by questioning them, the values ‘origin,’ ‘reason,’ and ‘history’ could not be contained within the metaphysical closure of an archaeology”<sup>26</sup> It is an analysis of this originary point which would be the focus of Derrida’s re-interpretation of Descartes in distinction to Foucault’s.

#### *Undermining Foucault's Reading of Descartes*

At the beginning of the second chapter of *Madness and Civilization* dedicated to the ‘Great Confinement’ which occurs across Europe during the seventeenth century, Foucault uses Descartes to establish a distinction between attitudes towards madness that existed during the Renaissance and Classical periods. This epochal shift, marked by an institutionalization of the mad that had commenced in Paris and traversed across Europe, is conditioned by the formation of a ‘rigid division’ between reason and madness exemplified in Descartes’ *Meditations*.<sup>27</sup> For Descartes, Foucault argues, errors of the senses, illusions, and dreams all form obstacles to the overcoming of doubt, yet madness is categorically different:

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24 WD, p.51. Quoted in Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*, p.33

25 WD, p.50

26 WD, p.42-3

27 Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. (Trans. & Ed. By John Cottingham), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

“[i]n the economy of doubt, there is a fundamental disequilibrium between madness on the one hand, and dream and error on the other. Their position is different in relation to truth and to he who seeks it; dreams or illusions are overcome from within the structure of truth itself; but madness is excluded by the subject who doubts.”<sup>28</sup>

Madness falls outside the categories of truth and error and is disqualified from the activity of doubting *a priori*. Foucault ties this gesture to an immense epistemological shift which relocates the question of the possibility of knowledge from the quality of the object to be known to the mind of the thinking subject. Consequently, once madness is constituted as the absence of thought it is excluded from the thinking subject; “I who think, cannot be mad,” as Foucault puts it.<sup>29</sup>

This reading of Descartes attracts the focus of Derrida’s critique of Foucault because in it he finds all of the elements of a metaphysical determination and exclusion of the relation to the other of which he accuses Foucault. Indeed, all of the questions of thinking relationality between these two thinkers can be seen here in their embryonic form. Derrida claims that, through his reading of Descartes, Foucault formulates a violent exclusion of madness in an extra-historical objectification of the other and in a historical determination of the foundation of the exclusion.

The question of the mutual exclusion between reason and madness, Derrida argues, is not a historical one but is rather economical in the sense that it is essential to the “*economy*” of language as such.<sup>30</sup> Language and reason always already mark a break with madness, language is always already differed and deferred from madness and therefore, Foucault’s attempted history of reason and its exclusion of madness is one form of madness and does not represent the historicity of reason in general.<sup>31</sup> The Cartesian exclusion is not a particular event; it is the constitutive foundation of the possibility of language, reason and history as such. In denying what Derrida views as the essential nature of the determination of the other in the constitution of meaning and history, Foucault is accused of positing his enterprise as transcendent to this violence by pretending to accede to a position from which he can appropriate the originary presence of the unity of reason and madness. Thus, he is guilty of a “structuralist totalitarianism” insofar as he invokes, what Derrida calls, an “evasive transcendence;” a transcendence

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28 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie a l'Age Classique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972. (My translation.) p.57

29 *Ibid.*

30 WD, p.51, 68

31 WD, p.50-1

which, in effacing the violence of its own discourse, succumbs to the error of all metaphysics.<sup>32</sup>

### *Madness as Unmasterable Excess*

While Foucault claims madness is excluded and constituted as the other of the cogito, and consequently thought as an illness to be repressed, Derrida argues that Descartes never excludes madness at this point in the meditation (where Foucault says he does), since here it is a case of only a minor impediment to the act of doubting and not a totalizing termination of doubt. Madness, Derrida says, is a less radical form of doubt than the examples of the dream and especially the evil genius. On the one hand, the dream functions to question all sense perception and is thus more radical than madness as a form of doubt and on the other, madness is not an act of doubt but only a rhetorical device composed for Descartes' non-philosophical interlocutor. Doubt is only radically considered in the instance of imagining an evil genius wherein we are forced to question ideas, not only of sensible origin as in dreams, but also of intelligible origin.<sup>33</sup> The evil genius represents the possibility of total error and delusion wherein, unlike the example of the dream, even deductions such as mathematical truths may be false.

It is at the moment of absolute delusion provoked by the evil genius that the cogito is nevertheless affirmed by Descartes. As Derrida puts it, for Descartes, “[the cogito] is valid, *even if I am mad*.”<sup>34</sup> The presence of reason is only constituted when reason itself is ‘mad,’ when the opposition between reason and madness is undecidable, a space radically anterior to any necessary relation between reason and madness, time and thought, temporality and truth.<sup>35</sup> The cogito is the “zero point” “which no longer belongs to a *determined* reason or a *determined* unreason,” it is the “common origin” of meaning and nonmeaning whereby “all the determined forms of the exchanges between reason and madness are embedded.”<sup>36</sup> Rather than exclude madness as Foucault believes, Derrida argues that Descartes fully appropriates it in the cogito. At the moment of the hyperbolic doubt of the evil genius, Descartes accedes to the ‘essential’ point beyond the totality of reason which is historically determined, and accordingly, the cogito cannot be reduced or

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32 WD, p.69-70

33 Antonio Campillo, “The History of a Debate on History.”

34 WD, p.67

35 WD, p.393-4. (n.27)

36 WD, p.68

confined to a historical structure or totality. Descartes thus seeks a point, Derrida argues, prior to all meaning, a point which acts as the possibility of meaning, reason, history as such.

Derrida's critique of Foucault works by undermining the possibility of thinking the decision for reason over madness as a determinate historical event.<sup>37</sup> Foucault is said to collapse the transcendental condition of the 'decision' or differentiation between reason and madness to either/or the exclusions constituted in Socrates and Descartes. Yet any claim to temporalize the cogito, to determine it within the horizon of a history would be, Derrida says, "*violence* itself."<sup>38</sup> Any claim for a madness exterior to logos would amount to a decision which would claim to transcend the determining violence of relation. The 'common origin' of reason and madness, Derrida argues, is the point of radical hyperbole wherein thought can only think determinate forms by transcending the totality through the guarantee and grounding of thought in God.<sup>39</sup> Only when Descartes posits God as the source of a totalizing closure does the decision and differentiation occur. Only through the absolutely divine is the cogito saved from the silence of total hyperbole: "Descartes knew that, without God, finite thought never had the *right* to exclude madness, etc. Which amounts to saying that madness is never excluded, except *in fact*, violently, in history."<sup>40</sup> Madness is the condition of possibility of Descartes' project since it constitutes absolute doubt, but also marks its impossibility since the exit from madness is only made in a thinking of totality. Madness is in principle or *de jure* always inseparable from reason, yet it is *de facto* exceeded in determinate historical events. The point of differentiation is located at the cogito's reinsertion into determinate history with the absolute support of God. The cogito becomes non-madness once it speaks, once it becomes temporal and discursive. Any claim to speak madness is always already necessarily grounded in its exclusion since language must both open to, yet determine, the otherness of madness which is its condition of possibility.

Just as Foucault can constitute his archaeological enterprise as soon as he departs from his initial definition of madness as pure silence in order to implicitly determine it in some way, Descartes makes the same move through the guarantee of certainty in God.

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37 Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*, p.35

38 WD, p.70

39 WD, p.68,

40 WD, p.395 (n.28)

Both Descartes and Foucault think the forms of reason and madness as historically determinate because they violently determine the infinite hyperbole of madness as a closed totality either through the transcendence of totality by the divine (Descartes) or by the Archimedean position of the archaeologist (Foucault). Foucault endows hyperbole with a historical location and thus, denies the 'essential' excess in any relation to an other. In principle, the violence of this relation is never overcome for it conditions the possibility of meaning, history and reason. The violence of exclusion and of constituting determinate relations is irreducible.

### *The Cogito and the Determination of Relation*

Derrida has thus shifted the place of what he elsewhere calls the "prior medium in which differentiation in general is produced" away from where it is located by Foucault.<sup>41</sup> Something akin to Heidegger's circumscription of Nietzsche occurs here. Derrida's account seeks to circumscribe Foucault within the limits of metaphysics which the latter seeks to exceed. Contra Foucault, the medium of the constitution of a determinate relation of reason and madness cannot be thought as a singular historical event for two reasons. Firstly, because the separation of reason and madness is a condition of historicity and language itself and therefore, a historical account of this separation always already presupposes it as soon as it speaks. Secondly, (and this follows from the first reason) there is no reason which is not already traversed by madness, nor a madness which is not traversed by reason and thus, neither can be questioned from the perspective of the other.

In short, Foucault is accused of repeating the Cartesian exclusion. That is, archaeology betrays madness as soon as it begins to speak, much as the Cartesian guarantee of certainty cannot but violently determine the irreducible indefinite excess of hyperbolic doubt. By providing the cogito with a divine guarantor Descartes neutralizes its excess so that it may begin to think axiomatically while Foucault is only able to speak of an event of decision in presupposing an originary (non-violent) and harmonious logos prior to the dispersion which he aims to reverse. The originary violence of all relation and language is denied in its being reduced to a localized historical event.

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<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. (trans. Barbara Johnson) London: Routledge, 1981, p.129. Quoted in Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*. P.64

## Foucault and the Discursive Field of Differentiation in Descartes

Foucault produced his response to Derrida as an appendix to the second edition of *Madness and Civilization* nearly ten years after Derrida's essay had first appeared. By the time the response appeared the nature of Foucault's enterprise had shifted significantly. For all intents and purposes, the response to Derrida came from a different Foucault than the one who had written *Madness and Civilization*. By 1972, when "My Body, This Paper, This Fire" had appeared, *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* had already been published and Foucault had already announced his later genealogical project with "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." This later Foucault would no longer claim to accede to the possibility of an experience of pure exteriority in madness; Foucault had, by the early 1970s at the latest, revoked the attempt to think a non-violent relation to the absolutely other.<sup>42</sup> Without ever acknowledging Derrida's critique of his attempt to think an originary experience of 'madness itself' as present to thought, he had nevertheless explicitly revised the aim of his enterprise and had done so, at least in part, through a critique of this aim in *Madness and Civilization*. For instance, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault admits that the earlier book "had accorded too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too, to what [he] called an 'experience,' thus showing to what extent one was still close admitting an anonymous and general subject of history."<sup>43</sup> In effect, Foucault implicitly admits that to the extent that he had aspired to uncover an experience of madness totally in excess of metaphysics Derrida's critique is accurate.<sup>44</sup>

However, if Foucault can be said to admit this element of Derrida's critique, he is nevertheless adamant that it is Derrida, and not he, who has repeated the 'Cartesian exclusion.' Foucault's reply thus immediately addresses what I claim is the question at the core of the debate: the location and status of the 'essential' point wherein the exclusion is constituted, the status of the point or medium of differentiation. For while Derrida argues that the cogito, as constituted in the excess of hyperbolic doubt, cannot be fully enclosed within a historical structure, Foucault argues that in this interpretation the cogito only exceeds a finite determined totality in terms of the status assigned to it by

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42 cf. Antonio Campillo, "Derrida and Foucault: A History of a Debate on History." P.118

43 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, [Hereafter referred to as AK], p.16

44 I am not prepared to go so far and assume, as Roy Boyne does, that it was as a direct reaction to Derrida's critique that Foucault had revised the aim of his oeuvre. Cf. *Derrida and Foucault: The Other Side of Reason*.

philosophical discourse.<sup>45</sup> Derrida is said to efface the multiplicity of discursive elements co-existing in Descartes text because he only reads it from the position of a sovereign philosophical discourse which disavows any other (juridical, medical) discursive elements. Foucault's reply therefore suggests that it is Derrida who is guilty of what Nietzsche calls a will to truth since he violently excludes the singular elements of Cartesian discourse in order to locate within it 'transcendental' philosophical problems. Foucault thus once again shifts the point where the exclusion – the determination of relation – is to be located, both in Descartes' text and in Derrida's, to the denial of the inescapable power and violence of a material discourse. It is Derrida whose reading of Descartes is circumscribed within the limits of metaphysics, whose account fails to think the terrain where the metaphysical may be exceeded.

#### *Derrida's Cartesian Gesture*

In this, his second and more extensive interpretation of the *Meditations* Foucault argues that Derrida is wrong to assume that the dream hypothesis is a more radical exercise of doubt than the example of madness because the dream affects only the matter of meditation. That is to say, it only affects the object of the meditating subject's knowledge and so only puts in question the truth of the most immediate sensory impressions. Madness, on the other hand, Foucault argues, affects the epistemological and medical characterization of the social and juridical qualification of the meditating subject itself. In organizing his interpretation of Descartes in terms of the question of hyperbole from Foucault's perspective Derrida ignores the broader ethical features of the discourse. He effaces the *askesis* or ascetic transformation that the meditating subject undergoes in order to prove capable of performing the philosophical act of doubting *prior to the performance of the act itself*. Before the examples of the dream and of the evil genius upon which Derrida focuses, there is a prior demand for the formation and determination of a specific type of subject which is qualified to doubt.<sup>46</sup>

As such, Derrida's 'philosophical' reading of Descartes is said to overlook that the

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45 See Wendy Cealy Harrison "Madness and Historicity: Foucault and Derrida, Artaud and Descartes." *History of the Human Sciences*. Vol.20, No.27, 2007. Pp.79-105,

46 Foucault would return to this theme of the *askesis* or self-transformation of the subject in his final works on ancient ethical and political practices. In these later works the event of decision in Descartes remains for Foucault the archetypal instance of a modern subject who is always determined prior to philosophical exercise. These themes will be explored in chapter 4.



text forms, not only a philosophical system of propositions wherein the subject remains fixed and unaffected by the demonstration, but also a subjective exercise which, in acting as a discursive event, calls for a transformation of the doubting subject. The Cartesian discourse is defined by Foucault, employing the perspective developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as a “discursive meditation” which functions as:

“a set of discursive events which constitute at once groups of utterances linked one to another by formal rules of deduction, and series of modifications of the enunciating subject which follow continuously one from another” and thus, “the utterances which are formally linked, modify the subject as they develop.”<sup>47</sup>

These two complimentary elements of the text are disregarded from the outset of Derrida’s analysis insofar as he does not proceed in analyzing the text as a discourse, that is, as “a set of utterances which are produced each in its place and time.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, insofar as it is a discursive event, Foucault maintains that the analysis of Descartes’ text must endeavor to determine the meaning of its utterances and the relation between the status of the utterance and the position of the speaking subject.

Only through an analysis of the *Meditations* as discursive ensemble is the position of the subject in relation to the discourse and in relation to itself established so that the Cartesian meditation marks both the constitution of the form of a subject who is authorized to speak the truth (to form axiomatic statements) and the exclusion of a subject who may not (the subject qualified as mad). The meditation is thus what Foucault would later call an ethical technique for the production of a particular mode of subjectivity, or, in other words, the meditation functions as a modification of the subject capable of the enunciation of philosophical truths. It is a ‘spiritual exercise’ which, in altering the subject, produces either a subject deemed capable of speaking the truth or one who is disqualified from truth-speaking.<sup>49</sup>

### *The 'Meditations' as Subjective Exercise*

Descartes begins his meditation with a single proposition: every truth received by the senses must be doubted and consequently, for the meditation to continue, its subject must form itself into a subject capable of doubting absolutely. However, a subject capable

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47 Michel Foucault, "My Body, This Paper, This Fire." *EWII*, Pp.393-418, p.406

48 *EWII*, p.405

49 The distinction of discourse as spiritual exercise between Descartes and the ancient Greeks would again become the focus of Foucault’s very last works. See chapter 4.

of absolute doubt would be mad and accordingly, would be disqualified from participating in a rational discourse. Thus, Foucault argues that the necessary first step is to perform an *askesis* to confirm the subject as rational and so it is in this sense that Descartes proposes the example of the dream as superior to the example of madness; the subject of madness, unlike the example of the dream, can neither be the doubting nor the meditating subject. As Foucault puts it, “madness is posited as disqualificatory in any search for truth....” and thus, Descartes constitutes the event of decision whereby he “parts company with all those for whom madness can be in one way or another the bringer or revealer of truth.”<sup>50</sup> Madness is excluded because the exercise of the madman’s doubt does not qualify as that of a rational subject; the madman cannot speak the truth. Descartes disqualifies the madman by identifying him through seventeenth century juridical and medical discourse as *demens*, and it is through this juridical category that he is always already determined as incapable of truth-speaking. The point of exclusion occurs in the intersection of several discourses, none of which is absolutely privileged, which in turn determine in advance, that is, form the limits of, the subject of philosophy.

Derrida, Foucault argues, is only able to view the example of the dream as a more radical questioning of sense perception because he discounts the discursive difference between the subject of madness and the subject of dreaming which he is able to do only by revoking philosophical status from the exclusion of the mad subject. Furthermore, Derrida claims that the example of the madman is excluded from the process of doubt insofar as it is removed by Descartes for pedagogic reasons, that is, the dream unlike the example of madman, does not frighten what he imagines to be Descartes’ naïve, common-sense, non-philosophical interlocutor. In considering the dream in relation to madness in this way, Foucault argues that it is Derrida who has in fact performed the ‘Cartesian exclusion’ of the other since he excludes madness insofar as it is not accorded ‘philosophical status.’ Foucault’s claim is, in short, that Derrida’s interpretation has the effect of “erasing” differences within the text in the name of the priority of a philosophical discourse which, in order to preserve its sovereignty over the text, must ignore its own historical determination.<sup>51</sup> The Derridean reading does not traverse the chiasm in the text, remaining only at the point of question of the possibility of the Cartesian ‘system’ and not of its status as a subjective exercise.

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50 EWII, p.409

51 EWII, p.412

*Madness and the Sovereignty of Philosophy*

Accordingly, while Derrida posits the example of the evil genius as the most radical example of doubt in the meditation, Foucault argues this example only emerges at a point in the meditation where madness has already been mastered and excluded by philosophy: “[i]f the evil genius takes on powers of *madness*, this is only after the exercise meditation has excluded the risk of *being mad*.”<sup>52</sup> The event of determination, the closure of the inside from the outside, occurs elsewhere Foucault argues, because the example of the evil genius is a mastered and voluntary exercise that allows the meditation to continue insofar as it allows a so-called madness to appear to philosophical discourse only once it has been objectified and excluded. For Derrida, much like for Descartes, madness is evoked as a fiction to be overcome and mastered by the subject of philosophy. Derrida has abstracted and protected philosophical subjectivity from the power of discourse through an act which asserts the sovereignty of philosophy, that is, which “avoid[s] placing discursive practices in the *field of transformation* where they are carried out.”<sup>53</sup>

For Foucault, Derrida’s interpretation of the text is constituted through an a-historical idealism and it is thus Derrida (and not Foucault) who makes the metaphysical move of occupying a position totally transcending history itself insofar as all texts are subsumed to a single philosophical discourse: “the philosopher,” Foucault says in reference to Derrida, “goes directly to the calling into question of the ‘totality of beingness.’”<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, the argument goes, Derrida sees all discourses through the horizon of philosophical discourse and is thus blind to the singularity of madness in the Cartesian meditation. In effect, it is Derrida and not Foucault, who must claim to occupy a position prior to, but wholly outside of, history. Derrida’s analysis thus appears as a-historical from Foucault’s perspective because it fails to accede to a thought of the point of exclusion. Exclusion is not constituted for Foucault in the necessary denial of the absence of the other (in the act of making the other present) but in the forces of dispersion of discourse which form and determine the other as a certain type of subject (one who cannot doubt rationally) and thus, as a certain type of object of knowledge (insane, mentally ill, etc.).

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52 EWII, p.415

53 EWII, p.416 (emphasis added).

54 EWII, p.412

### *The Cogito and the Determination of Relation (Again)*

Foucault's critique of Derrida is premised upon shifting the accusation of a violent determination of the relation to the other from himself onto Derrida insofar as he accuses Derrida of committing a secondary violence upon the originary violence of discourse. Derrida is said to deny the singular elements of the discourse in order to locate within it transcendental philosophical problems. In thinking the relation of *logos*-madness as a necessarily and irreducibly undecidable question of the conditions of possibility of all meaning, historicity, language, Derrida denies the material differences of discourse(s) producing the context or conditions from which Descartes' discourse emerges. And while Derrida would claim that his analysis accedes to a point anterior to the transcendental insofar as he questions the production of a metaphysico-transcendental position – which he claims Foucault inhabits without problematizing – Foucault reverses the claim to argue that it is Derrida's analysis which fails to question its own transcendental status and as such, establishes a position for deconstruction which would always violently determine the object of analysis in advance.

In short, Foucault can be understood to claim in "My Body, This Paper, This Fire" that it is in fact Derrida's analysis which constitutes itself in determining relationality in advance and accordingly, it is Derrida who is guilty of repressing the violence and objectification which occurs in his analysis. It is a question then, once again, though this time on Foucault's part, of making the claim to have acceded to a point anterior to the exclusion of the other which occurs in the *Meditations*; a point which for Foucault cannot lie in the 'quasi'-transcendental nature of the excess of the evil genius because madness, is already excluded by Descartes before the act of doubting can take place.

### **The (Im)possibility of Choosing Between Derrida and Foucault**

In essence, the 'cogito' debate consists in two accusations of denial; two accusations of constituting a secondary violence, of denying the exclusion of the other in order to govern it and identify it within a domain that the accused has mastered in advance. Consequently, Derrida and Foucault accuse one another of the ethical failure to think the violence of relationality insofar as each is charged with suppressing this violence in the name of a method which accedes to the essential point of exclusion, of

determination and objectification of the self's relation to the other and others. The difference between them is therefore a question of two modes of thinking the medium or point where the differentiation, and thus violence, occurs and the ethico-political implications of failing to view this point correctly. In effect, this failure amounts to, in the view of both thinkers, what we have called using the formulation outlined by Nietzsche and appropriated by both Derrida and Foucault, the will to truth. That is, failure to think the medium of differentiation correctly amounts to the denial and repression of the conditions of possibility of one's own analysis and thus, to a secondary violence which effaces the 'true' point of determination and exclusion of the other. In other words, from the respective positions of deconstruction's analysis of the quasi-transcendental nature of the exclusion and of archaeology's analysis of what we might call the quasi-empirical nature of the multiplicity of discourse, the other thinker's analysis always appears as having failed to affirm the irreducibility of its being-thrown into determinate relations.

The claim being pursued here is that from each of these positions, the opposing one appears incapable of thinking the medium of differentiation wherein relations are determined and thus, of an ethical and political failure insofar as the question of relation is the irreducible primary element of the political. These two thinkers seem to be mutually incompatible, and yet, are only shown to 'err' or commit the metaphysical move of determining relation from within the horizon of one or the other's text. Nevertheless, it should be evident that the questions of historicity, text and world, and region of application, are all determined by this anterior point of the medium of differentiation. Any characterization of the difference between Derrida and Foucault in these terms will only succeed in identifying partial or secondary differences between them, but not the source of their incommensurability; two distinct 'media of differentiation' through which all of their analyses pass.

If at the core of the 'cogito debate' we find the question of the locus or medium where determinate relations are formed, then we should see this question as opening a host of themes that cut across both Derrida's and Foucault's work. Epistemic questions about the possibility of a knowledge which can think this region while simultaneously avowing its own situatedness, ontological questions about the being of thought and its relation to its other, and consequent ethical and political questions relating to the

appropriate response of what a thought asserting its relatedness and thus violence over things should be. The stakes of the debate are, it seems, high. Moreover, it is my that claim the polemic is irresolvable. Relationality is either said to no longer appear in the open horizon of a question, but in a transcendently governed field of philosophical questions or an empirically determined history through which alterity is violently made to appear. The transcendently or empirically determined field where differentiation occurs functions for the interlocutor as the disavowed alibi for the inescapable violence of relation.

The incongruity if not irony of these two-way accusations of transcendentalism and empiricism is that it is in working to displace the empirico-transcendental binary through which Derrida and Foucault have defined much of their theoretical enterprises. Accordingly, if it is to their mutual engagements with the question of the subject to which we now turn it is because it is here that in modernity the transcendental and the empirical have been brought into contact with one another; where a determinate transcendental form of subjectivity has functioned to govern the empirical content of knowledge, but also of ethical and political relations. If the claim that the polemic between them is irresolvable is to be upheld, then one way of doing so is to demonstrate that both thinkers have sought to think beyond an empirico-transcendental double to think the conditions or 'medium' by which the subject can emerge. Ultimately, despite their claims to the contrary, the terms of the debate are grounded neither in transcendentalism nor empiricism but rather, in the 'grander' narratives through which each accounts for the double's emergence.

### **Between Immanence and Transcendence**

The question of the subject is perhaps the most basic and essential question of modern philosophy. Its importance lies in the fact that in modernity the subject has functioned as the ground of knowledge, but also of the political since it has served as ground ordering relations between the self and the world, truth and others. In modernity, the individual considered as a 'subject' has acted as the Archimedean point from which the world is given meaning and significance. The Latin term *subjectum* as is well known, is a translation of the Greek *hupokeimenon*, a term referring to a fundamental

substratum which has no more originary ground and upon which all other elements are predicated.<sup>55</sup> It functions as the ultimate substance underlying Being as such. Once 'man' as self, ego, consciousness, etc. becomes *subjectum* in modernity, the determining principle or ground is made to coincide with the thinking 'I.' Descartes' *Meditations* inaugurate the positing of an abstract, transcendental subjectivity and a concrete empirical reality in which the thinking subject can be located. Yet it was Kant who radicalized this formulation of the thinking subject by grounding subjectivity on the relation and difference between subject and object. The object comes to depend on the subject's constitution of objectivity; reason becomes grounded on universal laws which form the transcendental conditions of knowledge. Thus, as Gerard Granel argues, Descartes' 'I think' becomes with Kant, "I represent to myself that I think."<sup>56</sup> For Kant, experience is representational; the world and its objects are received by reason according to transcendental conditions, that is, through the way objects which are sensibly present are represented to thought.

Grounded in Kant's 'Copernican revolution' of the conditions of subjective knowledge, the rise of modern philosophies of subjectivity would bring with them a new vision of the political. Particular philosophies of subjectivity, by establishing a transcendental human identity, would provide a new ground upon which political philosophies and policy could be based. Particular political strategies, from Hobbes to Marx and beyond, work to ground themselves through various assertions of human nature or knowledge and the consequent desire for a harmony between a given human essence or identity and political institutions. The metaphysics of subjectivity would thus serve not only to determine the self's relation to the world and its possible knowledge of it but crucially, the self's relations to others. It is in this sense that Heidegger's critique of modern anthropologism's determination of man as a being who gives measure and regulates all that is, is not only radically epistemological or ontological, but inherently political.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, for Heidegger, to conceive man as both an entity, being, or object and as the ground of all objects is to neglect the primordial status of our being-in-the-world which precedes the subject-object or empirico-transcendental dualism.

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55 cf. Simon Critchley "Prolegomena to Any Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity." *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, (Simon Critchley & Peter Dews, Eds.) Pp.13-46, see p.13

56 Gerard Granel, "Who Comes After the Subject?" *Who Comes After the Subject?* (Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, Eds.) London: Routledge, 1991. P.159

57 See for instance "The Age of the World Picture." P.134

Heidegger replaces the epistemic question of 'how can the subject have knowledge?' to the ontological question of Being. That is, the transcendental question is displaced by the question of the givenness or disclosure of Being which precedes particular relations between truth and the world. In other words, Heidegger seeks to think what is 'between' and anterior to determinate relations between subject and object or subject and subject. As he puts in 'The Letter on Humanism': "[e]very determination of the essence of man [...] always presupposes an interpretation of beings without asking about the truth of Being."<sup>58</sup> His articulation of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world displaces articulations of subjectivity or intersubjectivity as particular ways of relating to the world, or what he calls modes through which the world is disclosed. Heidegger thinks Being as the medium through which determinate relations to the self, the world and others are given or produced and thus, the subject as relation between the empirical and transcendental is circumscribed by a more originary relation to Being.

Like Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault disrupt and displace the constitution of the empirico-transcendental double by thinking an 'outside' which is both anterior to and gives or discloses the subject. They share the post-Heideggerean impetus of thinking the subject as situated and made to appear through a logic or 'medium' which exceeds it. After Heidegger, the question of the subject is no longer a question of a substance which governs thought's relation to the world and to others, but rather, a question of its appearance or becoming. The being of the subject, as Nancy says, "*takes place*, that is to say it *comes into presence*."<sup>59</sup> Derrida and Foucault both share the view articulated by Nancy of the subject not as a determinate transcendental substance, but as effected and allowed to appear within networks of determinate historical, material and linguistic relations. Both think the appearance of the subject through what has been called the 'paradox of subjectivity:' "the ineluctable aspect of thought attempting to think its own (absent) ground."<sup>60</sup> Both Derrida and Foucault attend to the space generated by the paradox of a thinking 'I' which is both ground and object of thought; attempting to appropriate itself to *itself*. It is to the ways in which Derrida and Foucault respectively think the appearance of the subject as a determinate relation between the inside and its constitutive outside to

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58 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*. P.225-6

59 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Introduction," *Who Comes After the Subject?* p.7

60 Caroline Williams, *Contemporary French Philosophy: Modernity and the Persistence of the Subject*. London: Continuum, 2001. p.8



which we will now turn. This will serve two purposes. First, it will substantiate the different and ultimately incommensurable ways they conceive the relation between the empirical and transcendental which we saw was central to their debate over the *Meditations*. Secondly and consequently, it will point to the ways in which each proceeds to question and moreover, thinks the possibility of thinking, the anterior medium through which relations are determined. As such, it will serve to substantiate my claim that the terms of the debate between them lie not with a question of text or world but with the correlative yet incommensurable grander narratives which each proffers.

In an essay originally published in 1996 titled 'Absolute Immanence' Giorgio Agamben famously draws a distinction between on the one hand, Deleuze and Foucault and Derrida and Levinas on the other hand, as marking two distinct Heideggerean trajectories in twentieth century philosophy.<sup>61</sup> Deleuze and Foucault are said, in a lineage passing through Spinoza and Nietzsche, to be thinkers of pure immanence, while Derrida and Levinas, in their affinity to Kant and Husserl, are called by Agamben thinkers of transcendence.<sup>62</sup> In drawing the distinction in these terms, Agamben's essay suggests a productive way of thinking the difference between Derrida and Foucault. But while Agamben does devote several paragraphs to the immanent structure of Foucault's formulation of 'life' (to which we will return), the name of Derrida only appears in a highly schematic diagram in the end of the essay. Agamben's text is given to thinking the concepts of immanence and life in Deleuze and we are left guessing what the precise terms and stakes of drawing such a distinction might be. In developing Agamben's suggestive schema in terms of the differences between Derrida and Deleuze, Daniel W. Smith provides some insights which are productive for our own analysis.<sup>63</sup> In tracing the paths of Derrida's thought of transcendence and Deleuze's thought of immanence through the questions of subjectivity, ontology and epistemology Smith provides the parameters for an analysis of the divergence between Derrida and Foucault. Foucault, like Deleuze, thinks both experience and Being in the terms of immanence, that is, that there is nothing beyond Being and that there is an immanence between Being and beings. On

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61 Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence." *Potentialities*. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Ed. & trans.). Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. pp.220-239.

62 *Ibid.* p.239

63 Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought." *Between Deleuze and Derrida*. Paul Patton & John Protevi (Eds.), London: Continuum, 2003. pp.46-66.

the other hand, Smith argues, that while Derrida is not simply a transcendental philosopher, he nevertheless insists upon what he calls a "formal structure of transcendence."<sup>64</sup>

While Smith's account is helpful in thinking the implications of Agamben's diagram, he nonetheless passes too quickly over the nuances of Derrida's work. As we will see below, to insist on a purely transcendent structure to deconstruction is to efface the Derridean claim that all transcendence is irrevocably tied to and contaminated by the empirical realm from which it attempts to delimit itself. I suggest that insofar as it is engaged in undermining or disrupting transcendental grounds Derrida's thought is close to Foucault's. They converge upon the pursuit of what is anterior to and 'outside' the duality of the empirico-transcendental. Furthermore, as we will see below, both I would claim, attempt to think the primacy of difference anterior to its subordination to some ground or repetition.<sup>65</sup> This is reflected by the genealogical thematic which I claimed in chapter 1 emerges with both thinkers; they both undermine efforts to completely exceed the originary violence of relation by taking up an archipolitical position which transcends and governs relationality. Yet both simultaneously turn against this possibility in affirming the impossibility of an Archimedean position beyond determinate relations which would afford access to pure difference in itself.

Nevertheless, if there are similar theoretical effects and consequences from Derrida and Foucault's distinct ways of undermining the empirico-transcendental double, such a displacement is nevertheless accomplished through two distinct efforts which we might think, as Agamben suggests, in terms of immanence and (quasi)transcendence. While Derrida's conception of the 'double-bind' or of conditions of possibility as impossible maintains the necessity of working through transcendental ideas as regulative of thought, Foucault attempts to displace the transcendental altogether. In other words, Derrida attempts to submit the conditions of the possibility of experience to their simultaneous impossibility and thus works in the terms of an essential interruption or contamination of universal and transcendental conditions of experience. In a very different theoretical decision, Foucault displaces the question of transcendental

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64 Ibid. p.48, 54

65 In several texts, Leonard Lawlor suggests that, while they may engage in different theoretical work, Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault should all be considered as thinkers of immanence. cf. Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence* and *Thinking Through French Philosophy*.

conditions altogether by what he calls in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, their 'conditions of emergence.' That is, transcendentals are submitted to the discursive events through which they are produced. In short, if what unites both thinkers is their desire to no longer submit and govern thought by transcendental grounds, it is in the way in which Derrida and Foucault attempt to displace or undermine the necessity for transcendental principles which their differences appear. It is to these two distinct movements of displacement of the empirico-transcendental double to which the rest of this chapter is addressed.

### **Derrida, Foucault and the Critique of the 'Double'**

The 'cogito debate' has pointed us towards the question of the empirico-transcendental since each accuses the other of a thought which inheres in the double. In the following sections, we will begin by showing that Derrida disrupts the double by submitting the constitution of the transcendental to an indefinite passage to self-presence which, since it can never completely transcend the empirical, is never fully constituted. We will then go on to examine Foucault's argument that the double is formed through a teleology or eschatology which aims to form a unity of identity and difference or Same and Other and thus, is doomed to fail since it covers over the immediacy of the discursive field through which it is formed. Both Derrida and Foucault thus think a differential network *between* and anterior to the double which prevents its ultimate presence to self, a relational surface or medium anterior to any determinate order of inter-subjectivity. It is the different ways in which this field is thought which will prove instructive for our analysis.

#### *Derrida and the Double: Exceeding Presence and Absence*

Derrida conceives his negotiations with the empirico-transcendental double as moving 'undecidably' between these two positions. The 'quasi-transcendental' structure of *différance* marks an irreducibility between empirico-historical events and their formal transcendental elements. The distinction between right and fact is both maintained and simultaneously displaced in the movement, exemplified in the reading of the cogito, *between* complete excess and its determination; between metaphysical closure and its outside. To neglect the essential and unmasterable excess of all relationality is to be

committed to historicism; to view history as a series of facts as Levi-Strauss and Foucault are accused is to commit violence in the denial of originary violence. On the other hand, to reject history as a determination of the originary presence of the other as other is to attempt to accede to a transcendent position uncontaminated by the *de facto* originary violence of relation and thus, a denial of the relational situatedness of thought.<sup>66</sup> Derrida attempts to avoid either option by demonstrating that the opposition between totality and excess or empirical and transcendental are preceded by a logic which he describes with the French word "pas," which can mean both 'step' and 'not'.<sup>67</sup> The passage to the presence of the transcendental signified only appears in its impossibility or withdrawal.

In his work Derrida has consistently sought to trace a constitutive failure of representation in dispersing it to an originary division and difference. While I have been referring to this 'non-originary' difference as an originary "medium," the term must be qualified for it refers to a locus anterior to any medium, a differential movement that cannot be conceived or conceptualized.<sup>68</sup> *Différance* does not exist within time and space, since it is the differential movement that gives them and thus, is opposed to the logic of an originary presence that is re-presented. Deconstruction opens to an experience of 'nonpassage' or of the "pas (step/not)" which gives and disrupts all unity, origin, ground, etc.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, presence is shown to be the effect of a difference and deferral that is "between" the empirical and transcendental since it names both fusion and separation, producing its conditions of possibility while making unity impossible.<sup>70</sup> The 'between' thus forms the 'medium' or 'milieu' which allows and prevents the constitution of the double, it marks "the spots of what can never be mediated, mastered, sublated, or dialecticized through any *Erinnerung* or *Aufhebung*."<sup>71</sup> Presence is always the effect of a dispersion or dissemination which thought can neither master nor appropriate. As we will see below, the displacement of presence is central to Derrida's deconstruction of the empirico-transcendental double.

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66 This argument is made by Marion Hobson in *Opening Lines*, p.40

67 cf. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another At) The 'Limits of Truth,'* (Trans. by Thomas Dutoit), Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993, p.6, [Hereafter referred to as 'AP']. "Ja, or the *Faux Bond*." *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*. (Elisabeth Weber Ed.) Trans. by Peggy Kamuf et al. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. P.52,

68 This point is made by Claire Colebrook in *The Ethics of Representation*.

69 AP, p.6

70 Derrida discusses the structure of his quasi-transcendentals as a 'between' in *Dissemination*, p.230. See also Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*.

71 *Ibid*.

## *The Voice and Writing*

The ideal of presence, Derrida claims, is grounded in a conception of the voice as a medium which transcends the breach between thought and its other. It allows thought to posit an enclosed space in which it can bring the presence of the signified to itself in a direct and unmediated relation. Metaphysics is thus said to proceed by way of an eschatology whereby the overcoming of the distance of re-presentation results complete presence to self. Insofar as logos is defined as pure presence, metaphysics attempts to found thought in the appropriation of an origin that would function as its ground: "[p]hilosophy has always insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its other which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production."<sup>72</sup> Metaphysics is defined by the desire to ground itself in what exceeds it by mastering it, that is to say, to provide a foundation for thought in an element which transcends thought but which both determines or makes thought possible and which thought can appropriate. In a number of early texts, including *Voice and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology* and 'The Ends of Man,' Derrida's argument shows self-presence to be grounded upon the constitution of a proximity of presence to the subject. As Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*:

"the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier - has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical."<sup>73</sup>

It is the voice which, posited as a necessary mode of what Derrida calls 'auto-affection,' functions as a medium that can preserve self-presence.<sup>74</sup> The metaphysics of subjectivity is grounded in a notion of the subject who is affected by a phoneme which does not pass through any exteriority, the world, the nonproper, or an other and thus, a transcendental signified divorced from its empirical inscription. Auto-affection, as the constitution of self-presence, occurs through the metaphysical notion of a time wherein space is completely reduced.<sup>75</sup> In order to posit the structure of an originary presence not contaminated by empiricity, a relation to presence must be conceived which is completely non-spatial. That is to say, for the metaphysics of self-presence to function, beyond

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<sup>72</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Tympan." *Margins of Philosophy*. Pp.IX-XXIX, quoted on p.X

<sup>73</sup> OG, p.7

<sup>74</sup> cf. Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence*. P.18

<sup>75</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. (Trans. by Alan Bass), London: Continuum, 2004. p.21. Leonard Lawlor explores this point particularly vociferously in both *The Implications of Immanence* and *Thinking Through French Philosophy*. My analysis is indebted to his formulation of the deconstruction of self-presence.

different signifiers there must be an original and transcendental meaning or content which can be sustained and re-presented through time.<sup>76</sup>

Derrida effects a displacement of the notion of self-presence, of the unity or fusion of the empirical and transcendental by recourse to a formulation of the irreducibility of time and space. There cannot be, he argues, any difference between thought and its other, between thought and its originary ground, without an originary division and deferral. Self-presence, insofar as it is always a re-presentation, passes through an inescapable spacing or outside which consequently, always traverses and contaminates the inside of self-presence. Time, as Derrida argues, is inseparable from space such that the immediacy of presence is always contaminated in a mediation; the singularity of self-presence is only constituted insofar as it is repeated and universalized. For a concept to mean, it must function as a meaning-content through and across time-space which means that it must function beyond particular instances such that meaning is re-presented across time.<sup>77</sup> While meaning is grounded in conceiving a presence beyond the sign, Derrida argues that the constitution of transcendentals is always contaminated and traced by failure since content (empirical positivity) and form (transcendental foundation) are inextricably bound and compounded together in self-presence *at the same time* – spacing is inescapably bound to thinking. There is consequently an essential ambiguity to the presence of an ideal content related to thought in self-presence in the (non)time of 'hearing(understanding)oneself-speak.' In speaking, even to oneself, thought is always exteriorized and thus, there is rather an irreducibility to the transcendental's contamination by the empirical in its passage through time-space. There is thus always already what we might call, echoing Foucault, a 'double' between hearing and speaking and between thought and its other.<sup>78</sup> Any transcendental ground, any relation of thought to its origin presupposes an originary difference and deferral which divides presence to the self. The excess of an outside always traverses the inside in a movement whereby the inside of non-space (time) appears to itself and constitutes self-presence.<sup>79</sup>

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76 Derrida makes this argument in relation to Aristotle's determination of Being as substance in "*Ousia* and *Gramme*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*." *Margins of Philosophy*, Pp. 29-68. See pp.50-2

77 "*Ousia* and *Gramme*." p.51

78 Leonard Lawlor suggests this analogy in *Thinking Through French Philosophy*. (See especially pp.11-23).

79 Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence*, p.51-2

*The Aporia Between the Empirical and the Transcendental*

The relation between the empirical and the transcendental is thus what Derrida calls 'undecidable' or an 'aporia'. Contra Smith's (and others') insistence on the primacy of the transcendental in Derrida's work, his negotiation with the question of the double disrupts the transcendental by forcing it to pass (and accordingly demonstrating its impossibility) through a 'detour' of the aporia of the 'between' and which consequently prevents the formation of what Marion Hobson calls "a homogeneous space for thought."<sup>80</sup> Like he does in his account of the constitution of the cogito, Derrida undermines a given transcendental by exhibiting the experience of the aporia between the conditions that make a given relation both possibility and impossible. This 'medium' is the place or milieu where differences themselves are formed: "the place where this division begins to function, a place that is not empirical or historico-chronological."<sup>81</sup> Origin can no longer be conceived as ground but as an aporetic movement of difference and deferral. To think ground or origin as aporia is not, however, to draw an irresolvable contradiction or problem to be solved, a logical deficiency, nor to show it to be the result of a rhetorical move.<sup>82</sup> Rather, the relation to origin, ground or determination of a field of relations is always already threatened and contaminated.<sup>83</sup> If the signifier functions as a passage for presence, then the aporia is the experience of a 'nonpassage.' In re-inscribing the notion of the sign from a passage for presence of ideal content to the withdrawal of presence which he calls 'arche-trace,' Derrida shows the double to be grounded in an attempt to efface the 'play' of difference (and consequently originary violence) in favor of a principle or *arche* which would serve to ground thought in advance.

Presence can only be thought as a movement which unceasingly differentiates the elements within a signifying series.<sup>84</sup> Each time it reiterates itself, the element is not identical to its previous saying and thus, a delay of the original signified.<sup>85</sup> The origin never comes to be present and the two movements of *différance*, the spatial and the temporal, function as a giving and simultaneous withdrawal of presence insofar as they constitute a relation between the same and the entirely other. It is in this sense that

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80 Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*, p.57

81 "Psyche: Invention of the Other," *Psyche*, Pp.1-47, Quoted on p.31

82 AP, p.12

83 *Ibid.* cf. Gasché *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Harvard: Harvard UP, 1986., p.125

84 Jacques Derrida, "La Différance." P.19

85 *Ibid.*, p.13

Derrida says that "différance is not."<sup>86</sup> Différance is thus the 'between;' neither absent nor present, neither transcendental nor empirical, it posits the necessity and failure of a passage through presence since it is the striving after presence which inaugurates the possibility of meaning in general yet it is the failure to constitute presence which traces its undermining.<sup>87</sup>

*Foucault and The Double: Between the Same and the Other*

Like Derrida, in *The Order of Things* Foucault famously displaces the 'double' by showing it to be the effect of what he elsewhere calls non-originary "spaces of dispersion."<sup>88</sup> The empirico-transcendental double is related to the specificity of the organizing principle of modern knowledge which Foucault calls *episteme* or 'historical a priori' and it refers to the "conditions of possibility" or later "conditions of emergence" for the empirical sciences at a given time and place:<sup>89</sup>

"[t]his apriori is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provide man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true."<sup>90</sup>

The *episteme* is identified by regularities in scientific discourses and thus, these conditions are not transcendental but rather, form a network or space in which scientific discourses may appear.<sup>91</sup> Foucault's analyses of discourse, which he calls 'archaeology,' rather than deny the existence of the subject, account for the conditions in which particular subjects are produced.<sup>92</sup> The subject, he says, is "a position that be filled in certain conditions by various individuals."<sup>93</sup> It is delimited by its place in a particular discourse since, as an autonomous field of regularities and transformations, discourse is not dependent on individual speakers for forming meaning. The historical *a priori* is made up of the historically dynamic rules of what is given to thought in what is said.<sup>94</sup> Foucault thus shows discourse and later also power, to be anterior to the empirico-transcendental

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86 *Ibid.*, p.6

87 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination.*, p.109

88 AK, p.10

89 OT, p.xxii

90 OT, p.172

91 Todd May, *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault.* Pennsylvania State UP, 1993. P.23

92 AK, p.220-1

93 AK, p.122

94 OT, p.xxiii-iv



double, since they form the conditions in which subjectivity attempts to ascertain its grounds and origins.

### *Modernity and Man as Empirico-Transcendental Double*

Man, the subject of representation, emerges as a question once "words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things."<sup>95</sup> Once the media of knowledge become objects of knowledge in themselves a new epistemological question arises: to represent things, man must negotiate a historical context that precedes him since man is thought as appropriator of language and thus, as representing being. Representation as a problem unto itself is linked to an anterior field that precedes and exceeds representation and is thus, granted status as the foundation of knowledge.<sup>96</sup> Modern knowledge proceeds in the search for a more fundamental ground in the finitude of man.

Modern thought, Foucault argues, occurs as a series of attempts to overcome the problem of 'man' in the search for,

"a discourse whose tension would keep separate the empirical and the transcendental while being directed at both; a discourse that would make it possible to analyze 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."<sup>97</sup>

Man's capacity for representation is grounded in the causal forces of life, labor and language that precede and form him, yet man is not only an object produced in the world but also a subject that constitutes the world.<sup>98</sup> Beginning with Kant, man is thought as an object; as finite being limited by conditions which are prior to him and a subject who constitutes the world of objects in which he is included.<sup>99</sup> Modern knowledge is grounded in an 'analytic' of man who reflects upon his finitude in the search for it to provide its own foundation: "a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens the positivity of all concrete limitation."<sup>100</sup> Man, as ground of

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95 OT, p.331

96 Timothy Rayner, *Foucault's Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience*. London: Continuum, 2007. p.48

97 OT, p.349

98 Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. P.199

99 *Ibid.*, p.199

100 OT, p.343

knowledge, is a relation of identity (of unity) and of difference (since nothing can precede itself).<sup>101</sup> Thus, the task of modern thought is to provide a foundation for the knowledge of objects which confirm to man that he is finite.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, Foucault argues that modern knowledge is grounded in an aporetic structure since man as an object of knowledge is not a being, but the product of a contingent discursive formation. Modern philosophy is constituted in a series of attempts to overcome the distance between man as subject and object of knowledge; to overcome the empirico-transcendental double and resolve man to himself; to make all difference correspond to the Same. The failure of every system or logic to ultimately determine the epistemic relation between words and things is not a question of human finitude, but a condition of the logic or system itself. That is, of the regularities which govern particular discourses without being independent of discursive practices.

#### *Thinking 'Between' the Double*

In what is a marked correspondence to the early Derrida's writings on *différance* discussed above, in *The Order of Things* Foucault argues that there is a "middle region" *between* and anterior to the doubles which in turn allows the dispersal of Same and Other and forms the terrain upon which they are gathered back.<sup>103</sup> The differential movement 'between' Same and Other traced by Foucault is the locus which allows modern thought to think time as succession, promise, completion, origin, etc, in the teleological movement of resolving man to his ground or origin. Analogous to the productive failure of self-presence through *différance* in Derrida, the 'middle region' *between* the doubles prevents, Foucault argues, their perfect coincidence. For Foucault, no single set of elements can ground or transcendently determine another set and so the empirico-transcendental double is consequently dispersed into its anterior medium of differentiation. Yet, rather than searching for a transcendental ground of experience in something in excess of experience, Foucault locates the 'between' as immanent to structure yet irreducible to the experience it generates as the medium which produces and disperses the doubles. The 'between' which forms the locus for the constitution of the empirico-transcendental double is a space of difference and struggle (even if under-theorized in his archaeological works). It functions as the medium of differentiation or

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101 Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. P.199

102 OT, p.343,

103 OT, p.xxiii, 370.

what Foucault calls the "heterotopian" space where orders of determinate relations are delimited and where the historical a priori of experience is constituted.<sup>104</sup> While in his archaeological phase, Foucault already characterizes this medium as a space of struggle which "allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry;" not until his later more affirmatively genealogical works, would the power relations composing this space be fully elaborated.<sup>105</sup>

### **Immanence, Transcendence and the 'Between'**

Like Derrida, Foucault's attention to this middle region or outside is not an attempt to appropriate man to his unthought other or origin, but rather, exhibits knowledge's partial determination by a field which it cannot master. Knowledge is reinscribed into spaces of positivity that make it possible irreducible to scientific knowledge. Foucault relates thought to its outside which, never transcends, but is always immanent to the inside insofar as he displaces the subjection of thought to transcendental grounds to what, in this early text he calls "the pure experience of order and its modes of being" which exceed and produce the conditions for the double.<sup>106</sup> Foucault's early works, like those of Derrida, attempt to think the 'between' anterior to determinate relations between knowledge and its other, which in turn forms a space for the desire for ground or origin. Thus, for Foucault and Derrida, as for Heidegger, thought has an outside which gives thought or makes it possible.<sup>107</sup> However, unlike Heidegger's question of Being, neither thinker posits a more originary or authentic ground of questioning the outside. Rather, both think an originary difference and violence which disrupts the possibility of positing an originary disclosure. Both attempt to maintain a Nietzschean affirmation of the irresolvable play of differences and the resulting inescapability of perspectivism that for both, functions to displace the concept of origin and the possibility of any totalizing or authoritative position over any field of differences. Nevertheless, from this conclusion, both proceed in radically different directions.

If we might cautiously admit, as Smith does, that a "formal structure of

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104 OT, p.xxiii

105 AK, p.118

106 OT, p.xxiii

107 cf. Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.168

transcendence" underlies Derrida's work it would result from the latter's insistence on the irreducibility of a 'passage' or detour through the constitution of the presence of the transcendental signified in order to begin to open a space to its excess. Thinking the displacement of the empirico-transcendental double in terms of the simultaneity of conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility, as Derrida does, means that his thought, while undermining grounds or first principles, nevertheless ascribes the necessity of a 'passage' or 'detour' through the question of transcendental. As a passage or detour, transcendental is experienced as inescapably contaminated and thus, failed. However, for Derrida the experience of this 'passage' or 'step' is necessary since it is only in passing through the aporetic conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility that we recognize the violence of all attempts to transcend or totalize the empirical. Furthermore, as we will see below, it is in thinking through the contamination of absolutes or transcendentals that an excess to the closure of metaphysics appears. It is in the failure of transcendental that we see that no field can delimit itself totally and thus, can think the outside anterior to determinate relations to self, other and truth. This question of the necessity of thinking a 'passage' to presence marks a profound point of divergence between Derrida and Foucault.

If Derrida presents the inescapability of the question of the transcendental, I would claim that Foucault on the other hand, attempts to displace the positing of absolutes or grounds altogether in thinking the positivity of discursive statements which produce the conditions of subjective experience. The historical *a priori* is not a realm independent of experience and thus, Foucault refers to it as a 'positive unconscious.'<sup>108</sup> The positivity of discourse, Foucault argues, is always-already present to thought. The role of the archaeologist is the formalization and analysis of this field. "He must," Foucault says,

"reconstitute the general system of thought, whose network, in its positivity, renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible. It is this network that defines the conditions that make a controversy or a problem possible, and that bears the historicity of knowledge."<sup>109</sup>

Unlike Derrida, Foucault does not think the unconditional as impossible absolute which opens the possible. Instead, for Foucault, it is the result of a multiplicity of forces

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108 OT, p.XI

109 OT, p.83

constituting subjects, objects and the discourses which form them by coagulating around a given 'problem.' Rather than posit the necessity of thinking transcendently, Foucault's analyses appeal to a field of immanence insofar as he never portrays one set of elements determining another but rather, in terms of diverse fields of multiplicities in reciprocal feedback relations. It is a total dislocation of the perceived necessity of submitting thought to government by transcendental grounds which Foucault attempts by conceiving thought as difference, force, and event; as singularities governed by no prior ground.

### *The 'Between' and the Displacement of the Question of Being*

Foucault's texts, like Derrida's, undermine the attempt to ground thought in subjectivity. The question of positing a ground in a subject present to itself, the question of the transcendental, is displaced by a non-autonomous logic of difference anterior to it. Archaeology and deconstruction thus both develop methodologies which attempt to think the outside which is delimited or closed in order to form the time and space of the question of grounds, justifications or origins. As Agamben's schema described earlier suggests, like Heidegger, both conceive transcendental grounds – the attempt to determine relations between subject and object and subject and subjective – as given by an anterior event. However, both radicalize and undermine Heidegger's question of Being. For Heidegger, any ground or arche is effected by an anterior relation to Being which is subsequently determined by metaphysical thought and thus, concealed or forgotten. Heidegger asks the radical question, evident for example in 'The Age of the World Picture' of how man is grounded or determined as representing being, and consequently thinks time as the ecstasis that effects a subject who comes to know the world. Thus, for Heidegger, man as ontic (empirical) being is possible in man as ontological (and arguably transcendental) Being or temporal ecstasis. The origin of difference is always already located in the existence of Dasein or the disclosure of Being.

In *The Order of Things* Foucault argues that Heidegger's attempt to recover the origin of man in the experience of the self-concealing withdrawal of Being is an impossible task since the doubling of man is always already begun and consequently, cut-off from an originary experience. Heidegger, Foucault implicitly suggests, accords a primordial status to the experience of origin as moment when the transcendental (the cultural practices which give history) and the empirical (the actual movement of history)

are identical and thus, man's unity is established.<sup>110</sup> As such, Heidegger is caught in an infinite regress since he thinks man as both source and product of history.<sup>111</sup> In contrast to Heidegger, Foucault posits no privileged medium of difference, since the a priori itself changes with history; the "a priori of positivities," he argues, "is not only the system of a temporal dispersion – it is itself a transformable group."<sup>112</sup> Like his later genealogies of power apparatuses and ethical problems, the episteme or a priori has no unified structure except insofar as regularities between differences are formed in processes of sedimentation.

Similarly but more explicitly, Derrida will problematize and radicalize the Heideggerean displacement of the metaphysical determination of the relation to Being and others through 'man.' Heidegger's attempt to retrieve an originary relation to Being from the metaphysics of subjectivity is inevitably contaminated by metaphysical gestures. In the essay 'Envois' for instance, Derrida argues that Heidegger's attempt to overcome the representational relation between subject and object to think an originary sending or givenness of Being cannot itself completely overcome the representational relation.<sup>113</sup> In 'The Age of the World Picture' Heidegger thinks history as a series of epochs unified by the destiny of Being as 'sending.' The Greek, medieval and modern epochs form three distinct modes of the relation to Being. These three modes are counterposed by Heidegger to the pre-Socratics who, he argues, posited no separation between subject and object but thought only in terms of *logos* as an originary gathering of Being exposed to chaos.<sup>114</sup> Derrida argues that Heidegger's notion of representation as forgetting of this originary relation which it in turn represents is mirrored by the very way Heidegger thinks Being. Heidegger cannot overcome representational thought because, Derrida argues, there can be no total access to the outside of determinate order. Sending, the history of Being, is always already threatened since there is no single unity or medium of Being, there is no primordial unity since the origin is inescapably dispersed.<sup>115</sup>

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110 R. Kevin Hill, "Foucault's Critique of Heidegger." *Philosophy Today*. Vol. 34, No.4, (Winter 1990), Pp.334-41. p.337

111 *Ibid.*

112 AK, p.127

113 Jacques Derrida, "Envois." *Inventions of the Other*. (Catherine Porter, Trans.) Stanford: Stanford UP. Pp.94-128.

114 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture." P.129

115 Derrida, "Envois.", Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*.

In short, Derrida and Foucault inherit Heidegger's radical attempt to think an outside anterior to thought and particular determinate relations against which relationality is determined. Yet, neither posits an originary medium of Being totally anterior to determinate relations, but rather, for both, the origin is always already dispersed in a multiplicity of media; there is no single set of conditions which give a ground for thought to question its relation to the world or to others. However, while both effect a similar theoretical move, the divergence between them over how the event of determination can be thought, the locus of its occurrence and the ethico-political possibilities which it occasions mirrors the points of contention of the 'cogito debate.' Foucault attempts to disengage from the question of the limits of man to think a radical positivity; the possibility of a thought not subordinated to presence, ground or arche. That is, Foucault seeks to think a level of reality which cannot be attributed to a subject who participates in a discourse. The Derridean response, in turn, would be the one, it seems, that Derrida has made against Heidegger, and also Foucault. That thought cannot escape the question of the transcendental. Any reference to a 'beyond' representational thinking would itself be caught within and rely upon metaphysical gestures such as representation. Since there is no possibility of a complete exit from the metaphysical determination of relations, except through the employment of metaphysical tropes of transcendence itself.

### *The Transcendental and Archaeology*

It is in Foucault's attempt to move beyond the question of transcendentalism altogether that his thought, his archaeology in particular, has encountered both critiques and misunderstandings. Several thinkers have argued that there is an ambiguity between the transcendental and empirical in the status of the rules governing discourse. Beatrice Han and Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow have argued that there is an ambiguity in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* between the prescriptive and descriptive nature of the rules of discourse. It is unclear, they argue, whether the rules which Foucault ascertains govern, or whether they describe truth, that is, whether they have a transcendental or empirical status. Similar claims have been made in a more deconstructionist vein by Arthur Bradley and David Carrol.<sup>116</sup> Both Bradley and Carrol

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116 Arthur Bradley, "Thinking the Outside: Foucault, Derrida and Negative Theology," *Textual Practice*, Vol.16, No.1, 2002, Pp.57-74 and David Carrol, "The Subject of Archaeology; or The Sovereignty of the Episteme." *Modern Language Notes* 93. pp.695-722

argue that Foucault's conception of the historical a priori displaces the founding subject only to have it function as a foundation for his analyses. Extending the argument which Derrida makes in 'Cogito and the History of Madness' against Foucault's 'transcendental contraband,' they argue that history functions as a transcendental ground concealed as empirical events. However, the claim for such an inherent ambiguity to these texts can be made only if one thinks the rules governing discourse within the horizon of the empirico-transcendental double; the rules governing discourse would be transcendental if they maintained a constant status in relation to the episteme or archive.<sup>117</sup>

Foucault's attempt to do away with the question of the transcendental altogether both undermines this sort of critique and also marks a point of divergence from Derrida's claim that thought cannot escape a passage via the question of the transcendental. There is a relation of immanence between rules and statements which, as we will see, Foucault later expands to the relations between particular and general or global power relations and apparatuses. Archaeology works, Foucault says, by "suspending the indefinitely extended privilege of the cause, in order to render apparent the polymorphous cluster of correlations."<sup>118</sup> His method does not collapse or confuse the transcendental into an empirical condition or event, or as Derrida puts it in 'Cogito and the History of Madness,' the *de jure* is not collapsed into the *de facto*. Rather, in his archaeological works, Foucault attempts to think discourse as a medium *anterior* to the production of the double wherein fact and right cannot be categorically distinguished since they are produced in an immanent and reciprocal field of relations. Between rules and the field they govern conditions of emergence are constituted by the sedimentation of regularities in the discursive field which are in turn, reinforced or modified by new appearances.<sup>119</sup> Unities appear in the interplay of different rules which are not grounded by one of their elements nor by any exteriority. The *a priori* is itself a dimension which changes with history since there is no single determining level or plane from which relationality is determined. Discourse does not refer to a prior ground or other plane but only to itself. There is no necessity to think the passage to the presence of the concept for Foucault since his is not a question of the meaning but of the *use* of the concept in different fields.

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117 Keith Robinson, "An Immanent Transcendental: Foucault, Kant and Critical Philosophy." *Radical Philosophy*. Jan/February, 2002. Pp.12-21

118 AK, 47-8, Robinson, "An Immanent Transcendental."

119 David Webb, "Microphysics: From Bachelard and Serres to Foucault." *Angelaki*, Vol.10, No.2, August, 2005. Pp.123-133. See p.131



Nevertheless, I am not certain that this appeal to the immanence of conditions and conditioned in his archaeological works releases Foucault from these criticisms. While archaeology displaces the constitution of transcendental by thinking the archive or episteme as a set of determining variables in continuous modification, Foucault's analysis nevertheless falters in its theorization of the 'positive unconscious' of order.' While archaeology is historically situated and does not lay claim to a totalizing knowledge of our own episteme from some Archimedean point, it nevertheless makes the pretense of producing a "pure" experience of order.<sup>120</sup> As Dreyfus and Rabinow have famously argued, what archaeology fails to do is account for the position of the archaeologist since any such situated position would undermine the possibility of the 'purity' of this experience. This experience, if it is to be 'pure,' would have to avoid being subject to any interpretive act whatsoever, that is, not be engaged in a search for meaning or depth but only the rules of its production. Such a "pure description" would only be possible, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, if archaeological analysis were not itself produced from within a given discursive formation.<sup>121</sup> Foucault would have to assume an Archimedean position for archaeology prior to the production of a history or historicity itself. Since the archaeologist is always situated within a given discourse not only can he not transcend the rules governing his own discourse as Foucault readily admits, but the difference in which it appears from the present can only be partial, oblique and an event of discourse itself.<sup>122</sup> Archaeology, in short, cannot account for its own status which seems to exceed any particular archive and is thus, open to the Derridean critique launched in 'Cogito and the History of Madness.'

While by the time of *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault is no longer engaged in a project of re-appropriating an originary experience untouched by reason or violence as he is in *Madness and Civilization*, he nevertheless thinks the possibility of recuperating the purity of an experience of the medium of differentiation prior to any determination. As Dreyfus and Rabinow put it, "being both within and outside of the discourses he studies, sharing their meaningful truth claims while suspending them, is the archeologist's ineluctable condition."<sup>123</sup> In order to be totally

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120 OT, p.XXI

121 Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1983. p.85

122 AK, p.146

123 Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.88

successful Foucault must both share and deny the 'meaning' of a discourse. While Foucault is aware in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that we cannot describe our own archive he must nevertheless posit an impossible position for the archaeologist himself from which he can determine the limits of his discursive formation.<sup>124</sup> He is caught in what we will see Derrida calls a 'border' insofar as there is an implicit determination of a prior limit which cannot be maintained yet makes his analysis possible.

Foucault would come to address this problem of the situatedness of his own discourse in his genealogical work and in the process, more clearly distinguish his position from Derrida's. Foucault's archaeological method attempts to displace transcendental questioning by thinking the link between conditions of possibility or emergence and the elements which they condition as immanent since any categorical distinction between rules or principles and their elements is only subsequently derived from sedimentations among multiplicities of discourses. Yet, there is nevertheless a problematic in Foucault's method, as we saw, which belies its own residual transcendental structure insofar as he thinks the possibility of knowledge of a given order or discursive formation which is simultaneously not determined by that order. Foucault's genealogy, as Dreyfus and Rabinow have most notoriously suggested, would come to undermine the potential for such an Archimedean position for his own discourse by refusing to grant any special status to his own analysis, that is, as outside any order. Rather than advance within the terms of the impossibility of any unconditional experience as Derrida's work does, the impossibility of transcendence marks the point from which Foucault's genealogy sets off.

## Conclusion

If Derrida and Foucault can both be said to attempt to attempt to think genealogically, that is, by refusing a position for their own thought which would exceed its contingency, its determination in particular fields of relations or order and also to undermine all metaphysical attempts for thought to ground itself by postulating a non-contingent, non-relational transcendental which would thus violently determine and govern relationality. Then the difference between them, and the fact that each accuses

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124 AK, p.146-48

the other of such a metaphysical move, arises from the different ways each thinks the empirico-transcendental difference and the way in which it can be displaced by thinking the medium anterior to every determinate relationality and the different ways both think the movement of the determination of relation: either in terms of immanence or quasi-transcendence. This suggests that what is at stake between them is therefore the possibility of a mode of questioning which could affirm its own violence and so, according to both of their logics, be a lesser violence and secondly, to do so by relating thought to the limit of order; the limit between inside and what is outside every determinate order. It is to these questions we will now turn.

## Chapter 3: The Question of the Outside

"To give priority to the question is to submit the response to an endless interrogation;  
it is to overthrow the power, to preserve the opening."  
Edmond Jabès<sup>1</sup>

"What is the answer to the question? The problem.  
How is the problem resolved? By displacing the question."  
Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>

"There, in sum, in this place of aporia, *there is no longer any problem.*"  
Jacques Derrida<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

What is it to think relations first? That is to say, as prior to and constitutive of their terms and anterior to any single 'medium' of thought? And thus, think relationality neither in terms of a transcendental which would exceed and govern relations in advance, nor in terms of an empiricism which would assume pre-given terms and then systematizes their relations?<sup>4</sup> What is it to think the 'between,' anterior to the empirico-transcendental double, at the limit of the inside and the outside in which this double is produced? In the previous chapter I began to suggest that for both Derrida and Foucault, thinking from relations means thinking 'between' the determinate, limited or finite and the outside, infinite or unbounded. In doing so, both thinkers affirm the contingency inherent to all attempts to form determinate fields of relations. Any attempt to delimit and determine an inside, they both show, will necessarily fail since there is an outside or excess which cannot be indefinitely and totally mastered. Consequently, genealogy and deconstruction both enact an opening to and of relationality by questioning and disrupting the determination of relations by attending to this liminal movement and the play of differences which it longs to fix. Accordingly, this chapter pursues two related claims. That the refusal of the primacy of either the transcendental or the empirical outlined in chapter 2 leads both thinkers to seek to think an 'outside' anterior to both. That is, a play of differences which is both conditional to yet ultimately undermines any determinate

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1 Edmond Jabès, "Interview with Maurice Patouche." *Le Monde*. August 2, 1981, p.ix. Quoted from Irene Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy Différance*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. p.94

2 Michel Foucault. "Theatrum Philosophicum." *Essential Works*, Vol.2, Pp.343-368, quoted on p.359

3 AP, p.12

4 Brian Massumi gives this definition of empiricism in *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. London: Duke University Press, 2002. p.70

relational structure or hierarchy. Yet, both pursue competing methodological strategies in order to affirm the contingency of the relational in order to do so. So the second part of the chapter will take up these two strategies in order to demonstrate that not only is the divergence and incommensurability between Derrida and Foucault fundamental, but that it extends beyond the cogito debate to touch their oeuvres as a whole.

## The Finitude of Knowledge

In attempting to think the outside both Derrida and Foucault affirm the need to proceed, not from some determinate ground, but *strategically*. Their thought inhabits the 'between' of determinate inside and indeterminate outside, while it affirms the excess of contingency which is anterior to any determinate relations, it must also conversely affirm its own status as originating from within determinate relations. While it may resound as a tiresome cliché, both thinkers affirm the impossibility of a complete or totalizing understanding of any specificity. My claim is that this is the case not only because both affirm the outside which exceeds any order, but because their own thought is inescapably particular and situated. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Derrida's often (mis)quoted aphorism that "[t]here is *nothing outside the text*" and which Foucault, almost as notoriously, echoes: "there is *no point* where you are free from power relations."<sup>5</sup> Not only are all references to the 'real' inseparable from a differential movement but one cannot transgress this movement to an external transcendental signified.<sup>6</sup> The impossibility of absolute knowledge is affirmed by both not only in epistemological terms as the result of human finitude, since as Derrida argues in "Structure, Sign and Play" such a conception of interpretation preserves the teleology of the possibility of total knowledge. Rather, the insurmountability of perspectivism is the result, for both thinkers, of the ontological condition of the absence of depth and consequent indefinite movement of difference.<sup>7</sup>

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5 OG, p.158 and Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity." *EWI*, pp.163-174, quoted on p.167

6 Morag Patrick interprets Derrida's claim in these terms but as I have shown, this characterization of the status of knowledge applies equally to Foucault. See Morag Patrick, *Derrida, Responsibility and Politics*. London: Ashgate, 1997. p.19. For Foucault's displacement of the transcendental signified and subsequent characterization of the free play of the signifier see "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx." *EWII*, pp.269-78.

7 cf. "Structure, Sign and Play" where Derrida argues that "nontotalization can be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of *play*." *WD*, p.365, while in "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" Foucault argues that "depth was only a game and a surface to fold... everything which elicited man's depth was only child's

*Perspectivism and the Question of Being*

Both Derrida and Foucault I would claim, inherit from Nietzsche a notion of perspectivism that leads them to affirm that thought always begins from *within* determinate relations – from within fixed moments in the play of differences. As such, thought can only proceed strategically and provisionally. Accordingly, Derrida proceeds by showing that every attempt to overcome either empiricism or the transcendental is always already inscribed by its position in the metaphysical heritage and its empirical situatedness. One can only, he argues, "operate according to the vocabulary of the very thing one delimits."<sup>8</sup> Thought cannot exceed either its finitude nor the play of difference and thus, "[w]e must begin *wherever we are*," he says, and consequently, it is "impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely."<sup>9</sup> Echoing Derrida, Foucault will affirm that "we are in a *strategic* situation" and moreover, [w]e are *always* in this kind of situation."<sup>10</sup> In short, thrownness is irreducible.

The refusal to posit either a ground or privileged position for their work has produced the common and well known critiques of post-modern excess, nihilism or conservatism, political impasse and quietism which have been leveled against both, often at the same time. Rudi Visker, in an essay on Heidegger and Foucault, provides the terms for a nuanced and rigorous approach to the debate over the normative deficit in Derrida and Foucault.<sup>11</sup> Visker argues that, unlike Heidegger's question of Being and the *destruktion* of metaphysics, Foucault's ontology leaves him caught between two unsatisfactory normative conclusions which can arguably be extended to Derrida as well. Given his thoroughgoing perspectivism Foucault is limited to either thinking that a given order could have been otherwise or to succumbing to a dream of a "primordial spontaneity" which would be the absence of all order whatsoever; a pure play of differences.<sup>12</sup> As Visker puts it, Foucault is caught between either "turning every order into authentic order by accepting exclusion as being constitutive" or "condemning every

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play." *EWII*, p.273 and later, in his genealogical phase Foucault would argue that "The perspectival character of knowledge derives... from the polemical and strategic character of knowledge." "Truth and Juridical Forms." *EWIII*, Pp. 1- 89, quoted on p.14

8 "La Différance." *MP*, p.18, quoted from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface." *OG*, p.xvii

9 *OG*, p.162, emphasis in original.

10 Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity." *EWI*, p.167

11 Rudi Visker, "From Foucault to Heidegger: A One-Way Ticket?" *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*. Alan Milchman & Alan Rosenberg (Eds.) Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp.295-323.

12 *Ibid.*, p.301, 302

order to inauthenticity by appealing to a pre-ordinal self-sufficiency."<sup>13</sup> Once one thinks the inevitability and inescapability of the violence of determinate relations it seems, one is trapped between either rejecting or accepting all determination.

I argue here that Derrida and Foucault refuse both of these poles. Both affirm the exclusionary and determining nature of all ordering. Yet both defy the normative paralysis that this might generate by affirming the inescapability of determination as such while simultaneously refusing to accept and seeking to undermine any particular determination. Conversely, the possibility of thinking what Visker calls the "pre-ordinal" and what I have referred to as the 'outside' is always tempered by the fact that thought always begins from the inside. To think is to commence from a determinate time and place while at the same time refusing the possibility of totally exceeding relationality to a 'pure' experience of the dis-order of the play of a pure and ungrounded difference. Difference cannot be thought in itself, since it is always a difference *of* or *from* some ground, origin or apparatus.<sup>14</sup> It is in the terms of this logic that Derrida and Foucault both affirm their commitment to a relational thought. As we will continue to see in the following chapters, this commitment is not only epistemological nor ontological, but thoroughly ethico-political. To proceed ethically and to think the political is not, for both thinkers, to dream of transcending all relations, but rather to negotiate with the least possible violence the determinate fields within which we find ourselves – which also means, interrogating and undermining the denial of violence which lies at the core of all ordering. But it is the way in which each of them conceives the means by which thought can question its own determination and determination itself which marks the point of divergence between Derrida and Foucault. It is their mutual displacements of the metaphysics of the question itself to which this chapter is addressed.

In the last chapter we saw that Derrida and Foucault both disperse the empirico-transcendental double into an anterior milieu in which it is constituted. Furthermore, both think the formation of determinate relations as occurring in the between of determinate order and what both refer to as its 'outside.' But what is the outside? What is it to think that which exceeds any determinate or metaphysical field of relations? How

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.311

<sup>14</sup> This is how Claire Colebrook defines the impasse of representational thought for Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault in *The Ethics of Representation*.

can such a thought be attempted? A move made in the interest of recuperating or resolving thought to the outside would be anathema to both of their post-essentialist projects. But there is nevertheless, deeply rooted in both of their work, a Nietzschean affirmation of the outside as an indefinite play or pure movement of differences of forces which is underivable and irresolvable to cognitive content. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has suggestively sought to think this radical empiricism – neither commencing from fixed terms nor attributed to a subject – which underlies the conceptions of force in both Derrida and Foucault in terms of the ontological difference. Both Derrida and Foucault, she argues, "may be trying to touch the ontic with the thought that there is a subindividual (or random, for Derrida) space even under, or below, or before [...] the 'preontological Being as [*Dasein*'s] ontically constitutive space... [where] *Dasein* tacitly understands and interprets something like Being."<sup>15</sup> Proceeding from Spivak's formula, we might think this pre-ontological and pre-human 'space' in Foucault's terms as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" and which Deleuze calls, in his book on Foucault, the "savage forces" of the outside.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, for Derrida, it is a "systematic play of differences" or the "*game of the world*" without a transcendental signified to arrest its indefinite movement.<sup>17</sup> Such a radical, ontic and pre-ontological empiricism marks a Nietzschean transposition of Heidegger characteristic of both thinkers; the movement or play of difference is anterior to its amalgamation in a Being that then forms the horizon for determinate relations. If for Derrida and Foucault multiplicity is 'prior' to its amalgamation in a Being that then gives determinate relations, then it would undermine Heidegger's question of Being as the disclosure of a singular 'clearing' or locus for thought, since the play of difference would undermine the Heideggerean ontology which begins from what Rodolphe Gasché calls "a totality that, in an originary fashion, precedes its severance into a multiplicity."<sup>18</sup>

Yet, in a definitively Heideggerean motif, Derrida and Foucault both proceed from

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15 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge." from *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean, Eds. London: Routledge, 1996. pp.141-174. Quoted on p.147. The quotation from Heidegger is from *Being and Time*, p.39; the emphasis is Spivak's.

16 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. London: Penguin, 1998. [Hereafter referred to as HS] P.92. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*. London: Continuum, 2006. Pp.120-2.

17 Jacques Derrida, "La Différance." P.11, OG, p.221,

18 Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, p.182



the premise that any order or field of determinate relations is the effect of an anterior decision or event. For Heidegger, presencing – the event of disclosing an order – is an event of unconcealment or *aletheia*. Heidegger's question of Being or 'question of the question' proceeds from the fact that phenomena must always be disclosed or unconcealed in order to be questioned such that, unconcealment is anterior to any particular question of a ground or origin. Like Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault think *arche* or grounds as effects of a prior differentiation. Both think within the terms of what in *Being and Time* Heidegger calls 'equi-primordially'; that is, in terms of a multiplicity of origins of underivable or irreducibly original phenomena.<sup>19</sup> Thought takes place in a 'medium' which cannot be reduced to a single principle or condition. Thus, as Claire Colebrook suggests, for all three thinkers thought has an 'other' or outside which is anterior to, and which gives thought.<sup>20</sup> Heidegger's ontological difference describes the different modes across the history of the separation of thought and its other. Being, Heidegger argues, is disclosed in the ways thought questions its world.<sup>21</sup> Yet, Heidegger's Being is still a general or single 'unthought' or outside, a single medium differentiating from itself.<sup>22</sup> It is thus, as I argued in chapter 1, a Nietzschean cosmology of the play of difference through which both Derrida and Foucault displace or exceed Heidegger's question of Being since both refuse to posit a single or originary medium of thought which thought might recover as its origin and ground to think the origin as difference. What is at stake in both Derrida's and Foucault's works is, at least in part, an attempt to relate to the pre-ordinal, to an outside marking the contingency of every order without committing the Heideggerean error of positing an originary mode of this relation. Before pursuing the divergent formulations of a post-Heideggerean form of the 'question' in their work we must turn to examine more closely their mutual formulations of the outside.

## Derrida and the Thought of the Outside

In working through the relation between speech and writing in Saussure, the singular and the general in Levi-Strauss, *de jure* and *de facto* in Foucault, the empirical and

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19 Cf. *Being and Time*, p.170, for Foucault and equi-primordially see Edward McGushin's *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2007, p.30 and Claire Colebrook *The Ethics of Representation*, pp.167-8, ; for Derrida see Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, p.182.

20 Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.168

21 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. (Gregory Fried & Richard Polt Trans.) London: Yale UP, 2000. P.6.

22 Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.169

the transcendental in the metaphysics of subjective self-presence we have seen that deconstruction establishes the experience of an 'essential' and unmasterable relation between terms such that it opens thought to an aporetic and uncontrollable position which is neither inside nor outside a determinate structure, but rather in the undecidable 'between' or medium of differentiation where relations are produced. What Derrida calls his 'paleonymns' or 'quasi-concepts' work to inscribe undecidability 'between' two terms in a particular binary hierarchy and thus, displace rather than subvert or reverse the dominance of one term over another. The attempted closure of the determinate inside from its outside is thus shown to be always already disrupted through an "eruption of the *outside* within the *inside*."<sup>23</sup> The identity of a concept is always contaminated by what exceeds it and thus, the attempt to form an absolute limit between the inside and outside is undermined: "by means of the work done on one side and the other of the limit the field inside is modified and a transgression is produced that consequently is nowhere present as a *fait accompli*."<sup>24</sup> Concepts and discursive totalities are always already fissured by contradictions and heterogeneities which philosophy must avoid in order to protect the unity of its concepts. Thus, the aporetic logics which make a thinking of presence, ground or origin possible cannot be reduced or annulled. They are grounded in an irreducible difference such that to choose one is to attempt to collapse the aporia and thus, deny the origin as an effect of the play of differences.<sup>25</sup>

The logic of the aporia disrupts metaphysics not by employing empiricism in its place. Empiricism too is discounted since the impossibility of appropriating a totality results not only from human finitude but because totality is an ontological impossibility. Deconstruction marks a passage across and through the *between* of both of these choices (human and ontological finitude) in the same way as it does between the empirical and transcendental. The passage between the presence of the concept or idea and the 'completely other' which appears as non-presence in its withdrawal and which *mediates* any metaphysics of presence is unavoidable: "the instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as such* and thus, permits of variations among full terms."<sup>26</sup> The structure of

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23 OG, p.34

24 *Positions*, p.12

25 Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, p.136

26 OG, p.46-7

language makes presence impossible through an arche-synthesis which is inescapably 'transcendental' since it shapes the essence of our experience yet is not itself experienced since it is 'absent;' there is always an excess or beyond the merely empirical.<sup>27</sup> Derrida's aporetic quasi-concepts undermine empiricism by calling for the inescapability of thinking transcendently. As he puts it, "the value of the transcendental arche must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased."<sup>28</sup> All of Derrida's quasi-transcendentals, his nicknames, function to mark the locus of this centering-de-centering movement of determinate structures.<sup>29</sup>

Derrida's "aporetography" makes the appearance of phenomena possible but makes pure presence or singularity, an originary non-violent relation impossible: "the disappearance of any originary presence is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth. At once."<sup>30</sup> The unthinkable simultaneity of possibility and impossibility that Derrida calls this "at once" or aporia shows the inside of determinate order to be inescapably haunted by an outside or other which it cannot master nor make present. The account of the aporia therefore has the effect of making the inside and the outside indelimitable since no delimitation can ever be complete nor closed from its outside. Deconstruction, Derrida says, "always finds itself between these two poles."<sup>31</sup> Neither extreme is recoverable in its purity, neither the security of a totally determinate inside, nor the indeterminate or outside. This motif of the desire for and passage through the indeterminate or impossible extends to all of Derrida's work; the indeterminate or unconditionality of justice, hospitality, the gift, forgiveness, the event, democracy are related to their inscription in a determinate, calculative, finite and empirical economy:

"the very least that can be said of unconditionality... is that it is independent of every determinate context, even of the determination of context in general. It announces itself as such only in the *opening* of context. Not that it is simply present (existent) elsewhere, outside all context; rather, it intervenes in the determination of a context from its very inscription, and from an injunction, a law, a responsibility that transcends this or that context."<sup>32</sup>

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27 OG, p.60. cf. Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*. P.29

28 OG, p.61

29 Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification." *WD*, pp. 1-35, see p.26

30 *DIS*, p.166

31 Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority." *Acts of Religion*. (Gil Anidjar Ed.) London: Routledge, 2002. Pp.228-98. [Hereafter referred to as FOL] Quoted on p.251

32 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Trans. Samuel Weber) Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988. Quoted on p.152

It is thus at the limit of the inside which, rather than a total impasse, an opening to the other occurs and thus, this liminal realm forms the locus of the ethical and political. As we will see, it is not a space of immobilization, but the space where judgment and ethical decision is made.

## Foucault and the Thought of the Outside

First thematized in a series of early essays Foucault wrote on Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot and other avant-garde writers and artists of early and mid-20th century France, Deleuze extends the theme of the thought of the outside to all of Foucault's oeuvre.<sup>33</sup> The constitutive outside in Foucault's work, Deleuze says, does not function as a ground, but as what he calls "an unformed element of force."<sup>34</sup> The relation between the inside of determinate order and the outside of a zone of forces is what Foucault calls a 'non-place' since it is in constant mutation, transformation and constitution.<sup>35</sup> For Foucault, as for Derrida, the inside of order is always a failed delimitation from a "void" which is its outside.<sup>36</sup> Thus, all forms of interiority, positivity and identity are an "operation of the outside."<sup>37</sup> To move to the outside, to think the void from which all orders delimit themselves is to think the 'origin' as what Deleuze calls, a fold of the outside,' an organization of the limit between the inside and outside.<sup>38</sup> Such a thought, as Foucault describes it in his essay on Blanchot,

"stands at the threshold of all positivity, not in order to grasp its foundation or justification but in order to repair the space of its unfolding, the void serving as its site... a thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge, constitutes what in a phrase we might call 'the thought of the outside.'<sup>39</sup>

The thought of the outside, for the early Foucault, is located in the anonymity of language

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33 Deleuze's theorization of Foucault in these terms is a hypothesis which is proving increasingly accurate as his lectures from the College de France reach publication. In *Security, Territory, Population : Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-8* (Michel Senellart Ed., Graham Burchell Trans.) London: Palgrave, 2007 [Hereafter referred to as STP]) for instance, Foucault himself refers to his work in these terms and consequently, seems to justify Deleuze's interpretation. cf. STP, pp.116-120 wherein Foucault explicitly affirms his genealogy as a thought of the 'outside.'

34 Deleuze, *Foucault* p.43

35 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, p.85, cf. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' *EWII*, p.377

36 *EWII*, p.152

37 Deleuze, *Foucault*, p.97

38 *Ibid.*

39 Michel Foucault, "The Thought of the Outside." *EWII*, pp. 147-70. Quoted on p.150

as an exteriority to which the interiority of the subject is dispersed. Blanchot, Foucault argues, posits an experience of language not grounded in subjectivity as a medium of thought. Language is thought as force and as being prior to interiority or representation. To think language as exteriority is to see the dynamism of forces or events giving the literary work and thus, to oscillate between the inside of representation and its constitutive exteriority.<sup>40</sup> Thought takes place within the space of rules, language and history but crucially, it can also think these rules themselves and thus, think its own limits. Though speaking in a different context, Jean-Luc Nancy nevertheless deftly describes this relation to the limit: "touching the internal border amounts *also* to touching the external border."<sup>41</sup>

The avant-garde literature which captures Foucault's interest reaches the limit of what can be said and thus, locates the limit through a recognition of the force of language.<sup>42</sup> The void of the outside cannot be recuperated, but it can be touched and thus, brought to relate to the inside. While in *Madness and Civilization* Foucault tried to appropriate this space as a void absolutely beyond reason, in these works from the late 60s, madness and death are affirmed as only silent and absent.<sup>43</sup> The other of reason is no longer made to speak, but only to mark the limit of what can be said. Residing at the limit, the thought of transgression expresses the presence of the absence and silence of madness and finitude; of an excess which cannot be mastered nor appropriated and made present by the philosopher or writer.

Foucault would cease to work with these writers and themes, which has led a number of critics to suggest that he no longer thought art could be a transgressive force; that he saw himself as having succumbed to aestheticism.<sup>44</sup> Yet, while avant-garde literature is no longer a central thematic in Foucault's texts after the late 1960s, he would never depart – as Deleuze affirms – from posing the question of the outside. After this

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40 Timothy Rayner, *Foucault's Heidegger*, pp.52-3, p.57

41 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, (Trans. Bridget McDonald). Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993. p.48

42 See "The Thought of the Outside."; "The Prose of Acteon,."; "A Preface to Transgression,."; all in *EWII*.

43 Roy Boyne locates Foucault's essay on Bataille, "A Preface to Transgression" as the moment when Foucault would cease to implicitly claim a position for his own text outside history and reason. See his *Foucault and Derrida*, p.84

44 cf. John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. p.16-7, see also Jon Simons *Foucault and the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2002) whose whole argument is structured around what he sees as the oscillation, within and across Foucault's works, between the total constraint and total transgression of the limit.

period the experience of the limit is no longer only found in the privileged locus of aesthetics, but traversing all modes of relation. While I have argued that in *Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault is caught maintaining a problematic status for his own discourse as totally outside the orders which it describes, in the early 1970s, in announcing an explicit Nietzschean inheritance, Foucault began to refuse any privileged position for his own texts. In the genealogical works Foucault affirms his own texts as events of power whose status is determined, at least in part, by the determinate relations within which it arises and which it might effect.<sup>45</sup> Roy Boyne is thus correct to note that Foucault's genealogical works mark a moment of rapprochement with Derrida insofar as he no longer claims to appropriate a realm beyond reason. Yet, it is my claim that the manner in which the outside is related to the inside by Foucault's genealogy differs considerably and is in fact incommensurable from the means in which deconstruction effects such an experience. Any claim for a rapprochement needs to be tempered insofar as the conclusion that Foucault seems to draw from the impossibility of total access to the outside is that it can only be experienced *immanently*, that is to say, from within and as the inside.

In 'The Order of Discourse,' an essay written in the early 1970s, Foucault announces a new theoretical trajectory: the principles and means for ordering discursive practices should be thought, in terms which Foucault already suggests in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in terms of a metaphor of "battle."<sup>46</sup> The archaeological method is supplemented by an approach which thinks discourse as effected by a multiplicity of force relations traversing institutions, spaces, disciplines and epochs. Genealogy, unlike archaeology, no longer questions the conditions of existence of statements but of the production and regulation of discourse:

"in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and dangers, to cope with chance events, and to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality."<sup>47</sup>

Discourse, in marking out its particular objects (e.g., sexuality, population, carceral

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45 Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Interviews 1961-1984*. (Sylvère Lotringer, Ed.) New York: Semiotext(e), 1996. P.213

46 AK, p.205

47 "The Discourse on Language." *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Sheridan Smith, trans.) New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, pp.231-37, quoted on p.231.

subject) may be incorporeal, yet it produces actual material effects; actual possibilities and limits and is thus referred to as an "incorporeal materialism."<sup>48</sup> Genealogy adds another dimension to archaeology since by questioning the manner technologies of power order discourse and thus, unlike archaeology, does not proceed in the form of a formal question of "the rules of formation of [a discursive formation's] concepts."<sup>49</sup> Rather, it attends to a discourse's "objectives, the strategies that govern it, and the program of political action it proposes."<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, genealogy makes visible the positivity of determinate relations produced by dispersions of power by "showing the knowledge effects produced by the struggles, confrontations, and battles that take place within our society, and by the tactics of power that are elements of this struggle."<sup>51</sup>

Foucault conceives two complimentary ways in which the exteriority of knowledge is formulated. Firstly, by thinking knowledge as the effect of an anterior event which exceeds it, it appears as the "result of conditions that fall outside the domain of knowledge" since knowledge does not represent an ideal object or universe.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, that knowledge always involves "relations of struggle" since behind it, he argues, "there is a will."<sup>53</sup> In opposition to the logocentric disjunction of truth from power, genealogy maps discourse as event and outcome of struggle. Knowledge is dispersed into what Foucault often calls an 'economy of power relations' which always circulate with knowledge and which knowledge always denies. Truth is linked in a circular relation with the systems of power which produce and sustain it and to effects of power which it provokes and which in turn expand it.

Foucault traces the rigidity or regularity of dispersions of power through what he calls in the 1970s '*dispositifs*' (translated as apparatus) which he would later argue, arise in response to specific 'problematizations.'<sup>54</sup> The *dispositif*, as the formation of a complex of limits between a determinate inside and outside is the locus where Foucault isolates what Derrida calls the 'medium of differentiation.' Like Derrida, Foucault does not think this

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48 Ibid., p.231

49 STP, p.36

50 STP, p.36

51 STP, p.3

52 EWIII, p.13

53 EWIII, p.14, p.11

54 Foucault began thinking the apparatus as a response to particular problems as early as 1977. cf. STP, p.10

'medium' as a single thing since power is always dispersed across a multiplicity of media.<sup>55</sup> The *dispositif* is a "thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions."<sup>56</sup> While not the product of conscious design, the *dispositif* traces the coherence of a multiplicity of relations as disparate responses to a given problem; that is, through the practical conditions by which something becomes an object of knowledge.

Broad strategies arise from particular questions isolated by the genealogist which are as concrete and general as possible which Foucault describes as "problems that approach politics from behind and cut across societies on the diagonal."<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, to the problem of how to govern a 'population' as an object of demographic knowledge a new liberal *dispositif* appears; the disciplinary *dispositif* appears as a response to the problem of ensuring the orderliness and assent of the citizen during the rise of liberal democracy. The disciplinary *dispositif* is an ensemble of practices and discourses for controlling and observing human subjects in a number of institutions including schools, factories, prisons and hospitals without being identical to any of them. It functions within and between them, traversing and linking institutional sites. No single element acts as the ground or center of the *dispositif*, but rather, multiple elements form the conditions for each other. Disciplinary technologies and productive technologies for instance, condition each other without functioning as causes but rather, in terms of mutual reinforcement. Accordingly, Foucault argues that factory production is constituted in the intersections of techniques for quickly processing raw materials and the formation of an orderly workplace in a highly segmented and rationalized process of production. The radical reform of prison or factory conditions is not the result of the development of humanism or a new moralism, but the contingent effect of the intersections of technologies and the attempt to increasingly efficiently control and order individuals in confined spaces.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, the interiority of a moral subject of rights and freedoms is shown to be the effect of an 'outside' of multiple events. The political subject is formed not through governmental representation but by disciplinary and

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55 Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.165

56 PK, p.198

57 Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*. (Paul Rabinow, Ed.) New York: Pantheon, 1984. P.376

58 I owe this example of the factory system to Nick Crossley, *The Politics of Subjectivity: Between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1994. P.110



governmental *dispositifs* which effect, through a multiplicity of institutional linkages, an individual capable of functioning normally within this new socio-economic landscape.

*Discipline and Punish* is exemplary of a de-subjectifying experience of the outside which, no longer located in the privileged locus of literature, is thought in the terms of a struggle and strategy against authority. The individual and society are not fundamental units of analysis, but the product of a multiplicity of dispersed strategies and technologies which revolve around the goal of normalization and order. That is, around networks of power functioning independently from individual intentions. Since they are shown to be spaces of struggle which always generate modes of resistance, the outline of the technologies for ordering relationality traced by Foucault's genealogies mark the fragility and contestability of power apparatuses. Struggles occur over the form power should take, who should exercise it, its limits, etc. If there is an element of constancy in Foucault's accounts, it is only of a constant redistribution and redeployment. The contingency of the outside against which interiority is formed appears in the 'eventalization' of order whereby what is taken as determinate is unveiled to its accidental, particular and indeterminate nature.

The radical novelty of Foucault's genealogies lie in the refusal to see limits or ordering as a purely negative force. Rather, competing and colliding discourses intersect, interrupt, or support one another. As Foucault explains in a discussion of *Discipline and Punish*, "[m]astery and awareness of one's body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body... But once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power... Suddenly what made power strong becomes used to attack it."<sup>59</sup> This passage, as well as other similar ones<sup>60</sup> have led a vast number of readers of Foucault, both critics and defenders, to argue that a circularity permeates his work. Habermas, Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and Michael Walzer's characterizations (one could name many more) of Foucault as a "theorist of confinement" and their consequent critiques of the absence of a positive normative formulation, a way to resist the suppression of freedom, proceed from a view which paints an opposition either a total determination of the social by

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59 PK, p.56.

60 For example, "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex desire, but bodies and pleasures." HS, p.157.

power or the dream of an originary authenticity (or what Visker calls the "pre-ordinal" origin) of freedom.<sup>61</sup> From this perspective, power appears as a limitation on freedom; a limitation moreover, which leaves no prior principles from which power can be condemned.<sup>62</sup> Yet, these thinkers neglect the total re-articulation of the political which occurs as an operation of genealogy; and thus, they wrongly maintain an oppositional relation between power and resistance.

Regimes of truth, Foucault argues, form multiple ensembles of fields of possibility; different strategies, goals and techniques may support one another, but may also come into conflict. Fields of relations are always potentially reversible – the metonym never becomes a metaphor – such that there is what Foucault calls a 'tactical polyvalence of discourses':

"discourse can be both instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting-point for an opposing strategy... Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."<sup>63</sup>

Fields of power-knowledge act as unstable fields of frictions, like waves passing through the social which expand or collide at their intersections. The notion of 'resistance' marks those moments of "counter discourse."<sup>64</sup> Resistance is not situated totally outside of power, it is "never in a position of exteriority in relation to power,"<sup>65</sup> but rather the varying and unstable points within networks and which marks their contingency and thus, their absence of ground. The limit is thus not only a negative force since to think it as purely destructive is to assume that it distorts something essential and prior. There is no originary presence that is then ordered, but rather, order appears from out of multiplicities of relations, relational orders, places and problems and their intersections. The whole debate around the possibility and source of resistance to power has ultimately

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61 See Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory*, Vol.12, No.2, (May 1984), pp.152-83; Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault." *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. (David Hoy, Ed.), Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986, pp.51-68; Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions." *Praxis Interinternational*, Vol.1, No.3, 1981, pp.272-87. I owe the phrase "theorist of confinement" to Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*. p.26

62 Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," p.53,61

63 HS, p.101

64 The notion of counter-discourse is central to Foucault's account of discourses of power which displace the centrality of sovereignty in the 18th and 19th centuries in Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-6*. (Trans.) David Macey. London: Penguin, 2003.

65 HS, p.96

failed to grasp this fundamental point, since it has focused upon the search for 'something' in Foucault's texts which would resist power, which would act as a material or ideological point from which power could be opposed, refused, or overthrown. Foucault's readers have either located this source somewhere implicit in the text (usually located in the human body) or claimed that it is absent and thus, left us to our supposed fatedness to an indefinite and total domination. Much of the reception of Foucault's later genealogies of ethics proceed along this same trajectory, analysing and evaluating Foucault's readings of Ancient Greek and Roman philosophical and moral practices for this same putative source of resistance. As we will see in the next chapter, Foucault's turn to the Ancients is not made in the search for a society free from power relations, nor as some non-ordering or non-determining socio-political realm, but rather, as a different, immanent and non-normalizing relation to the outside.

The thought of the outside is at the heart of both Derrida's and Foucault's work. Both attempt to inhabit the space of the outside and simultaneously affirm the impossibility of doing so. The goal or aim of their work is not to posit some total transcendence or transgression to the outside, nor do they provide an alternative mode of ordering, but instead, enact a re-articulation of our relation to the event of ordering itself. Hierarchy, authority and domination all appear as contingent effects of the play of the indeterminate. Significant for our analysis is how these two modes of thinking the outside mark a massive displacement of the way theoretical questioning has traditionally proceeded. In this instance, philosophy does not proceed by either positing or attempting to discover some ground or event of thought but rather, by attempting to disrupt and circumvent the very question of ground itself. It is to their mutual displacements of the question of ground that we now turn.

### **The Question of the Question of Relation**

Part of the massive significance of Nietzsche's work for philosophy, I have argued, is the means by which a meta-question is put to philosophy's procedures themselves. Unlike his predecessors, he is not engaged in seeking or affirming a ground or first principle which would both explain and govern relationality but rather, the conditions, forces and effects of positing the question of grounding *itself* are brought into the scope of

inquiry. The genealogical recoil which turns against the will to truth itself; his questioning of the 'value of value' and the value of truth' stages a seismic philosophical event whose reverberations are not only epistemological or ontological, but ethical and political. Nietzsche's genealogical recoil upon the question itself opens the horizon for not only his own, but the way Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault all radically undermine this metaphysical and ethico-political desire by disrupting the question of the ground of relationality itself in attempting to think the anterior non-relational locus which gives determinate relations - and thus the conditions which make particular questions possible. Nietzsche's 'will to power,' Heidegger's 'Being, Derrida's 'différance' and Foucault's 'power' all shift the site of questioning from the desire to ground or order relationality to the giving of relation itself. Once we think the priority of relation itself ethico-political questioning no longer proceeds from the logic of an independent subject-being in relation to other independent subject-beings but from the irreducibility of the fact that our existence is being-with-others. Consequently, the political can no longer be thought in terms of timeless, non-empirical principles, but in terms of a multiplicity of relations across hierarchies, spaces, temporalities and institutions which constitute political existence and whose analysis undermines the metaphysical desire to arrest and submit existence to a particular and timeless logic. Yet, if Nietzsche and Heidegger can be said to radically open a new post-essentialist questioning of relation, there are, we have seen, fundamental moments in the works of both wherein the question of relation is determined.

Nietzsche opens thought to the inescapable violence of communal life yet this opening is always accompanied by a refusal and determination of the question of relation in his politics. In viewing the institution of an order of rank as a necessary condition for the enhancement of humanity, Nietzsche re-enacts the Platonic gesture of philosophy's legislation of the limits of the political. He abandons the ethico-political question of relation through the desire to dictate the empirico-political conditions for the enhancement of humanity. Nietzsche calls for a new legislation and determination (of the weak by the strong) in order to form a 'free' space for the question. In short, the pathos of distance forms the limit of Nietzsche's thinking of relation. Heidegger's search for a 'proper' determination of Being which leads him back to what he thinks as the event of the inception of metaphysics among the pre-Socratics is still caught, both Derrida and

Foucault argue, in the metaphysical move of freeing presencing from its relation to any particular being. Heidegger opens the question of relation insofar as he does not proceed by conceiving prior entities which are then related but rather, in terms of the primordial unconcealment of a 'clearing' which gives relationality *in the first place*. Yet, Heidegger's attempt to accede to the ontological is always haunted and contaminated by the ontic or empirical determinations from which he proceeds.

Crucially, Derrida's and Foucault's (implicit or explicit) critiques of Nietzsche and Heidegger do not lead them to go still further in maintaining the 'purity' of the question and unconditionality of questioning. The question of what is anterior to or outside determinate relations, what Derrida calls 'the question of the question,' can only be approached from *within* determinate relations. As such, all questioning is a matter of strategy, calculation and negotiation so that it is always already a question of politics. We might say that in a sense, Derrida and Foucault accuse one another of not being strategic enough. Metaphysical violence, defined as the attempt to deny or transcend the determinate relations wherein the question is formed, is the very violence which both Derrida and Foucault accuse one another in the 'cogito debate.' The difference between the two thinkers is accordingly formed by the divergent strategies that each takes up in the approach to the outside to determinate relations. Furthermore, it is because neither thinker accepts either the possibility of a pre-ordinal authenticity, nor the particular violence of any order that both view questioning as taking place within an 'economy' of violence or power which neither is willing to accept in any form as Nietzsche is.

How do their mutual strategies of the question differ from each other? As Foucault's critique of Derrida in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire' suggests, genealogy questions the orientation from which deconstruction begins; the specific choices that Derrida makes in framing the objects of deconstruction. As a response, Foucault attempts to go 'behind' Derrida to show the specificity of the power-knowledge networks which have constituted the objects of Derrida's analysis. In his reading of the *Meditations* Derrida does not attend, Foucault maintains, to the question of the discursive structures which form the conditions for the philosophical 'system' which Derrida goes on to deconstruct. On the other hand, Derrida too problematizes the formation of the object of analysis in Foucault. The archaeological or genealogical analysis can only proceed,

Derrida maintains, by first determining or totalizing the discursive and epochal structures which form the objects of Foucault's reading of Descartes. Consequently, there is an indefinite oscillation between Derrida and Foucault, each circumscribing the other; each proceeding to show that the other has denied in some way the relational field from which his analysis commences and thus, a failure to think the outside. In chapters four and five we will attend to the ethics and politics which relate to the disruption of the demand for a unity of question and answer which need not result in a thoroughgoing nihilism or impasse. The remainder of this chapter, however, will address itself to the ways in which Derrida and Foucault continue the Nietzschean move of disrupting the question of relation and the polemic that results from the different ways they go about doing so.

### **Derrida and the Question of the Question**

Derrida thinks the conditions giving the possibility of particular questions in terms of a "decision" determining a particular field in terms of the thematics of presence we have examined above.<sup>66</sup> The act of questioning, or what he simply calls 'the question' is, Derrida says in 'Violence and Metaphysics,' always already caught in a prior horizon: "the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermeticism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question."<sup>67</sup> The violence of this enclosure is inescapable since questioning can only proceed from within determinate grounds such that the response is never free from the partially fixed conditions in which it arises. Rather than remain within the confines of an always determining question, Derrida attempts to think in terms of what in "Violence and Metaphysics" he calls 'the question of the question':

"that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question."<sup>68</sup>

Rather than attempt to fix the conditions of a given field or place and remain within the identity of the question of foundations and its response, Derrida attends to what he calls

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66 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." WD. Pp.97-192, see p.98. This passage is also quoted by Simon Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp.95-7

67 WD, p.99

68 WD, p.98, quoted in Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.96

"the question about the possibility of the question."<sup>69</sup> His is an attempt to accede, if only partially, to that space anterior to every question or determination, of thinking the outside prior or under all determinate relation – that which precedes the question without belonging to it:

"[t]he questioning of foundations is neither foundationalist nor antifoundationalist. Sometimes it questions, or exceeds the very possibility, the ultimate necessity, of questioning itself, of the questioning form of thought, interrogating without confidence or prejudice the very history of the question and of its philosophical authority. For there is an authority – and so a legitimate force of the questioning form of which one might ask oneself whence it derives such great force in our tradition."<sup>70</sup>

How does a questioning of questioning itself lead thought to touch the anteriority of its outside without claiming to exceed its own relational determination? Derrida has approached this theme throughout his work, however, it is perhaps his texts engaging with Heidegger where the question of the question is most pronounced and also lends itself to an engagement with Foucault.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Aporia and the Problem*

In *Aporias* Derrida opposes his thematic of aporetic conceptual impasse(s) to what he calls 'the problem.'<sup>72</sup> For Derrida, the establishment of a problem as the delimitation of a field is a thoroughgoing metaphysical move since it assumes the possibility of forming a closure, horizon or mastering a given field in the face of what exceeds it. As we will see below, Derrida's choice of vocabulary forms not only an apparently accidental parallel with Foucault's own concept of 'problematization,' but is a central motif in Derrida's return to the polemic with Foucault following the latter's death in 'To Do Justice to Freud'.<sup>73</sup> In theorizing the aporia as a disruption and as anterior to the problem, Derrida posits the necessity of the movement of 'nonpassage' of the aporia to all articulations of the question or problem. That is, the problem is always and ineluctably constituted in covering over the aporia which makes it possible. The following section will examine Derrida's discussion of the aporia's relation to the problem in relation to his discussion of

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69 WD, p.98

70 FoL, p.236

71 Levinas is of course the other figure with which Derrida explicitly engaged on this question. We will turn to Derrida's reading of Levinas and the question of the other in the next chapter.

72 Rudolphe Gasché defines the aporia as "conceptual impasse" in *The Honour of Thinking: Critique, Theory, Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007, p.331

73 Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud": The History of Madness in The Age of Psychoanalysis." *Critical Inquiry*. No.20 (Winter 1994), pp.227-66. [Hereafter referred to as TDJF]

Heidegger's *Being and Time* as well as several later texts before letting it resound against Foucault's own notion of the problem.

The novelty and importance of *Being and Time*, Derrida argues in *Aporias*, arises from the absence of an ontic assumption of an (empirical) understanding of death in the text – the type of assumption for which Derrida accuses Foucault in his appropriation and implicit claim to understand madness. Instead, he argues that Heidegger makes the error of trying to overcome the irreducibility of the empirical *tout court*. Heidegger's 'problematic' sets up what Derrida calls a new ontological "project" or "border" to determine the field of his analysis between a proper and improper relation to death theorized in terms of the finitude of Dasein. When Heidegger famously declares in *Being and Time* that "[d]eath is the possibility of the very impossibility of Dasein,"<sup>74</sup> death is made to function as the horizon, project or border between proper and improper which organizes Dasein's relation to the present and the past by thinking the future as the 'possible impossibility' of existence.

Derrida pursues a deconstruction of the limit-line, border, or threshold between authentic and inauthentic Dasein along two distinctions which Heidegger makes. First, in terms of the ontico-ontological difference since Heidegger argues that only Dasein can experience death "as such" and thus distinguishes the death of Dasein from the 'perishing' and dying of the animal.<sup>75</sup> Second, authentic death is contrasted to inauthentic deceasing whereby Dasein is said to flee its finitude into *Das Man* where only 'one' dies since the singularity of existence is covered over by its contingent and empirical determinations. The circumscription of authentic *Dasein*, the decision to begin with the originary or proper, is the event of determination which generates all choices and hierarchies of Heidegger's analysis: "[t]he decision to decide from the *here* of this side is not simply a methodological decision, because it decides upon the very method: it decides that a method is pre-ferable, and better, than a non-method."<sup>76</sup> *Dasein's* authentic Being-towards-death thus marks the moment in which the answer already determines the field of Heidegger's questions. Yet the decision which Heidegger makes is only possible because death is an aporia, it has no limits and is thus, undecidable.

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74 BT, p.294

75 AP,p.35

76 AP, p.56



If death is the cessation of experience and the experience of the end of experience is impossible, then the relation to death can only be aporetic, can only be structured on the impossibility of "being-dead."<sup>77</sup> Not only can *Dasein* not relate to death, but it consequently cannot appropriate 'the there' or the unity of existence. Death, Derrida argues, *absolutely* resists possibilization or determination. Heidegger's attempt to think the impossible as possible marks a simultaneous recognition of impossibility but also, a nostalgia for presence; a privileging of an originary gathering relation to which Derrida opposes the originary violence of all relationality which dis-appropriates but also forms the conditions for Heidegger's ontological analysis.

The logic of aporia initiates the undermining of not only Heidegger's, but every determinate limit. As such, it cannot be made to appear except in the form of the "*pas* (step/not)" which means that it appears only as incalculable and undecidable, as "the line that terminates all determination" and as the refusal of "the pure possibility of cutting off."<sup>78</sup> Derrida describes the oscillating movement of the '*pas*' as made present only insofar as it withdraws the very possibility of the presence of any determination and in this sense, marks both the drawing of a border or limit which can be traversed and its simultaneous impossibility:

"To mark and at the same time to erase these lines, which only happen by erasing themselves, which only succeed in erasing themselves [n'arrivent qua' s'effacer], is to trace them as still possible while also introducing the very principle of their impossibility."<sup>79</sup>

The step/not, the (im)possibility of the determination of limits forms the conditions for what Derrida calls an 'absolute exposure' to the outside since it points to a locus anterior to any determinate form or relation. There is 'nonpassage' since the necessary impermeability of any medium of thought is formed only by covering over the aporia or impasse. There is no longer any border to cross or delimit a field, and thus no passage since there is no originary medium to pass to. In this state of absolute undecidability, Derrida says, "we are exposed, absolutely without protection, *without problem*."<sup>80</sup> There is thus, no possibility of positing pure limits; between 'awaiting oneself at death,' 'awaiting death and expecting that death will come,' awaiting or 'expecting another at/from death

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77 AP, p.73

78 AP, p.7, p.78

79 AP, p.73

80 AP, p.12. Italics added.

at the limits of truth.'

*The Aporia, Of Spirit and The Other*

One thread in Derrida's *Of Spirit* pursues the same trajectory as *Aporias* insofar as it seeks to disturb and undermine Heidegger's attempt to think an originary and non-ontic unity of Being which avoids the metaphysics of presence. Derrida steadfastly disrupts Heidegger's articulation of the 'question of the question' and his attempts to go beyond metaphysics by posing an originary proximity to the unconcealment or revealing of Being which makes particular questions possible; a pure question of Being prior to its determination by metaphysical concepts which would only allow a thinking of Being in the terms of presence rather than presencing. A close reading of the complex arguments which Derrida raises in relation to Heidegger's attempt to exceed metaphysics in *Of Spirit* is beyond the scope of the present work. However, if we pause over this text it is to note the similar form Derrida's reading of Heidegger to the one given in *Aporias*; an indeterminate thinking of Being, a questioning which proceeds without conceptual determination, he argues, is impossible.

In *Of Spirit* Derrida traces four ways in which the question of Being is determined in Heidegger's text. First, Derrida argues that the privileging of the question of Being which dominates all of Heidegger's texts is still caught within the orbit of metaphysics since the priority of the question is defended through a determination of *Dasein* as the being which poses the question.<sup>81</sup> Much as he argues in 'The Ends of Man' and *Aporias*, Derrida maintains that authentic *Dasein* forms a proper starting point for the question yet the 'power' of *Dasein* to question is itself never questioned so that *Dasein* acts as a ground for the possibility of the question.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, Heidegger's claim in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that unlike *Dasein*, the 'animal is poor in world' determines *Dasein* as being human.<sup>83</sup> Thirdly, Heidegger's critique of technology as a nihilistic forgetting of Being formulated in terms of "the essence of technology is nothing technological" marks for Derrida the attempt by Heidegger to preserve the purity of the question of Being from any contamination by technicity. Finally, Heidegger's notion of epochality is traversed by

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81 Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. (Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby, Trans.) London: U of Chicago Press, 1989. P.9

82 *Ibid.* Pp.18-22; cf. David Farrell Krell, "Spiriting Heidegger." *Of Derrida, Heidegger and Spirit*. (David Wood, Ed.) Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1993. Pp.11-40. See p.16

83 *Ibid.*, pp.47-55

a teleology since it excludes that which does not fit with Heidegger's notion of metaphysics. Epochality is preserved only insofar as Heidegger covers over or disregards elements of the tradition (Derrida's example is Heidegger's failure to address the singularity of Spinoza<sup>84</sup>) which exceed Heidegger's own notion of metaphysics. In short, Derrida argues that throughout his oeuvre, Heidegger determines the question in advance by positing a prior hierarchy, order or will which forms the grounds of the question. Whatever is offered as exceeding all empirical or ontic determination is nevertheless haunted or contaminated by its ontic articulation.

Heidegger is aware that any unconcealing of Being can only be said in the language of presence and thus, only as a concealing of presencing. Yet, he proceeds nevertheless to attempt to avoid contamination by metaphysics for his own questioning and thus, is caught in the dream of an originary non-violence of the question which would overcome the violence of determinate relationality. For Derrida, no presence can ground difference, there can be no originary presence of Being to which thought might return. Thus, when in 'La Différance' Derrida says that *différance* is "a difference more unthought than the difference between Being and beings," unlike Heidegger he is not positing a difference of a prior presence or pre-given foundation.<sup>85</sup> Anterior to Being is the pure play of difference which cannot be thought or affirmed *except* through a questioning which has already been determined by its metaphysical heritage and thus, cannot be affirmed *as such*. No transcendental or ontological claim can avoid being contaminated by its empirical or ontic inscription. Heidegger's pursuit of a questioning which is not determined by any substance or ground thus, inescapably relies upon its situatedness and situating of particular determinate relational fields.

#### *Affirming The Outside Anterior to the Question*

But in *Of Spirit* Derrida also locates a different moment in the later Heidegger wherein the priority of the question is displaced.<sup>86</sup> Heidegger 'crosses out' or questions his question marks, Derrida says, in the form of thought as 'listening;' a thinking of the

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84 One should add that Spinoza is never a central figure for Derrida's own articulations of the history of metaphysics either.

85 "La Différance." p.22

86 Derrida refers to "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* and "The Essence of Language" in *On The Way to Language*.

way language gives or grants relation anterior to its human usage or any anthropologism.<sup>87</sup> Prior to the question is the affirmation of the very fact of our being related in language; "[l]anguage always *before any question*."<sup>88</sup> The experience of the absence of grounds for the human delivers Heidegger, Derrida argues, to eventually seek a recovery of *Dasein's* originary abandonment or dis-propriation – to the fact that relation is always already violence. The opening to language is an opening of thought to the originary violence of relation from which the question proceeds; "in and from an abyssal structure of experience that involves a constant ex- or dis-propriation."<sup>89</sup> The impossibility of exceeding the violence of determinate relations, their dis-propriating force, is always anterior to the question. It is in this sense that Derrida thinks an unconditional command of the question of the question in terms of the call, promise, responsibility and affirmation. Prior to any determinate questioning is the affirmation which proceeds from an exposure to the outside or *aporia*. It is, as Derrida describes it, "the promise which, in opening every speaking, makes possible the very question and therefore precedes it without belonging to it: the dissymmetry of an affirmation, of a *yes*, before all opposition of *yes* and *no*."<sup>90</sup> This prior call, promise, or responsibility which "overwhelms the question itself" is 'heard' in the affirmation of always beginning in determinate relations, but also a response which desires to think what exceeds and gives relation while acknowledging that it can only be thought from *within* those relations. The opening to the indeterminate, in excess of relation, only proceeds through a prior affirmation of relationality itself; of the limit between the inside and the outside. As Derrida puts it in *The Politics of Friendship*, there is an affirmation which is "more originary than the question and which, without saying *yes* to anything positive, can only affirm the possibility of the future by opening itself to determinability and therefore by welcoming what still remains indeterminate and indeterminable."<sup>91</sup>

The opening to the outside which proceeds from the affirmation of beginning from determinate relation effects a different mode of relationality; a different *genealogical*

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87 *Of Spirit*, p.134, n.5

88 *Ibid.*, p.94

89 Christopher Fynsk, "Derrida and Philosophy: Acts of Engagement." *Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Tom Cohen, Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. Pp.152-71, quoted on p.165

90 *Of Spirit*, p.94

91 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*. (George Collins, Trans.) London: Verso, 2005 [Hereafter referred to as POF], p.38, Quoted in Geoffrey Bennington, "Derrida and Politics." *Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Pp. 193-212.

relation which affirms its own violence. Thought, in affirming its own situatedness and violence, not only inevitably determines what exceeds the otherness which exceeds it, but also forms an *opening* to the other; a 'promise' that the other will appear *as other*. In *Aporias*, Derrida argues that the relation to death 'as such' can only appear through the other: "self-relation welcomes or supposes the other within its being-itself as different from itself," and thus, the closure of self-relation is only promised but never given.<sup>92</sup> *Dasein's* 'awaiting itself' in its being-towards-death, given its aporetic status, cannot be bounded by Heidegger's conception of the singularity and solitude of *Dasein* since *Dasein's* awaiting its determinate and proper self is undermined when opened to its aporetic structure. *Dasein*, Derrida says, can thus only be thought to be awaiting what he simply calls 'something,' a completely other. Existence cannot be appropriated and so the self can only be related to as an other awaiting its singular self. Moreover, the relation to death might be thought even more radically, as an "absolutely awaiting *each other*" since we await a relation to death which is impossible.<sup>93</sup> An awaiting of 'each other' (the French 'tout autre' can mean both all otherness and every singular other) occurs in the impossibility of simultaneity, relationality appears in the form of an indefinite non-coincidence:

"the waiting for *something* that will happen as the completely other than oneself, but of waiting (for each other) by awaiting oneself [s'attendre en s'attendant du même coup soi-même], by preceding oneself as if one had a meeting with a oneself that is but does not know."<sup>94</sup>

This albeit disorienting formula marks the "contretemps" of the aporetic structure of relationality and in turn structures the logic of promise and of the 'to-come.' A waiting for each other that will never arrive is defined as "impossible simultaneity."<sup>95</sup> In the affirmation of the 'nonpassage' of the aporia and thus, of the fact that we are in relation, lies the impossibility of a determination of either self or other. The other cannot be determined since the other is never present. Like Heidegger, Derrida affirms the 'thrownness of existence within the 'Da,' that is, the anteriority of others, languages and traditions (one might simply say, of relations). But unlike Heidegger, Derrida argues that the 'Da' can never be appropriated since it always exceeds any determinately 'human' experience. Thus, the relation to death cannot be recuperated such that otherness always

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92 AP, p.61

93 AP, p.65

94 AP, p.66

95 AP, p.65

precedes determinate *Dasein*. The relation to death is always mediated by an other; there is "expropriation" and "inauthenticity" at the heart of existence – a radical anteriority to which we are called to respond.<sup>96</sup> The experience of the aporia, of the impossibility of a questioning which is not always already determined and given in advance, nevertheless brings forth an opening; the other is always arriving, always 'to come' and it is the promise of the other which is the 'call' to which the deconstruction of borders, limits or problems strives.

Any particular response to the other is always already a general response to what echoing Heidegger in *Of Spirit* Derrida calls the promise of language, to the fact of its always having already addressed us and to our having responded to it; alterity precedes identity. Thought finds itself positioned within a relational network which it does not transcend, which cannot be appropriated and from which it always already begins. The experience of 'nonpassage' erects a new thinking of the border or limit between the self and other since it invokes the opening of the border itself and not simply the constitution of a particular relation to some ontic other. Rather, the 'arrival of the other' prefigures every particular determination of relation:

"an *arrivant* [who] affects the very experience of the threshold, whose possibility he thus brings to light before one even knows whether there has been an invitation, a call, a nomination, or a promise... What we would call here the *arrivant*, the most *arrivant* among all *arrivants*, the *arrivant* par excellence, is whatever, whoever, is arriving, does not cross a threshold separating two identifiable places."<sup>97</sup>

The proto-arrival as event allows the event of identification, differentiation and reconstitution but, as an event that de-identifies and not as an identity that synthesizes constituent parts. Thus, the absolute arrival is prior to the possibility of any border, that is, prior to the possibility of different identities but also allows the possibility of any identity or border, and thus, allows the possibility of determinate relations.

The event or arrival of the other is not simply "to cross a given threshold" but rather, "affects the very experience of threshold."<sup>98</sup> The aporetic is an experience of an absolute border whose crossing, or erasure opens the space of every positive and identifiable border: "[p]erhaps nothing ever comes to pass except on the line of a

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96 AP, p.77

97 AP, p.33-4

98 AP, p.33

transgression."<sup>99</sup> The figure of absolute arrival cannot be determined, expected, or prepared for since it is a radical indeterminacy which allows and is prior to any determinate encounter of émigré, refugee or tourist. These are definitive arrivals, arriving in a defined and determinate place where "the inhabitants know or think they are at home."<sup>100</sup> The absolute arrivant "call[s] into question, to the point of annihilating or rendering indeterminate, all the distinctive signs of a prior identity."<sup>101</sup> In the experience of the aporia and the affirmation of relationality, there is no longer a definitive or total border to be crossed, but an opening to the outside, to the contingency and indeterminacy of relationality *itself*, to the excess and contingency upon which every determinate relation is grounded.

## Foucault and the Problem

Like Derrida, Foucault too proceeds strategically; that is, by affirming that every question, including his own, cannot totally exceed the limit between inside and outside and accordingly, is always already at least in part, the particular effect of the specific order or apparatus which makes it possible. And like Derrida, Foucault proceeds not by pursuing transcendental and a-historical answers to the questions philosophy has posed itself (who are we? what ought we to do?) but rather, in shifting the scope of questioning itself to ask after the conditions forming the possibility of particular questions themselves. Foucault's displacement of what he calls 'the dialectic of the question and answer' takes place through what, by the early 1980s, he called "problematization."<sup>102</sup> Foucault's articulation of problematization is restricted to several interviews and an abbreviated outline in a late book, however, near the end of his career Foucault intimates that all of his works revolved around this notion. Much more so than Derrida, Foucault was a thorough revisionist; each phase of his work, from the archaeology to ethics is folded into the one which follows it. Yet it is the final articulation of his work in terms of 'problematizations' as events of thought which involves an engagement with all three sets of exteriorities which made up Foucault's career: archaeology, genealogy and ethics:

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99 AP,p.33

100 AP,p.34

101 AP, p.34

102 It appears that the earliest uses of 'problematization' by Foucault occur in 1983-84. cf. *Fearless Speech, The Use of Pleasure*, p.10; the reference to the dialectic of the question and answer is in "Theatricum Philosophicum," EWII, p.359

"I tried to locate three major types of problems: the problem of truth, the problem of power, and the problem of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can only be understood in relation to one another, not independently."<sup>103</sup>

*The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in particular, address the criteria governing the formulation and circulation of statements and thus, the ways of distinguishing true and false. Secondly, in the 1970s Foucault compliments discursive analysis with a power axis which represents the rules, techniques and objectives governing relations between human beings. These analyses occur in the well known works of 'power-knowledge;' *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality* but also his lecture courses from this decade which all mark the shift whereby the production of knowledge is theorized together with the power relations which support and are supported by knowledge. Strategies, apparatuses and institutions analyzed as technologies of power, circulate and reinforce knowledge in attempts to determine and regulate the normal and abnormal, the permissible and impermissible, the natural and unnatural, etc. Finally, the genealogies of the early 1980s and of *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* both published in 1984, analyze the modes in which values are appropriated and practiced as modes of relating to and governing oneself. Foucault establishes this continuity in a late interview:

"It was [throughout his career] a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies,' but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily thought - and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. The archeological dimension of the analysis made it possible to examine the forms themselves; its genealogical dimension enabled me to analyze their formation out of the practices and the modifications undergone by the latter. There was the problematization of madness and illness arising out of social and medical practices, and defining a certain pattern of 'normalization'; a problematization of life, language and labor in discursive practices that conformed to certain 'epistemic' rules; and a problematization of crime and criminal behavior emerging from certain punitive practices conforming to a 'disciplinary' model."<sup>104</sup>

Madness, illness, the criminal, etc., are all problematic objects which enable social scientific discourses and administrative practices to conceal their 'heterotopic' or contingent status. These objects do not exist in themselves, but function to unify

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103 Michel Foucault, "The Return of Morality." *Politics, Philosophy Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. (Lawrence D. Kritzman, Ed.) pp.242-254. quoted on p.243; This periodization of Foucault's work is broadly agreed upon by the majority of Foucault's commentators and runs roughly from *Madness and Civilization* to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, from *Discipline and Punish* to *The Will to Knowledge* to *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*.

104 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*. London: Penguin, 1985. [Hereafter referred to as UP], Pp.11-12



multiple discourses and practices. Without existing in themselves, they are the negative space which acts as the constitutive opposition to any norm. Modern societies posit madness, death, delinquency and sexuality in order to constitute the world of social appearances. One may confine, treat or punish the 'madman', but in doing so, one applies regulations and laws that constitute the conditions for a 'sane' experience of the social world. For example, the experience of the body of the criminal within the panoptic space, dispersed across society, founded a new experience of the social and bound law to that order rather than in grand displays of sovereign power. The exclusion of the problematic object, which has no substantial existence in itself, worked to reinforce a particular mode of social order.<sup>105</sup>

Through the notion of problematization, the three axes or "realms of exteriority" of knowledge, power and ethics are united by what Foucault simply calls 'thought:'

"[b]y 'thought,' I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as an ethical subject... In this sense thought is understood as the very form of action - as action insofar as it implies the play of true and false, the acceptance or refusal of rules, the relation to oneself and others. The study of forms of experience can thus proceed from an analysis of 'practices - discursive or not - as long as one qualifies that word to mean the different systems of action insofar as they are inhabited by thought.'<sup>106</sup>

As Paul Rabinow points out, this definition of thought, as constituted in problematizations, establishes thought as a broad domain of experience.<sup>107</sup> Problematizations are processes by which tripartite domains of knowledge, power relations and ethics are assembled in relation to particular difficulties or questions which demand a response. Experience emerges from interrelations between these three axes in their concrete forms in institutions, disciplines, various techniques and systems of rules, yet no priority can be given to any one axis since, in the complexity of their interactions, each axis "is affected by transformations in the other two."<sup>108</sup> "A problematization," Foucault says, emerges as a complex "reply to some concrete and specific aspect of the

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105 On 'problematic objects' in Foucault's oeuvre, see Laura Hedgehold, *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault*. University Park: Pennsylvania UP, 2007.

106 Michel Foucault, "Preface to 'The History of Sexuality, Volume Two.'" *EWI*, pp.199-206 Quoted on pp.200-1

107 Paul Rabinow, "Introduction." *EWI*, p.xxxiv

108 *The Foucault Reader*, p.388

world."<sup>109</sup> By connecting disparate conditions for the emergence of particular forms of experience, existence is problematized, producing a historically singular event of thought. The conditions for particular questions are thus the result of concrete events: "the development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought."<sup>110</sup> Yet the question, in attempting to produce an answer or response disavows the contingent and accidental nature of its origins and therefore attempts to legitimize or derive a certain necessity and transcendentalism from contingent events or power relations.

Problematizations are not particular representations of the world, since there is no prior presence which problematizations order. Rather, problematizations give order itself. Thought, Foucault argues, "develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to."<sup>111</sup> Any transcendence, ground, or Being does not exceed or become represented through a given problem, since any ground is given as a result of the particular relations which result from a particular formation of subjective experience.<sup>112</sup> Problematizations, Foucault writes in *The Use of Pleasure*, are the different ways "through which being offers itself to be, necessarily thought."<sup>113</sup> Contra Heidegger, Foucault does not think a selfsame Being which gives the conditions for existence and which is then forgotten in its metaphysical or representational determination. Being is not prior to problematization; the medium of differentiation or particular forms of the relation between the inside and the outside are effected by the relations of forces which coagulate into determinate conditions through which thought questions or problematizes its existence. A given 'clearing' or order of existence is the effect of the becoming of a multiplicity of events which coagulate into particular regularities. We might say that like Derrida, the multiplicity of forces which form the conditions for a given field of thought are 'older than the ontological difference,' since, as Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, Heidegger's question of Being is rooted in a particular modern mode of thinking the 'unthought.'

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109 Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1997. [Hereafter referred to as FS].

110 FS p.48

111 FL, p.421, cf. Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, p.16

112 cf. Claire Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*, p.164-6

113 UP, p.11

Foucault's genealogy of problematizations attempts to go beyond or before the question to "define the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do and the world in which they live."<sup>114</sup> The way in which these three "fundamental elements of experience" are related in a given power apparatus will determine the subject's field of possibility, or what, Foucault would quite simply call power relations.<sup>115</sup> The genealogy of problematizations functions as a history of thought which maps these interrelations through the ways in which problems become an object of forms of knowledge and technologies of power.<sup>116</sup> This work does not attempt to excavate a subjective interiority as ground of experience, but rather, thinks the subject as emerging within a historically delimited space bounded by the limits governing these axes at a given time. The genealogy of problems operates as a mapping of difference since events are thought as singularities and in terms of their differences in and between multiplicities:

"[i]t is not a matter of locating everything on one level, that of the event, but of realizing that there is actually a whole order of levels of different types of events, differing in amplitude, chronological breadth, and capacity to produce effects. The problem is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another."<sup>117</sup>

A history of problematizations proceeds by showing the conditions of particular questions as formed by concrete techniques, effects and conditions and thus, denies any transcendent term as a ground for understanding the particularity of events:

"[f]ar from being the still incomplete and blurred image of an Idea that would, from on high and for all time, hold the answer, the problem lies in the idea itself, or rather, the Idea exists only in the form of a problem: a distinctive plurality whose obscurity is nevertheless insistent, and in which the question ceaselessly stirs. What is the answer to the question? The problem. How is the problem resolved? By displacing the question. The problem ... is a dispersed multiplicity... We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically."<sup>118</sup>

The problem gives an account of the combinations of heterogeneous elements which have their modes of existence made visible as a product of their constitutive outside.

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114 UP, p.4

115 UP, p.4

116 Keith Robinson, *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Thought*.p.224

117 FR, p.56

118 "Theatricum Philosophicum." EWII, p.359

## Problematization and the Aporia

If Foucault thinks that the metaphysics of the question can be disturbed through a genealogy which analyses the conditions which make the question itself possible, then Derrida's response could be said to argue, against Foucault, that the very possibility of delimiting a given problem already relies upon a transcendental move. At stake between them are the forms thinking might take while both affirming its being-thrown into determinate relations yet thinking the conditions of that thrownness itself. In 'Cogito and the History of Madness' Derrida calls what he sees as Foucault's attempt to reduce a universal condition of reason to a historical event a "structuralist totalitarianism."<sup>119</sup> The event of determination "cannot be recounted, cannot be objectified as an event in a determined history" and thus inaugurates the terms of a give-and-take (discussed at length in chapter two) over the question of the empirical and the transcendental; over the possibility and/or necessity of a determinate history, which as Derrida says, in reference to the infamous break between them which occurred following the publication of 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire, "made us invisible to one another, that made us not associate with one another for close to ten years."<sup>120</sup>

In 'To Do Justice to Freud', written almost ten years after Foucault's death, Derrida returns to these questions. In this text however, Derrida engages closely with the thematic we have been addressing in this chapter; the possibility of disrupting the question by problematizing the conditions which make it possible. In 'To Do Justice to Freud' Derrida once again identifies a reduction or determination in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* in the construction of what he calls here, echoing his critique of Heidegger in *Aporias*, a "border."<sup>121</sup> However, in this later essay, the thematic of the border is related to Foucault's oeuvre as a whole – and to the possibility of displacing the question – since Derrida extends the argument to question the conditions of thinking a 'problematization' at all.<sup>122</sup> At stake is thus the very mode in which both thinkers displace the question in order to think its constitutive outside.

In the later essay on Foucault Derrida 'declines' to return to the earlier debate over

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119 WD, p.69;

120 WD, p.70; TDJF, p.227

121 TDJF, p.233, cf. AP, p.12

122 TDJF, p.264

the place of madness in the *Meditations* and this time argues that in *Madness and Civilization* (along with *The Order of Things* and *The History of Sexuality*) it is Freud who is violently determined by Foucault. Foucault's violent and metaphysical gesture, Derrida argues, is "to situate Freud in a historical place that is stabilizable, identifiable, and open to a univocal understanding."<sup>123</sup> Unlike Descartes, Freud recognizes the death drive as a hyperbolic force which operates in the ego and cannot be mastered such that for Freud, hyperbole cannot be excluded from thinking as Descartes wanted to do, nor can it be confined to an epoch, discursive formation, or given problematization as Foucault wants. The latter's situating of psychoanalysis into a discursive regime or an apparatus of power-knowledge still must presume a position totally outside the hyperbolic excess of the death drive. Foucault, Derrida says, "regularly attempts to objectify psychoanalysis and to reduce it to that of which he speaks rather than to that from out of which he speaks."<sup>124</sup> In order to place Freud within a given field, to see him as a violent 'figure of order' one must discount the transgressive and hyperbolic element in Freud's text. Moreover, as Derrida points out, in *Madness and Civilization* Foucault himself affirms that Freud stands with Nietzsche as a figure who entered into a dialogue with madness prior to its pathologization by psychology and thus, like Nietzsche, Artaud and Holderlin, makes Foucault's own text possible.<sup>125</sup>

Freud thus acts as what Derrida calls a 'supplement' in Foucault's text; he is both excluded by being placed inside the history of the determination of madness and placed outside insofar as he makes a dialogue with madness possible. Freud can thus only lie at the "border" of Foucault's history:

"Freud, is the double figure of the door and the doorkeeper. He stands guard and ushers in...That is why - and this would be the paradox of a serial law - Freud does and does not belong to the different series in which Foucault inscribes him. What is outstanding, outside the series [*hors-série*], turns out to be regularly reinscribed within different series."<sup>126</sup>

Like any totality, Foucault's delimitation of the violent determination of madness can be shown to be founded upon that which it excludes. In 'To Do Justice to Freud' Derrida refers to this experience of nonpassage at the border of Freud, employing a 'quasi-concept' from *Specters of Marx*, as a 'hauntology'; any objectification is perpetually haunted by the

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123 TDJF Pp.233-4

124 TDJF, p.232

125 TDJF, p.238-9

126 TDJF, p.235

hyperbolic:

"the whole criteriology and symptomatology that can give assurance to a historical knowledge governing a figure, an *episteme*, an age, an epoch, a paradigm, once all these determinations are found to be in effect threatened by a perpetual haunting. For in principle, all these determinations are for the historian either presences or absences, as such, they exclude haunting."<sup>127</sup>

Much like the argument in 'Cogito and the History of Madness,' here Derrida suggests that Foucault has failed to ask 'the question of the question' of the relation between the inside and outside (here marked by the figure of Freud), which makes his analysis possible. As such, rather than do "justice," Foucault has committed a determinate violence against Freud.

Given the resonance of this later text with the deconstruction opened in 'Cogito and the History of Madness,' 'To Do Justice to Freud' may not be of great importance for our own analysis since, as we argued in chapter two, Foucault came to reject many of the assumptions grounding *Madness and Civilization* and quite radically altered his own methodology, especially after *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. However, in the later text, Derrida extends his argument to encompass all of Foucault's work. A 'problem' he argues, can only appear through the promise of the presence of knowledge of a given field. Yet, since presence is always already divided and deferred, any problem, is only constituted in the covering over of an aporia:

"The self-identity of its age, or of any age, appears as divided, and thus, problematic, *problematizable*... as the age of madness or an age of psychoanalysis -as well as, in fact, all the historical or archeological categories that promise us the determinable stability of a configurable whole."<sup>128</sup>

In other words, it is Foucault who delimits or closes the inside from the outside, who denies the instability and impossibility of all limits, who violently 'decides' the contours and context of his history before presuming to undermine it in genealogy. The possibility of any genealogy of problematizations cannot proceed except by violently and teleologically determining its objects and thus, by covering over the aporia or hyperbolic excess which is the condition for Foucault's history. Derrida makes a similar argument in *Rogues*, arguing that the determination of context or field in Foucault's works is an

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127 TDJF, p.242

128 TDJF, p.259

"infrastructure of technoscientific discovery" and thus,

"[w]henver a *telos* or teleology comes to orient, order and make possible a historicity, it annuls that historicity by the same token and neutralizes unforeseeable and incalculable irruption, the singular and exceptional alterity of *what [ce qui]* comes, that without which, or the one without whom, nothing happens or arrives."<sup>129</sup>

It is Foucault who, Derrida argues, enacts the closure of the outside in attempting to form an interior horizon as the field for his histories of problematizations. In *Aporias*, Derrida traces the etymology of the word 'problem' to its Greek origins as a reference to 'projection' or 'protection.' The ancient meaning of the term, he suggests, echoes the constitution of a problem as the ordering or delimitation of a domain or field. The constitution of problems in disciplinary, ontological, or territorial terms Derrida says, refers to the constitution of a border, identity, or, in short, a closure.<sup>130</sup> The setting up of a problem or limit, he argues, is always already threatened; it is always already marked by the "experience of nonpassage" of the *aporia* which denotes the impossibility of any total or non-negotiable border. The *aporia* is that milieu where, Derrida argues, "*it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem, a project, or a projection.*"<sup>131</sup>

For Derrida, Foucault's text is not *genealogical enough*, since it denies the determinations of relation that occur within it. It cannot maintain the question as a question and so, it is up to deconstruction to conduct "the problematization of problematization."<sup>132</sup> The *aporia* is not merely prior to decision or problematization, it is also an excess over any decision and thus, prevents the possibility of mastery by a given decision. Foucault's problematization then, could only be constituted in a violent reduction of this anterior medium.<sup>133</sup> Deconstruction would thus be anterior to and less violent than the genealogy of problematizations since this experience of a non-totalizable excess or outside which exceeds any determination or problematization marks the failure of its attempted closure. Yet, if Derrida's deconstruction of Foucault is correct, it cannot be so when considered within the scope of the terms of Foucault's own articulation. That is to say, the polemical difference between Derrida and Foucault might be irresolvable not because of a fundamental ontological contention but rather, as arising from their shared

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129 RO, p.128

130 AP, p.40

131 AP p.12

132 TDJF, p.264

133 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. P.101

affirmation of the relational determinateness of questioning and the consequent necessity for questioning to proceed strategically. Since neither thinker attempts to sustain an absolute justification for their discourse, we might wonder if we can say that each account is ultimately justifiable only in terms of the point from which their analysis sets out. The debate between them, as a question of the violence of their respective analyses, moves from two distinct points of 'evaluation' internal to both discourses such that each seems to be caught in an indefinite circularity. The accusation of violence emerges from two distinct *strategic* points of departure.

The debate and polemic between Derrida and Foucault might be unavoidable since, in an ironic logic, both affirm the situatedness of their thought in determinate relations and thus, posit no absolute justification for their analyses. As Derrida put it in *Of Grammatology*, it is "impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely," and thus, he goes on, deconstruction always proceeds from a particular point, it always begins "in a text where we already believe ourselves to be."<sup>134</sup> To work strategically for Derrida is to sustain what he calls a "radically empiricist" point of departure, one which is neither absolute, nor purely empirical but which proceeds along or through a 'minimal' consensus in the interpretation of given phenomena or texts.<sup>135</sup> Deconstruction's mode of proceeding has come under criticism, most notably from David Wood and Peter Dews (albeit in different inflections) for this strategic mode of questioning. Inherent to this first step of deconstruction they argue, is a sustenance or nostalgia for metaphysics or logocentrism by which Derrida first constructs a metaphysical whole prior to its deconstruction.<sup>136</sup> This type of argument mirrors Foucault's own attack in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire' on what he sees as Derrida's preservation of the sovereignty and privileged status of philosophy in deconstruction's positing of essentialism in metaphysics and the history of metaphysics.<sup>137</sup> Yet, Foucault, as we will see, makes a similar 'strategic' affirmation about the truth status of his genealogies.

This negotiation with the veracity of their analyses in relation to dominant

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134 OG, p.162-3

135 OG, p.162

136 cf. Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Political Theory*. London: Verso, 1987, p.37; David Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1989. Pp.267-292

137 cf. Chapter 2



paradigms of truth is not a temporary problem, a minor (or major) mistake which can be overcome, it is the condition and fate of all 'strategic' and genealogical thought that refuses to adopt a model of substantive truth absolutely. The debate and difference between Derrida and Foucault, while it may revolve around certain formal interpretative differences (e.g., the historical status of Descartes' *Meditations*), more fundamentally, the dispute centers on the status of the transcendental and its ethical import. While the divergence between Derrida and Foucault may be articulated in terms of formal questions of interpretation (and consequent accusations of teleology), the fundamental distinction and the stakes of the difference lie at the intersection(s) of philosophy, ethics and politics. The 'error' of which each thinker is accused resides at the locus where relationality is determined. As such, while the 'debate' revolves around given interpretations of the status of Descartes or Freud, the critical element of the debate is nevertheless the accusation of committing violence or a determination and it is an ethical and political one. The stakes of the debate and the difference between Derrida and Foucault lie over how the violence of relationality is to be negotiated, how a relational or genealogical thought is to be affirmed and thus, is ultimately a question of 'strategy' of the question; of a strategy of a lesser violence in relational existence. At stake are two 'economies of violence' and thus, the irreducibility and centrality of the ethico-political question of relation. It is here, at the question of strategy, that the distinction Agamben draws between a thought of transcendence and a thought of immanence might be operative.

Foucault perhaps most clearly explains the immanence of the conditions of thought to thought itself through his conception of 'life' which is elaborated in the essay he penned as an introduction to Georges Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*.<sup>138</sup> Foucault understands life itself as a continuous process of concept formation and, of human life in particular, as being always within a "conceptually structured environment," a milieu that is "mobile, on an undefined territory."<sup>139</sup> In appropriating Canguilhem's formulation of knowledge in terms of the conceptual structuring of an environment Foucault conceives the subject's relation to its environment(s) as defined by complex "interactions," and not as having constituted it or been constituted by it.<sup>140</sup> Concepts lie

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138 Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science." *EWII*, pp.465-478.

139 *EWII*, p.475.

140 I take this idea from Gutting's "Foucault's Philosophy of Experience." *Boundary 2*. Vol.29, No.2 (Summer 2002), pp.69-85.

at the centre of that complex relation between the subject and its context. And it is not just humans but all living beings for which life is formed in this way. As Foucault puts it, the concept, "is one of the modes of that information which every living being takes from its environment and by which conversely it structures its environment... Forming concepts is a way of living and not a way of killing life."<sup>141</sup> To form the conditions for responding to conceptual problems is thus a mode of negotiating our environment; it is to form specific possibilities within a complex and unstable environment. Thought does not reflect a prior world, but is an active event in itself. Thus, conceptual systems or grounds are not reducible to a single element (a subject, or an object, or Being); because any ground is itself the effect of a regularity which then affects meaning, subjectivity and particular decisions.<sup>142</sup> The conditions of thought are immanent to and inseparable from the empirical event of thought itself. Accordingly, thought is always a response and never a solution since it forms the very conditions for its response to a problem and can never resolve itself to, or in Derridean terms, appropriate those immanent conditions which produce it.

In the essay on Canguilhem, life itself is conceived as a series of modes of being within an immanent conceptual network that is always susceptible to "error," for the processes of adequation that define the forming of concepts "give way to a chance occurrence that before becoming a disease, a deficiency or a monstrosity, is something like a disturbance in the informative system, something like a 'mistake.'"<sup>143</sup> One must grant, Foucault goes on, that if concepts are the mode in which we cope with the inherent contingency of life, then "error is the root of what produces human thought and history."<sup>144</sup> If norms are by their very nature contingent, never in the 'right' place, truth will always consist in a calendar of errors. Thought will always be grounded in discontinuity since it is grounded in its own singular limits which are never transcendent from it. It is susceptibility which acts as the instigation for a problematization, thought is problematic since it is constantly giving way to those "chance occurrences" which reveal a mistake in the conceptual system. If to err (i.e., to think) is to deviate from the norm, then contingency becomes the ground of order itself and the source of a becoming other or 'thinking otherwise' as a way of living, an exit from the norm which constitutes it.

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141 EWII, p.475

142 Colebrook, *The Ethics of Representation*. p.167

143 EWII, p.476

144 EWIII, p.476.

This formulation of life suggests an analogy between such a thinking of the concept and the aporetic logic of (im)possibility which lies at the heart of Derrida's thought. Both thinkers affirm the contingency and ultimately the failure of all concepts to attain a transcendent truth and the consequent violence which all concepts do to things; the concept is always in error. Neither thinks that relations can be indefinitely determined since all grounds are effected by the play of differences of an ultimately irrecoverable outside and both seek to open up this irreducible contingency, to destabilize fixed limits. Yet, the implications which both thinkers draw from this non-foundationalist state of affairs are radically different and perhaps irreconcilable. Derrida tirelessly persists with the 'quasi-transcendental' question of the impossibility of the concept as a means of disturbing all attempts to govern relationality and accordingly affirms the responsibility which beginning from determinate relations entails. Foucault, on the other hand, concludes that, if a transcendental truth is not attainable and thus, all interpretation or concept forming is an "infinite task" with no telos which violently "upset[s], shatter[s] with the blow of a hammer" then thought might perhaps affirm itself as such; that is, as difference and as an event of power.<sup>145</sup> As Foucault puts it, "knowledge is always a certain strategic relation in which man is placed... that's why it would be completely contradictory to imagine a knowledge that was not by nature partial, oblique, and perspectival... Knowledge simplifies, passes over differences, lumps things together, without any *justification* in regard to truth."<sup>146</sup> If thought cannot exceed its own determinate conditions than this means it can only proceed in terms of an analysis of the immanent relational and conceptual milieu in which it finds itself. The impossibility of transcendence signals for Foucault the possibility of proceeding without posing transcendental questions of justification, of the Idea or of Truth. Instead, thought might affirm itself as a determinate and determining event rather than 'mourn' the impossibility of the indeterminate.<sup>147</sup> It might be in this sense that Agamben refers to the essay on Canguilhem when he distinguishes Foucault and Deleuze as thinkers of immanence from Derrida and Levinas as thinkers of transcendence.<sup>148</sup> For being in error, Foucault says

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145 EWII, p.274, p.275

146 EWIII p.14

147 Derrida discusses "mourning" the impossibility of presence and appropriation in *Points: Interviews 1974-1994*, Elisabeth Weber, Ed. (Trans. Peggy Kamuf et. al.), Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. p.48; cf. also *Specters of Marx*. Slavoj Zizek argues that it is precisely the "melancholic" aspect of Derrida's thought which marks its ineffectiveness for any politics. cf. "Melancholy and the Act." *Critical Inquiry*. Vo.26, (2000), pp.657-81.

148 Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence." Pp.238-9

there, is a way of living: "with man, life has led to a living being that is never completely in the right place, a living being who is fated to 'err' and to be 'wrong.'"<sup>149</sup>

Foucault consequently accorded no special status for his own genealogical texts. And it is with his notion of the concept as error in mind that we should understand his labeling of all of his works as 'fictions':

"I am quite aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I'm not saying for all that that this is outside truth. It seems to me the possibility exists to make fiction work in truth, to induce effects of truth with a discourse of fiction, and to make it so that the discourse of truth creates, 'fabricates' something that does not yet exist, therefore, 'fictionalizes.' One 'fictionalizes' history starting from a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictionalizes' a political outlook that does not yet exist starting from an historical truth."<sup>150</sup>

Any delimitation of a problem, apparatus or discourse begins from within what Foucault calls a given (and needless to say, contingent) "game of truth" and to one extent or another it works from within its conditions.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the work "does need to be true in terms of academic, historically verifiable truth;" it must accord with certain functions and demands of the particular discourse of truth in which it is inserted.<sup>152</sup> This mode of truth, as demonstrable, verifiable, empirical and acquired through an act of cognition is what, in the lectures from 1974 Foucault thinks as a mode of truth which denies its inescapable relation to power.<sup>153</sup> This is a mode of truth which we saw, Foucault argues, comes to full form with Descartes *Meditations* whereby truth is acquired in an adequation of the subject to the object.<sup>154</sup> Truth, in this sense, is tied to particular rules or laws which determine a *correct* method for attaining truth.<sup>155</sup> It is in terms of this Cartesian mode of truth which Derrida will deconstruct Foucault's text, by showing that any empirical designation of a problem, any claim to a verifiable truth, will always be determined, determining and violent. "All pathbreaking," Derrida says in reference to Foucault, "opens the way only at a certain price, that is, by bolting shut other passages, by

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149 EWII, p.476. Quoted in Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," p.220 (Translation in Agamben slightly different from EWII).

150 *Foucault Live*, p.213

151 cf. UP, p.6

152 Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault." EWIII, Pp.239-298, quoted onp.243

153 Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*. (trans. Graham Burchell), New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. cf. pp.236-7. On this point see also Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*. P.39

154 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*. (Graham Burchell, Ed.) London: Picador, 2005. [Hereafter referred to as HH], p.190

155 HH, p.190,

ligaturing, stitching up, or compressing, indeed repressing, at least provisionally other veins."<sup>156</sup>

But it is another mode of truth which I think Foucault seeks to formulate: a truth which simply affirms itself as an event of power. Genealogy should be judged, Foucault argues, not in terms of its capacity to prove demonstrable truths, but in terms of its 'effectiveness,' insofar as it's "fictions become true."<sup>157</sup> As an event of power, the effectiveness of any work lies with its capacity to affect and alter determinate relations by relating them to their outside. Foucault clearly illustrates this point in an interview in a discussion of *Discipline and Punish*:

"The book makes use of true documents, but in such a way that through them it is possible not only to arrive at an establishment of truth but also experience something that permits a change, a transformation of the relationship we have with ourselves and with the world where, up to then, we had seen ourselves as being without problems - in short, a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge. So this game of truth and fiction - or if you prefer, of verification and fabrication - will bring to light something which connects us, sometimes in a completely unconscious way, with our modernity, while at the same time causing it to appear as changed. The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently. will be, at best, one and the same thing"<sup>158</sup>

The attempt to exceed the realm of verification and coherence is not the nihilistic cry of 'everything is permissible' since, as Foucault argues, the work arises from within, and cannot totally escape the demands of the 'game of truth' which forms its conditions.<sup>159</sup> Yet, in opening to the exteriority and contingency of the institutions and apparatuses which have formed a given field of knowledge a different mode of truth appears. Genealogy, in the identification of points of constitution and therefore, possible points of fracture or possibility, "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."<sup>160</sup> The telos of the work is thus not to demonstrate truth, but to be "effective;" to "deprive the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature."<sup>161</sup> Its very

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156 TDJF, p.230

157 PK, p.93

158 "Interview with Michel Foucault." EWII, p.244,

159 For 'game of truth' cf. UP, p.6

160 EW III, p.375

161 EW III, p.380

effectiveness arises with its ability to introduce discontinuity “into our very being.”<sup>162</sup> It is the introduction of discontinuity itself which opens the sphere of possibility. The introduction of new possibilities for what might be thought and done, of a new mode of relating to the limits that form the self; limits as relations to the self, to knowledge, and to others. In inducing particular effects, new experiences of the carceral institution for example, the work invokes new relations to truth and to others and as such, 'becomes true' since it enters into and transforms, particular economies of power relations, opening them to the 'outside' which has made them possible.<sup>163</sup>

Like Derrida, Foucault thus affirms the violent consequences, the necessary determinations, which any historical analysis will provoke. Yet for Foucault, if knowledge is inherently violent and determining of relations, if all knowledge is 'error' and 'fiction,' then questioning need not proceed in terms of grounds, foundations, justification nor Truth. All of these concepts are given over to the sedimentations of fields of forces which Foucault comes to call 'problematizations,' in which they are constituted. Derrida's deconstruction, in both 'Cogito and the History of Madness' and 'To Do Justice to Freud' question the constitution of given problematizations themselves; their elaboration, he argues, focusing on Descartes and then Freud, will always be inextricably tied to a violent effacement of the aporia and consequently, violent determinations which *are not* acknowledged by Foucault. As a result, we are caught in an infinite regress between the problem and the aporia, each purporting to have outlined the conditions in which the other might appear. Foucault's genealogies appear to be constituted upon a violent reduction of the aporias which make them possible since they assume the possibility of the presence of a given field of knowledge while Derrida's work on the experience of the aporetic is formed within particular 'games of truth' and thus maintains the sovereignty of traditional, transcendental philosophical questions.

## Conclusion

If neither Derrida's nor Foucault's thought is to fall prey to the accusations made by Visker, Fraser, or Habermas of a thoroughgoing nihilism wherein all ordering, all

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162 EWIII, p.380

163 On the relation between truth as event of power and the thought of the outside, see Timothy Rayner, *Foucault's Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience*. My claim to the truth-status of Foucault's own work is indebted to Rayner's analysis.

determination is both equal and unavoidable, then a satisfactory articulation of an ethical orientation will prove crucial to their work. In the next chapter we will explore the intersections of ethics and politics in Derrida and Foucault to think the way the ethics of each is informed by a thought of the outside and the way an ethics of relationality guides political thought in their oeuvres. Can a questioning which proceeds by a thought of the aporia or the problem orient thought without simultaneously falling prey to the archipolitical desire to posit itself as transcendent authority? What kind of ethical orientation emerges from such a thought? Finally, how do we think the ethico-political once we concede the incommensurability of the accounts of ethics proposed by Derrida and Foucault? It is to these questions we now turn.

## Chapter 4: Two (Incommensurable?) Economies of Violence: Ethics in Derrida and Foucault

### Introduction

In a recent book Slavoj Žižek succinctly presents the rationale for looking beyond the empirical and apparent when thinking about violence.<sup>1</sup> What Žižek calls “objective” or empirical violence is made visible and identifiable against the implicit “background of a non-violent zero level” which we associate with our everyday existence.<sup>2</sup> In other words, violence appears as the suspension of the natural and generally peaceful state of things. However, by thinking violence in these terms, Žižek maintains we implicitly obscure and veil the systemic violence of our own existence.<sup>3</sup> That is to say, in reducing violence to a (relatively) rare eruptive event, we conceal the fact that our existence as social and linguistic beings is always already irreducibly violent; that violence is the condition of all meaning and all relation. Žižek goes on to tie this insight to Heideggerian ontology: the disclosure of a world or of particular epochs of Being always denotes particular determinations of both our being-in-the-world and our being-with-others.<sup>4</sup> For Žižek, Heidegger's fundamental insight is that all social or political existence – all relationality – is constituted in an irreducibly violent reduction and determination of what ‘is.’ Moreover, as Žižek notes, Heidegger also is aware that the violence of relation is not “merely ontological” and thus, should not be reduced to a purely philosophical problem.<sup>5</sup> Any particular world disclosure, while violent as such, will involve specific relations of authority and domination. Consequently, the irreducibly ontic violence of any particular field of relations is not only an ontological problem, but an ethico-political one as well.

Žižek's account of the irreducibility of violence is prescient here. It is in refusing to view violence as limited to an irruptive and purely empirical event that we open the possibility of thinking the more pervasive violence of the moral-metaphysical grounds that have sought to determine the modes by which we exist with others. As Nietzsche's

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1 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*. New York: Picador, 2008.

2 *Ibid.* P.2

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.* Pp.67-70. Žižek's reference is to the discussion of the Antigone chorus in *Introduction to Metaphysics* discussed in chapter 1. See also Žižek's more extensive discussion of Heidegger and the violence of the political in *The Ticklish Subject*.

5 *Ibid.* P.70



genealogy and Heidegger's history of Being have shown most of all, moral and metaphysical categories are irreducibly violent; either as the product of political struggles themselves (Nietzsche) or particular historical determinations of Being (Heidegger). In restricting violence to the empirical, we veil the limits and hierarchies of particular socio-political structures. As we have seen, both Derrida and Foucault critically appropriate in different ways these Nietzschean and Heideggerean themes. From Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault inherit the notion of 'determination.' For Heidegger, any ground or *arkhe* is effected by an anterior relation to Being which is subsequently determined or reduced by thought and thus, concealed. However, if both take up Heidegger's notion of the violent and reductive nature of metaphysics, they nevertheless reject the recovery of origin or essence which permeates Heidegger's work. For Derrida, Heidegger's desire for a 'proper,' non-reductive, non-metaphysical and non-subjective thinking of Being is itself haunted or contaminated by its own irreducibly reductive gestures. Similarly, for Foucault Heidegger is caught in the modern epistemic move of seeking to recover an origin which would ground or condition knowledge. Read through either Derrida or Foucault, Heidegger's recovery of the 'proper' origin of thinking thus appears as one more (yet perhaps the most radical) attempt to avoid or overcome the irreducible violence of existence. Against Heidegger's attempt to recover the 'proper' Derrida and Foucault insist on the Nietzschean theme of the violence of all origins and thus, refuse the possibility of recovery. Accordingly, each posits a mode of thinking *strategically* via the aporia or the problem in order to attempt to displace the question of origin or ground altogether.

The crucial question with which we closed the previous chapter and which will be our focus in this chapter arises here. Once we insist on the irreducibility of violence and refuse, as I have shown Derrida and Foucault to, either the possibility of appropriating a spontaneous primordially or the possibility of a non-violent order, are we left unable to discern violence at all? In other words, if no ground is posited from which particular orders can be evaluated then both Derrida and Foucault are seemingly left without the means by which the irreducibility of a violent social existence can be negotiated. Their work would be, as one thinker has put it, nothing more than the “sabotaging of a reigning epoch's agenda.”<sup>6</sup> By thinking a violence more pervasive than the empirical and which cannot be transcended they risk no longer being able to recognize violence at all. If non-

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6 Kevin Thompson, “Forms of Resistance: Foucault on Tactical Reversal and Self-Formation.” *Continental Philosophy Review*. No.36 (2003), pp.113-38. P.123

violence can never be present are we reduced to a vacuous inability to think and act ethically and politically?

This chapter constructs a negative response to this question. Both Derrida and Foucault provide a way out of this apparent paradox by positing an 'economy of violence' which functions something like a compass allowing them to orient and negotiate the irreducibility of violence. Both thinkers postulate a principle of evaluation which allows them to discern a better and a worse and yet does not form a transcendental ground beyond all determinate relations (insofar as a 'principle' here is not thought as a law but as an 'orientation'). Moreover, I will argue that the ethical orientations both propose are characterized by a Nietzschean affirmation of the irreducibility of violence, one which receives its motivational force from what, for both is a 'desire' for the other or outside. That is, a desire to relate the violence of determination to the otherness and indeterminacy which exceeds it. Finally, despite these similarities the question of the incommensurability of the two strategies employed by these thinkers reappears here – in the question of the ethics of otherness. For while they attempt congruous ethico-political moves they do so in terms of the two radically different strategies outlined in the previous two chapters in terms of immanence and quasi-transcendence. From an encounter between these two disparate strategies of conceiving the finite, determinate and violent nature of thought and its accordant ethics a violence appears in excess of their very accounts of violence. Insofar as each strategy excludes and circumscribes the other, it thus cannot account for nor recognize the very force of the other's account.

### **Derrida: An Ethics of the Same and the Other**

One possible path into the complex terrain of the ethics of deconstruction proceeds from Derrida's critique of empiricism discussed at length in chapter 2. As we have seen, in several essays collected in *Writing and Difference*, in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, Derrida claims there to be a historicism inherent to the structuralist theories of Levi-Strauss and the early Foucault. The latter are accused of illegitimately collapsing originary violence, constitutive of all determinate relations, into an empirical and secondary violence in order to recover the possibility of a non-violent presence of the other. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida's first major essay on Emmanuel Levinas

he implies that his friend and contemporary succumbs to a similar error. Levinas, Derrida argues, seeks to transcend ordinary violence by making it a merely empirical event. As such, Derrida's reading of Levinas proceeds on the same basis as those of Levi-Strauss and Foucault, that is, on the affirmation of the impossibility of transcending violence. Yet, it is in the deconstruction of Levinas' ethics of alterity in particular that, among his early works, Derrida perhaps most explicitly develops his own understanding of the relation between (in Levinas' words) the Same and the Other and ultimately, begins to formulate what we might call his own 'ethics' of relationality.<sup>7</sup>

In this section I will begin by briefly outlining Derrida's early engagement with Levinas in order to suggest that an 'ethics' of deconstruction emerges from the particular way in which, contra Levinas, Derrida asserts the irreducibility of violence in the relation to the other. I will then go on to argue that many of Derrida's critics, who to differing degrees accept this reading, nevertheless err in limiting the scope of deconstructive ethics. Not only does Derrida affirm the irreducibility of violence and calculation for ethics, he also provides a notion of 'lesser violence' which acts as an 'orientation' by which an economy of violence can be negotiated. This 'orientation,' I will argue, is defined by a 'desire' for the other or outside which permeates all of Derrida's work.

### *Derrida, Levinas, The Same, and the Other*

Levinas' theoretical apparatus is centered on the attempt to displace the cogito as the centre or ground of all relationality in modernity by inscribing an absolute otherness within it. Accordingly, he seeks to inscribe the totalizing force of identity, or what he simply calls the Same, with a notion of infinity which, essentially inappropriable, undermines the totalizing movement of consciousness' appropriation of the object.<sup>8</sup> For Levinas ethics revolves around the pursuit of a concept of infinite responsibility for the other formed in an attempt to totally exceed the identity of the Same.<sup>9</sup> Whenever the other is not addressed or related to as absolutely other it is reduced to an element of the Same, and thus, violently appropriated.<sup>10</sup> Hence, Derrida says that for Levinas "coherence

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7 The argument that the 'ethics' of deconstruction arise through an engagement with Levinas is well known. See for instance Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit*, London: Routledge, 1992.

8 WD, p.122, p.142

9 Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*. P.36

10 Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence : Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. Baltimore : Johns

in ontology," – the absolute coherence of the *logos* with itself – is "violence itself."<sup>11</sup> Levinas' ethics is said to be grounded in the claim that the other cannot and should not be reduced to a determinate economy or context, that "the concept (material of language) which is always *given to the other*, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other."<sup>12</sup>

While Levinas associates violence with the finitude and determination by the concept, he holds out the possibility of non-violence embodied in a pure *logos* which would incorporate the absolutely other *as other*.<sup>13</sup> He attempts to guarantee otherness or alterity through a formulation of 'positive infinity' which would be "beyond Being."<sup>14</sup> An otherness which would always be absolutely more than, or in excess of the Same, and therefore self-sufficient and in-appropriable. Such a notion of otherness, absolutely beyond relation, or as Levinas puts it echoing Blanchot's formula, a "relation without relation," would ensure respect for the other insofar as it would keep it from being determined and reduced.<sup>15</sup>

While the ascription of an ethics to deconstruction is commonly conceived through the proximity of Derrida's work to Levinas' notion of alterity there is a risk in collapsing Derrida into Levinas. Overstating the proximity threatens to efface the absolute irreducibility of violence and its ethical implications in Derrida's work. Simon Critchley's influential *The Ethics of Deconstruction* is exemplary of this error. Despite generally providing an accurate and provocative reading of Derrida, Critchley goes too far towards reducing deconstruction to Levinas' ethics of alterity. In conceiving deconstruction as a "philosophy of hesitation" Critchley sees it as a mode of opening thought to an ethics of infinite responsibility to the other, that is, to an unconditionality and undecidability which both transgresses the empirical and determinate and cannot be effaced.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, he maintains that for Derrida there is an irreducible gap between the ontological and the ontic, the same and the other and so, between ethics and politics.

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Hopkins, 2002. P.124

11 WD, p.403, n.2

12 WD, p.117

13 Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence*. P. 134 and "Violence and Testimony." *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*. (Hent de Vries & Samuel Weber, Eds.) Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997. P.23

14 Hobson, *Opening Lines*. P.44

15 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. (Alphonso Lingis, Trans.)

Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991. P.80. See also Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*. (Susan Hanson, Trans.) Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993.

16 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*. p.42 and *passim*.

It follows for Critchley that deconstruction fails to theorize an engagement with the empirical (and thus the political) since his very account of ethics is based on the Levinasian notion of the failure of finite empirical existence to live up to the absolute ethical demand to respond to the other.<sup>17</sup>

Critchley's view that Derrida fails to close the gap deconstruction forms between the empirical and transcendental insufficiently stresses the extent to which the latter's account of relationality is formulated in opposition to Levinas.<sup>18</sup> The relation to the other in Derrida's work, unlike in Levinas, begins and ends in violence. All three of Derrida's texts engaging with Levinas proceed from the principle that determinate relations cannot be totally exceeded and thus, violence cannot be restricted to a particular concept or determination.<sup>19</sup> In suggesting there is an irreducible gap between the transcendental and empirical or unconditional and determinate, Critchley too quickly effaces the ineluctable contamination of the purely ethical relation as the basis of a deconstructive ethics. It is to a closer reading of Derrida's deconstruction of Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics' to which we now turn.

If Levinas seeks an exteriority beyond the discourse of philosophy in the form of a pure difference of pure difference then Derrida, much as he does in relation to Heidegger, insists on the inescapable thrownness and attendant finitude of thought. We find ourselves always already caught in fields of determinate relations and thus, we are called to negotiate rather than transcend violence if we are to avoid what Derrida calls the "worst" violence of the disavowal of violence.<sup>20</sup> Responsibility, is necessarily indissociable from irresponsibility. As Derrida puts it, it is necessary "to state infinity's excess over totality in the language of totality [...] it is necessary to state the other in the language of the Same [...] it is necessary to think *true* exteriority as non-exteriority."<sup>21</sup> The other can

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17 *Ibid.* P.200, 236.

18 One should note here that Critchley's privileging of the place of Levinas in deconstruction rather reductively revolves around the following brief sentence from Derrida's *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986): "faced with a thought like that of Levinas, I never have an objection." Quoted in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.10; See also Alex Thompson, *Deconstruction and Democracy: Derrida's Politics of Friendship*. London: Continuum, 2005. Pp.1223, 126-8 and Morag Patrick *Derrida, Responsibility and Politics* (pp.91-125) for a more extensive critique of Critchley's hermeneutic strategy.

19 These texts are "Violence and Metaphysics" *WD*, pp.97-192; *Adieu: to Emmanuel Levinas*. (Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas, Trans.), Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999; (with Pierre-Jean Labarriere) "At this Very Moment In This Work Here I am." *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Pp.143-90

20 *WD*, p.146, 162, 191

21 *WD*, p.140

only appear within a given and particular context which is in turn destructive of its singularity.<sup>22</sup> A relation to the other is always violent and moreover, all denunciations of violence are violent: "[t]here is no phrase which is indeterminate, that is, which does not pass through the violence of the concept [...] The very elocution of nonviolent metaphysics is its first disavowal."<sup>23</sup> Absolute difference or 'positive infinity' can only be thought from within a series of finite attempts to think difference and thus would not escape its own inscription as a possibility within finitude, language and the world.<sup>24</sup>

In short, Derrida displaces Levinas' ethical relation to the other by the originary and uncircumventable excess and co-implication of totality and infinity or inside and outside, that makes transcendence both possible and impossible.<sup>25</sup> Originary violence is the irreducible condition of relation since "the other cannot be absolutely exterior [or "cannot be, or be anything" Derrida adds in a footnote to this sentence] to the same without ceasing to be other."<sup>26</sup> If an ethics emerges from the deconstruction of Levinas, it does so through the claim that the latter elides the full import of the impossibility of understanding and relating to absolute otherness. This impossibility is not only an empirical condition but a transcendental one.<sup>27</sup> The same or inside is, Derrida argues, the "only possible point of departure" for any relation to the other.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, violence is the condition of all relationality and all ethics; violence is what Derrida calls in *Of Grammatology* the "nonethical opening of ethics."<sup>29</sup> "One never escapes," Derrida says, "this *economy of war*."<sup>30</sup>

In affirming the necessity and inescapability of violence Derrida appears to assert what we might call a genealogical ethics, characterized by the refusal to veil or conceal the violence of all points of departure against Levinas' ethics of alterity. Insofar as Derrida's work is permeated by an invocation to produce what he calls an "experience" of the irreducibility of the aporia (and thus of violence), we can, I believe, describe it as an *amor*

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22 WD, p.142

23 WD, p.185

24 WD, p.146

25 WD, p.146

26 WD, p.158 and p.404, n.45

27 Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*. P.37

28 WD, p.156

29 OG, p.140

30 WD, p.185

*fati*.<sup>31</sup> That is, if there is something like an ethics in deconstruction it is situated in the between, as an opening and avowal of and by thought to the originary violence from which any particular ethical acts proceed. As we saw in chapter 3, deconstruction proceeds from our abandonment to determinate relations to an exposure and affirmation of the outside or other, "an affirmation, of a yes, before all opposition of yes and no."<sup>32</sup> The call to our responsibility to the other is 'heard' in the affirmation of always beginning within determinate relations, but also as a response which desires to think what exceeds and gives relation. An opening to the other, in excess of finitude and the conditional, only proceeds through an experience and affirmation of relationality itself: of the 'between' the inside and outside, same and other.

Crucial here is that in affirming the irreducibility and necessity of its own violence, deconstruction constitutes a different order of violence to that of metaphysics: this is a violence that recoils upon itself. This formulation of the relation to the other, in affirming its own situatedness and violence, not only inevitably determines or reduces the singularity of the other, but also forms an opening to the other. If contra Critchley we sustain an understanding of Derrida's work not as a "refusal" of determinate tactics, strategies and calculations, since deconstruction is irreducibly finite and strategic, we must nevertheless ask how an 'economy of violence' can be negotiated?<sup>33</sup> If the possibility of moral or normative principles is disavowed, are we caught in a vacant nihilism without orientation, affirming only our own finitude? It is to these questions that we now turn.

### *The Universalisation of Violence*

Critchley's account reflects a common critique of deconstruction. Insofar as it forms an affirmation of the incompleteness of identity, the argument goes, deconstruction is inherently insufficient as an articulation of political relations. In this vein, William Connolly for instance, argues that deconstruction is limited to provoking an experience of contingency. While this experience is a necessary element of a post-essentialist conception of the ethico-political, Connolly nevertheless maintains that it is merely a

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31 Derrida often refers to deconstruction as an "experience" of the aporia or undecidability. See for instance *AP*, p.33; "Eating Well." *Who Comes after the Subject?* P.107

32 *Of Spirit*, p.94

33 See Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, P.200

negative critique which fails to produce positive theoretical alternatives.<sup>34</sup> Further determinate and positive political articulations are necessary if our thinking of relationality is to exceed a merely reactive and critical status. Similarly, albeit in a radically different ontological register, Alain Badiou sees the Levinasian-Derridean inspired account of ethics as at best, banal and insufficient. "Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*," Badiou argues in his *Ethics*.<sup>35</sup> Difference or alterity, Badiou says, characterizes every relation and so, offers no particular insight or basis for an ethics or a politics.<sup>36</sup> Analogously, Ernesto Laclau argues that the attempt to attribute an ethics of responsibility to the other as constitutive of, or constituted by deconstruction cannot be valid. As he puts it,

"[t]he illegitimate transition is to think that from the impossibility of a presence closed in itself [i.e., originary violence], from an 'ontological' condition in which the openness to the event, to the heterogeneous, to the radically other is constitutive, some kind of ethical injunction to be responsible and to keep oneself open to the heterogeneity of the other necessarily follows."<sup>37</sup>

If the impossibility of closure revealed by deconstruction, Laclau argues, is to be constitutive of experience, it must always be prior to any ethical injunction.<sup>38</sup> Deconstruction is just 'what happens.' In a sense Laclau is correct, no ethical necessity follows from the logic of aporia or double-bind and moreover, the postulation of a determinate ethical principle would amount to submitting thought to a transcendental principle.<sup>39</sup>

Despite their very apparent differences all of these thinkers understand Derrida in terms of the irreducibility of a gap between the unconditional and conditional described by Critchley.<sup>40</sup> For instance, while Laclau's 'structuralist' reading of unconditionality lies in stark contrast to Critchley's Levinasian reading, whereby what the former views as an

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34 William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1995. P.36

35 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. (Peter Hallward, Trans.) London: Verso, 2001. P.25. While Badiou's discussion centers around Levinas, Peter Hallward suggests that Badiou's critique of post-structuralist ethics clearly extends to Derrida. See Hallward's "Introduction" Badiou's *Ethics*. Pp.xxi-xxvii.

36 *Ibid.* p.27. We return to Badiou's critique in further detail in chapter 6.

37 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*. London: Verso, 2007. P.77

38 *Ibid.*

39 Ernesto Laclau, "Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony." *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. Pp.47-68. P.53

40 We could also add Slavoj Zizek to this list since he relies on Critchley's understanding of deconstruction. See "Melancholy and the Act." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol.26, No.4 (Summer 2000) Pp.657-81.



ethical relation the latter sees as a structural condition, both nevertheless begin from the postulation of an absolute gap between the unconditional and particular decisions in deconstruction.<sup>41</sup> All of these thinkers see deconstruction, to one extent or another, as limited to a description of the conditions from which determinate actions are effected and moreover, all see this description as insufficient for an ethico-political praxis. Crucially, if these thinkers are partly correct to note the absence of determinate, or what Connolly calls 'positive' theoretical alternatives or demands beyond the affirmation of openness or contingency in deconstruction, this does not mean that Derrida leaves us to blindly negotiate our being-thrown into determinate relations. Rather, I will argue that deconstruction does provide (or simply is) what we might call an ethical orientation or compass to orient our negotiations within economies of violence.

In 'Violence and Metaphysics' Derrida defines this orientation as the desire for "the lesser violence in an economy of violence."<sup>42</sup> What would choosing the 'lesser violence' entail? It is the choice to hear the genealogical imperative defined by the refusal to disavow the fact that all relationality – all relation to otherness – is constituted in violence: "the avowal of violence, is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence."<sup>43</sup> In this sense, I claim that the ethics which impels deconstruction is defined by an imperative to undermine the will to truth's denial of originary violence – *amor fati*. So while Laclau insists that it is contradictory to posit an ethical command transcendent to deconstruction, it is not an injunction beyond all violence which Derrida elicits, but rather, the affirmation of what 'is': the irreducibility of the dis-appropriating force of *différance*, aporia, double-bind, etc. Much as we will see is the case for Foucault as well, there is no categorical difference between the *description* of what happens and an 'ethics' grounded in its *affirmation*. A genealogical 'ethics' is defined by this indissociability between fate and injunction, ought and is. For while the opening of the same to the other, or the inside to the outside is inescapable, it is nevertheless ceaselessly violently denied and concealed.

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41 The reference to Laclau's 'structuralist' deconstruction is from Aletta Norval, "Hegemony After Deconstruction: The Consequence of Undecidability." *Journal of Political Ideologies*. Vol.9, No.2, (2004). Pp.139-57. For the debate over the status of ethics in Laclau's theory of hegemony see Simon Critchley, "Ethics, Politics and Radical Democracy: The History of a Disagreement." and Ernesto Laclau "Ethics, Politics and Radical Democracy: A Response to Simon Critchley." Both in *Culture Machine*. Vol 4. (2002). (<http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk>) (Accessed 10/01/2008).

42 WD, p.146

43 WD, p.162

How do we recognize a 'worse' violence? How does what Derrida calls a "violence against violence" provide an orientation by which we can navigate the relational?<sup>44</sup> Derrida argues that it is a "desire for the other" which deconstruction elicits and that acts as an "injunction" or an "unconditional appeal."<sup>45</sup> As he once put it in an interview, "deconstruction is a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it."<sup>46</sup> This 'injunction' does not amount to a normative principle, yet it is the desire for the other or outside which nevertheless elicits responsibility and has, what Derrida elsewhere calls "motivational force."<sup>47</sup> In this sense, deconstruction is also always a response and a responsibility since there are always already others before the self to which we are called to respond and to whom we have always already begun to respond in the form of what Derrida calls a "nonpositive affirmation."<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, it is not possible to ascribe *an* ethics to deconstruction or an ethics *of* deconstruction insofar as what I am calling ethics is the way violence, the structural condition of all relations, is/should be negotiated. Thus, to describe ethics as the 'desire for the other' or outside which acts as a compass to orient that negotiation is to conceive ethics as only guided by the refusal to disavow or conceal what 'is;' that the closure or determination of the relation to the other is impossible.

### *The Messianic as Ethical 'Orientation'*

Given the way ethical themes arise in Derrida's work, 'ethics' cannot refer to the search for a normative ground or principle upon which action should be based. This becomes increasingly prevalent in his work from the 1980s and 1990s in the formulation of a 'desire for the other;' an impossible horizon nevertheless structures our negotiations within the possible. The general structure of this experience is often referred to by Derrida in terms of the (im)possibility of an event or messianic promise which, in always receding from finite experience, is said to be always futural and thus, 'to-come.' Take for instance one of his earliest account of the logic of the futural event or 'to-come' in the

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44 WD, p.146

45 RO, p.53; "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." p. 83; *Limited Inc.*, p.152

46 Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other: An Interview with Derrida." *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*. (Richard Kearney, Ed.) Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994. P.118

47 RO, p.XIV. See also Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*. p.126

48 WD, p.335, n.15. Or as Derrida puts in another text: "The affirmation of the future *to come*: this is not a positive thesis. It is nothing other than affirmation itself, the 'yes' insofar as it is the condition of all promises and of all hope, of all awaiting, of all performativity, of all opening toward the future, whatever it may be." *Archive Fever*, p.68

deconstruction of the concept of invention.<sup>49</sup> Invention, Derrida argues in this text, "begins by being susceptible to repetition, exploitation, reinscription."<sup>50</sup> The status of an invention or event *qua* event is only recognized by its re-insertion into a system or economy of conventions. At the origin of every invention or event rests the violence of the inscription of the singular into the general since without such an insertion or inscription we would not be able to recognize or confer any status to the event at all. In other words, the concept of event implies an inaugural instance which only receives its status in a system through which it can be recognized; excess always requires its insertion into an economy.<sup>51</sup> All events thus have an aporetic and promissory structure; they cannot be determined in advance since they can only occur in the suspension of any determinate law and yet to have occurred they must be recuperated by a programme or laws and thus, are always susceptible to repetition and reinscription.<sup>52</sup> In short, we can never be sure if the event occurred since the horizon through which it must pass in order to appear can never be made present.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the event as Derrida describes it marks the irreducibility of the arrival of the other which can only occur via a passage through and disturbance of the same.<sup>54</sup> The other cannot be incorporated in any *de facto* relation since it always exceeds any determinate relation, border or horizon. Originary disjointure, repetition and the constant retroactivity of presence, means that a final justification or identification of the event and its consequent recognition is constantly deferred to an open future which never arrives as such. The other is always 'to come' since the event of the other marks both the impossibility of closure of a horizon and the impossibility of anything coming to presence

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49 Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other." *Inventions of the Other*. [Hereafter referred to as PSY]. Richard Beardsworth points to this essay as marking the beginning of a shift in Derrida's work towards the question of the event, the opening to the new, and a futural logic of otherness. cf. "The Future of Critical Philosophy and World Politics." *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy*. Pp.45-65. See p.56 and also the 'Conclusion' to *Derrida and the Political*. Geoffrey Bennington rejects Beardsworth's formulation of two distinct trajectories in Derrida's oeuvre distinguished by a concern in the earlier work with an absolute past and the question of originary technicity and with an absolute future in the later work as a false and positivist dichotomy. See Bennington's *Interrupting Derrida*. Pp.174-9.

50 PSY, p.16

51 One of Derrida's privileged exemplars of this logic is following poem by Francois Ponge titled "Fable": "with the word *with* begins then this text, of which the first line says the truth." (Francois Ponge, *Proèmes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948 quoted in PSY, p.8.) The phrase is contained in the first word of the poem: 'with.' However, only in its repetition does sense appear. Repetition confirms that what is new can appear, but this necessary repetition simultaneously destabilizes, undermines and contaminates the new. On Derrida's reading of Ponge see also Marion Hobson, *Opening Lines*, p.184.

52 PSY, p.16

53 PSY, p.54

54 PSY, p.11

on that horizon.

The argument being put forward here is that Derrida's account of the arrival of the other orients finite thought since, if our negotiation of the determinate is propelled by a desire or response to the other, then this response can only be performed by opening the determinate and closed to the other who is 'to-come.' Furthermore, this 'ethics' which Derrida often describes in terms of 'hospitality' or 'welcoming' signals what we suggested is the collapse of description and affirmation, necessity and obligation.<sup>55</sup> The 'promise' that the other is always to come forms a mode of relation between same and other which in *Aporias* is described as "impossible simultaneity;" a figure of arrival which, in arriving or appearing is no longer totally other.<sup>56</sup>

In *Specters of Marx* and elsewhere, Derrida famously thinks the futural logic of the event of opening the same to the other in terms of what he calls "the messianic without messianism."<sup>57</sup> Derrida's use of the concept of messianicity functions to affirm a thinking of the event which is always-to-come, necessarily having no determinable or determinate content. In thinking messianicity in this way, Derrida is able to put forward a mode of affirming the absolute contingency of the future-to-come. The messianic appears in the opening of a horizon or border which it affirms can never be closed.<sup>58</sup> As one theorist describes it, "[a]t issue is the move from a promise of the future that insists on the 'what' of the future, to the atheological, 'dry' promise *that* there is a future, before all else."<sup>59</sup> Messianicity functions as an affirmation of the refusal or impossibility of closing determinate horizons and yet, by emerging only from out of determinate relations, it marks what Bennington describes as an "infiniteisation, which takes place each time finitely."<sup>60</sup> Between the determinate and indeterminate, between necessity and injunction, the messianic is described by Derrida as simply "an 'it is necessary' for the future."<sup>61</sup> Yet, if the irreducible messianic promise of the arrival of the other marks a desire for a non-violent relationality, violence is *in fact* irreducible and thus, the desire for

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55 See for instance Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*. Pp.147-9; "Hospitality." *Angelaki*. Vol.5, No.3, (2000) p.14; "A Word of Welcome." *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

56 AP, p.65

57 Jacques Derrida, *Spectre of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge, 1994. [Hereafter referred to as SoM], p.59

58 SoM, p.73

59 Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*. P.60

60 Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*. P.16

61 SoM, p.73

the other calls for calculation, strategy and convention.<sup>62</sup> An ethics of negotiating an economy of violence requires choosing among injunctions and thus, of unjustifiable exclusions and determinations of the other. It is to the question of the 'traversal' and oscillation between the unconditional and the finite, the other and the same to which we will now turn by briefly examining Derrida's accounts of responsibility and justice.

### *Ethics and the Necessity of Violence*

The conception of ethics as inescapably violent and thus sacrificial of the other is perhaps most explicit in Derrida's account of the Abrahamic sacrifice in *The Gift of Death*.<sup>63</sup> In the third chapter of this text mainly addressed to Jan Patocka's ethics and his relation to Heidegger, Derrida opens a discussion of Abraham's response to God's demand to kill his son Isaac. Abraham, in responding to the unconditional call or voice of the absolute other (which in this case is called God) who commands the sacrifice of his son, suspends the authority of the law ('though shall not kill'). As such, Abraham sacrifices the law for the other in the name of absolute responsibility and thus assumes the risks of the undecidable (the 'madness' or aporia of a decision between responding to the call of the other and the sacrifice of the particular other – Isaac) in the name of responsibility, that is, he assumes the risks of the undecidable and his commitment to a concrete decision.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Abraham figures the aporia of every decision and every ethics such that he is both "the most responsible and the most irresponsible of men, absolutely irresponsible because he is absolutely responsible."<sup>65</sup>

Within an economy of violence, every genuine decision involves the sacrifice of the ethical, that is, the sacrifice of the other to the same.<sup>66</sup> Every decision takes place, Derrida argues, by ignoring, excluding and in short, by sacrificing others:

"I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others. *Every other (one) is every (bit) other [tout autre est tout autre], everyone else is completely or wholly other.*"<sup>67</sup>

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62 See "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." p.83

63 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (David Wills, Trans.) Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1995. [Hereafter referred to as GoD]

64 Note the parallels in this account of the decision with that given in *WD*. In both cases the absolute contingency of the decision is only concealed and stabilized by positing an absolute guarantor which, in both cases, is figured by God.

65 GoD, 72

66 Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence*. P.159

67 GoD, p.68

Any decision, any sacrifice of one for (an) other is absolutely unjustifiable and violent insofar as we think the ethical, as Derrida does, in Levinas' sense of a non-violent relation to the singularity of the other. For there to be responsibility as such, it must be infinite, yet since we always find ourselves in finite and determinate relations with others, duty and responsibility are ultimately impossible.<sup>68</sup> Even feeding one's cat, Derrida suggests, represents the sacrifice of all other cats in the world whom one does not feed. Infinite responsibility to the singularity of the other therefore forms an impossible horizon which structures the demands of finite and thus unjustifiable decisions.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, guilt and violence are inherent to responsibility since no response can ever accede to its unconditional form. The unconditional cannot therefore be an ideal form against which acts are measured nor a telos towards which actions aim as Critchley for instance, seems to suggest. To think unconditionality in this way is in fact to either make it totally conditional (and thus, to invoke a closure) or to attempt to maintain its transcendent status as Levinas does. The unconditional cannot be made present but therefore, this implies that our acts are never satisfactory, that change and further action are both necessary and possible. Contestation and negotiation find no resolution.

Derrida's account of the universalisation of violence and the consequent impossibility of fulfilling our absolute responsibility to the other corresponds to the broad genealogical thematic developed throughout this thesis insofar as the promise that "there is a future" is constituted from within the finite and yet, affirms its own violent status.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, if no decision transcends violence this does not mean that ethical decisions cannot be differentiated or that, as instances of failed responsibility or duty, they remain indistinguishable from one another. There is always the possibility, as Hent de Vries argues, of the worst and the best.<sup>71</sup> The suspension of a normative ground which in turn makes ethical decisions possible means that no decision can be guaranteed nor stabilized. Yet crucially, it is the desire for absolute responsibility to the singularity of the other and thus, for 'lesser violence' which prevents the condition of undecidability from licensing anything. Thus, Laclau is partially correct to argue that from deconstruction no state of affairs necessarily follows since the impossibility of closure is a structural condition of all

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68 GoD, p.51, 61, 68

69 GoD, p.66

70 Jacques Derrida, "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." P.83

71 Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence*. P.196

experience.<sup>72</sup> Yet he reiterates the error of conceiving the relation between the unconditional and the determinate as irreducible gap in arguing that, given the contingency which deconstruction brings to bear on the ethical, no outcome can be considered better or worse than another.<sup>73</sup> Laclau's argument occludes that deconstruction, insofar as it results from (and is) an injunction and desire for the other, thus contests and undermines ethical decisions which claim a metaphysical ground or dogmatic truth since they veil their contingent and violent status. Duty and necessity become indistinguishable here; closure is structurally impossible and yet, the possibility of openness 'ought' not to be prevented. In denying the violence of our actions and concepts we deny what 'is,' the arrival of otherness. Thus, an 'ethical' orientation appears in deconstruction in terms of a logic of the sacrifice of the other taking place in the *between* of the finite and the infinite or unconditional.

In the first part of 'The Force of Law,' prior to a close reading of Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' essay, Derrida rather schematically outlines the aporia of justice which, he argues, adhere to the "experience of aporia" as such.<sup>74</sup> At stake in this account of justice and its relation to finite law is the ethical articulation of the negotiation of an economy of violence viewed as an oscillation between the inside and outside, of the (in)determinate nature of all relationality and, in Levinas' terms, between the same and the other. Justice, says Derrida, is "infinite, incalculable, rebellious to rule and foreign to symmetry, heterogeneous and heterotopic."<sup>75</sup> Law, as finite and conditional, is a "stabilizable and calculable apparatus, a system of regulated and coded prescriptions."<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, law is the sphere where the negotiation of determinate relations and thus, finite calculation is necessary. "The law," says Derrida, "applies equally to all," and yet, "[e]ach case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely."<sup>77</sup> As such, the justice of every single legal decision is by definition impossible since, while law forms determinate horizons in the form of legal decisions, unconditional justice exceeds every horizon.

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72 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*. p.78

73 As Laclau goes on to say, "a case for totalitarianism can be presented starting from deconstructionist premises." *Emancipations*, p.78

74 FoL, p.244

75 FoL, p.255

76 FoL, p.250

77 FoL, p.250

There is a necessity of a traversal and oscillation between two poles; from the injunction or command of the unconditional to calculation in the finite. In a by now familiar conceptual terrain, Derrida insists on the necessity and irreducibility of an experience of justice as impossible, since this experience of failure and inadequacy of any empirical law in relation to justice nevertheless allows or opens a space for a transformation of the empirical in the name of justice.<sup>78</sup> As Derrida puts it, "infinite justice *commands* calculation."<sup>79</sup> The 'ethical' takes place within the finite, but as its "infiniteisation."<sup>80</sup> Justice cannot transcend its inscription in the law since justice requires a decision.<sup>81</sup> Yet justice, by being inscribed in a determinate law, marks a sacrifice of the singularity of the other to "a system of regulated and coded inscriptions" and thus, to a secondary violence.<sup>82</sup> Justice, in order to be possible *commands* violence, strategy and tactics. Insofar as justice cannot be made present in any particular decision, it remains always 'to-come.'<sup>83</sup> Justice cannot be maintained as unconditional or transcendental since any empirical practice involves the construction of determinate "horizons" - both theoretical and practical.<sup>84</sup> Our responsibility to the other 'is' violence and is realized violently; not only must a relation to the other *qua* other be violent, but the desire or opening to the other demands decision and thus, violence.<sup>85</sup>

In summary, if deconstruction assumes no transcendental position and is thus irreducibly violent and reductive, it nonetheless inhabits and figures a different order of violence. It figures a violence that not only reduces or determines, but simultaneously opens to, rather than closing off, the other or outside. In 'Violence and Metaphysics' Derrida refers to this *other violence* of deconstruction as a "violence against violence" and in *Rogues* goes further, to label it a "weak force" and a "force without power."<sup>86</sup> But it is perhaps in "The Force of Law" that Derrida most clearly distinguishes two modes of violence through his reading of Walter Benjamin. On the one hand, a mystical or messianic force of non-representational, excessive, hyperbolic force which undermines

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78 FoL, p.255, see also WD, p.313, n.21

79 FoL, p.257

80 Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p.16

81 FoL, p.254

82 FoL, p.250

83 FoL, p.238

84 FoL, p.255.

85 FoL, p.257.

86 WD, p.117; RO, p.XIV



every identity. A violence without limits or determination which thus always marks the opening of horizons. On the other hand, the 'mythical' violence of foundations grounded in the veiling of its own contingency, in the denial that "its ultimate foundation is unfounded."<sup>87</sup> If Derrida's 'ethical' move is to affirm the messianic force which undermines identity, closure and determination which is mystical violence (and which mythical violence occludes), there is nevertheless a second affirmation; of the irreducibility of transcending mythical violence as such. This notion of an irreducibility of violence, of two orders of violence, simultaneously distinguished yet inseparable - of opening and closing to the outside and motivated by a 'desire' for the outside - forms a key point of dialogue and difference with Foucault. Before entering the agon of this dialogue it is to an account of Foucault's genealogical ethics to which we now turn.

### **Foucault, the Same and the Other**

In an otherwise perceptive account of the analogies between Derrida and Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak inadvertently signals a profound distinction between the two thinkers when she turns to the question of violence. As Spivak admits, "I cannot find anywhere in Foucault the thought of a founding violence."<sup>88</sup> Spivak is in fact correct to assume that absent from Foucault's oeuvre is an account of originary and secondary violence in Derrida's terms. But by phrasing the question in this way she reveals the bias of a Derridean theoretical framework in her reading of Foucault. Unlike Derrida, for Foucault there is no category distinction between an originary or messianic force of *différance* and the secondary violence of founding or legislating. Between the irreducibility of power relations and the disjunction of knowledge from power formed by the will to truth there does not lie an absolute horizon which is then shown by the theorist to be always-already transgressed or fissured. There is only an immanent plane of different organisations of relations between forces out of which transcendence is produced. In this sense, if transcendence, the disjunction of truth from power, forms a different form or order of violence it is insofar as it forms a particular (historical) mode in which relations between forces are organised; one wherein the irreducibility of violence is disavowed.

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87 FoL, p.242

88 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge." *The Spivak Reader*. p.150

To search for, or decry the lack of an interrogation of 'founding violence' is to ascribe a (quasi)transcendental questioning to Foucault's work, when at the core of the latter's strategy is the attempt to think in terms of immanence. However, if this is the case, how then is the irreducible economy of violence to be thought and negotiated? Can Foucault too provide a legitimate notion of 'better or worse'? In order to respond to this question we will begin by delineating the 'economy of violence' which can be found in Foucault's genealogical works and which places him in a dialogue with Derrida over the question of violence. We will then turn to Foucault's genealogy of ethics in order to demonstrate that, like Derrida, Foucault also has a notion of 'better' and 'worse' by which power relations can be negotiated, which is also motivated by a 'desire for the other' or the outside.

### *Foucault's Economy of Violence*

In affirming the inherent contingency of power relations Foucault implicitly provides an analytic whereby power can be distinguished from domination. This distinction is most clearly expressed in the late essay 'The Subject and Power.'<sup>89</sup> Here Foucault draws a nominal distinction between 'violence' and 'power': "a relationship of violence acts upon the body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it *closes of all possibilities.*"<sup>90</sup> Since power is positive it forms subjective possibilities and capacities while violence, a purely negative force, closes them off. For example, when Foucault says that "a system of constraints becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it" or "[w]here the determining conditions saturate the whole there is no relation of power," he differentiates power relations as strategic relations in a field of possibilities from domination as the ossification of a given order or more ominously, as the violent attempt to eliminate possibility altogether.<sup>91</sup> Foucault's analyses thus always move within these poles: of limits as limiting and limits as constituting possibility.<sup>92</sup> Limits both regulate thought and action and make it possible. The analyses of power/knowledge hover in these grey regions between possibility and limits. On the one hand, a power which forms possibilities while, on the

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89 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power." EWIII, pp.326-48.

90 EWIII, p.340. Emphasis added.

91 EWII, p.197; EWIII, p.325

92 This is the central thematic of Jon Simons' *Foucault and the Political*. See also Paul Patton, "Foucault's Subject of Power." *The Later Foucault*. (Jeremy Moss, Ed.), London: Sage, 1998.

other hand, a power that denotes a contraction of the limits of the possible. This 'economy' provides in some sense a diagnostic tool to evaluate particular power/knowledge regimes.

A number of theorists have suggested that a radical agonistic politics arises from Foucault's economy of power relations which would be grounded in what William Connolly has described as the constant pursuit to "find space for the other to live and speak," or as Leslie Paul Thiele puts it: "it is the enhancement of struggle – not its mere production or exacerbation – [that] must form the criterion of political judgment."<sup>93</sup> These theorists suggest the emergence of an ethico-political project which would be grounded in the maintenance of a political sphere which contests any claims to necessity in order to engender certain conditions of freedom in relation to the regimes in which our subjectivity is constituted by what Connolly calls an "agonopluralistic ethic."<sup>94</sup> Yet these articulations of a Foucaultian political ethics are limited insofar as they do not pursue a series of crucial questions which emerge when Foucault's genealogy is brought into dialogue with deconstructionist ethics. That is to say, from where would such a political ethics derive what Derrida calls 'motivational force'?<sup>95</sup>

A crucial distinction between Derrida's quasi-transcendental ethics of the other and Foucault's own genealogy of ethics opens up with this question. In stark contrast to Derrida, it is the absence of a constitutive responsibility or relation to the other which has been perhaps the most common critique of Foucault's ethics.<sup>96</sup> Judith Butler, for instance, argues that Foucault generally occludes the fact that his own questions are motivated by a "desire to recognize another or be recognized by one."<sup>97</sup> It is in the desire

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93 William Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity*. Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1987. P.94; Leslie Paul Thiele, "The Agony of Politics: The Nietzschean Roots of Foucault's Thought." *The American Political Science Review*. Vol.84, No.3, (September 1990). Pp.907-25, quoted on p.922. Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political*.; David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason*. London: Routledge, 1994.

94 William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault." *Political Theory*. Vol.21, No.3, (August 1993). Pp.365-89. Quoted on p.370

95 RO, p.XIV

96 See for instance, Barry Smart, "Foucault, Levinas, and the Subject of Responsibility." *The Later Foucault*. Pp.78-92; Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005; Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Polity, 1994; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. (Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg, Eds.) Urbana:U of Illinois, 1988. Pp.271-313; Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham UP, 2005.

97 Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself*. P.24

to confer or receive recognition from the other which Butler, in a decidedly Hegelian logic, argues that the conditions determining relationality come into question.<sup>98</sup> Thus, without an account of the desire for recognition the argument follows, Foucault is unable to address the constitutive ethical force of his own genealogies. More notoriously, in her paradigm-forming essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak criticizes Deleuze and Foucault for what she sees as their abandonment of the question of the domination of the 'subaltern' or third-world subject, characteristic of the Western intellectual. In their refusal of ascribing to the intellectual the role of representing the interests of the oppressed subject and concordant desire to 'let the other speak,' Deleuze and Foucault, she claims, valorize the oppressed subject. Both are caught in what is for Spivak the dangerous and violent invention of an oppressed subject who can know and speak its conditions.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, she argues that the anti-representational role which Deleuze and Foucault ascribe to the intellectual in an interview they held together fails to situate the dominant Western intellectual in relation to the third-world subject and thus, neglects to address its economic and social exploitation.<sup>100</sup> Since they do not question their relation to the radical heterogeneity of the 'subaltern' subject it follows for Spivak that Deleuze and Foucault maintain an essentialist notion of the pure presence of a subject capable of representing itself.<sup>101</sup> Spivak famously favorably contrasts Derrida's deconstruction of Eurocentrism as an opening of the Western, first-world 'same' to the third-world oppressed other to what she sees as Deleuze and Foucault's implicit occlusion and reduction of the heterogeneity of the exploited subject.

Butler's and Spivak's critiques of Foucault are legitimate to a limited extent, for there is no explicit interrogation in his work, the ethics above all, of the possibility of knowledge or recognition of the other. However, their legitimacy resides in conceiving the relation between same and other (quasi)transcendentally; a move which, as we have seen, Foucault's own notion of immanence places in question. 'Can the subaltern speak?' or 'can I receive recognition from the other?' are transcendental questions which

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98 *Ibid.* See also *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.

99 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" P.273-4

100 The interview to which Spivak refers is "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze." *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice*. (Donald F. Bouchard, Ed.) Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977. Pp.-205-17

101 *Ibid.* p.276

Foucault's ontology of power relations attempts to displace.<sup>102</sup> For Foucault, posing the question of otherness in these terms reduces the medium of differentiation away from discursive and positive differences to transcendental philosophical questions. How then would a Foucaultian 'ontology of immanence' which ostensibly occludes the question of the other find 'motivational force?' What type of account can an approach which refuses the 'question of the other' offer of the relation between same and other? Is there a fundamental absence of the question of otherness in Foucault's account of ethics? It is in now turning to Foucault's late works on the genealogy of ethics that I seek to respond to these questions.

### *Care of the Self and Knowledge of the Self*

Just as Foucault's genealogies of modern power-knowledge apparatuses work to displace and undermine the universal status of political concepts such as sovereignty to reveal the micro-powers through which social order is formed, the genealogy of ethics displaces morality as a quasi-juridical system of laws and prescriptions blinded by the juridical question of 'what ought I to do?' Foucault shows that anterior to this articulation of the moral question lie a multiplicity of different historical problematizations to which ethical practices respond. The traditional juridical articulation of ethics obstructs the fact that while given sets of moral rules or codes remain relatively stable across time and space, ethical practices are highly volatile, unstable and specific. A historical analysis of codes inevitably repeatedly returns to the same series of obligations and so, Foucault argues, "only shows the poverty and monotony of interdictions."<sup>103</sup> Differentiation emerges not upon the terrain of a history of moral obligations, but upon a history of moral conduct, or what Foucault calls 'subjectivation.' Foucault's focus on ethical practices thus displaces the transcendental question of 'can the other speak?' or 'can I be recognized by the other?' by the analysis of the techniques by which we *become* subjects of our own actions.<sup>104</sup> In turn, there emerges, as we will see below, an economy of violence or power in his work.

What is the specificity Foucault finds in Ancient ethics? How might they suggest a

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102 For a critique of Spivak and defense of Deleuze and Foucault see Warren Montag, "Can the Subaltern Speak and Other Transcendental Questions." *Cultural Logic*. Vol.1, No.2, (Spring 1998). <http://clogic.eserver.org> (Accessed 21 July, 2008).

103 UP, p.250

104 UP, p.4; EWIII, p.177

'lesser violence' which might function as a point of orientation in an economy of violence? The answer to these questions only emerges once we bring Ancient ethics into dialogue with the contemporary forms of power and domination described by Foucault. His genealogies of the power/knowledge apparatuses of disciplinary and bio-power delineate the way in which the increase of subjective capacities and creativity is developed through the intensification of power relations.<sup>105</sup> This form of control, originating with Christian ethics of self-renouncement and developing up to contemporary neo-liberalism, is characterized by a quasi-juridical mode of subjectivation whereby the demand for constant self-examination and self-transformation operates in relation to the demands of the law. This structure not only persists, but as Foucault's genealogies of discipline and bio-power show, is intensified once the religious context disappears. Therefore, the genealogy of ethics is vital to Foucault's project since it formulates a distinction between moralities grounded in a rigid systematicity and Greek and Roman ethical practices which function in terms of dynamic relations between the subject, his actions and pleasures and moral rules.<sup>106</sup> The genealogy of Ancient ethics not only form one example of the contingent problematizations around which thought and action revolve, but uncover an ethics which problematizes the self's capacity to direct or master itself.

This fundamental distinction between juridical and active ethics is ultimately defined by Foucault as two broad modes of conceiving the subject's relation to truth. In his 1982 lectures at the *Collège de France* and elsewhere this dichotomy is formulated in terms of the Athenian distinction between 'care of the self' and 'knowledge of the self.' Here the distinction lies between an ethics of transcendence which has dominated Western thought from Christianity to modernity and an earlier notion of ethics grounded in the necessity of a subjective self-transformation.<sup>107</sup> These two ethical trajectories make up what in the 1984 course Foucault will describe as two modes of 'ethical differentiation': a metaphysical experience of the world which seeks access to a 'true' transcendent other world ("*autre monde*") in contrast to a historico-critical experience of life which seeks to transform both the world and the self in name of truth ("*monde*

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105 EWI, p.317

106 UP, p.29-30

107 My characterization of this disjunction is indebted to Beatrice Han's "The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity;" Edward McGushin, "Foucault and the Problem of the Subject." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol.31, No.5-6 (2005) Pp.623-48 and Frederic Gros' "Course Context." *HH*. (Graham Burchell, Trans.) Pp.507-50.

*autre*").<sup>108</sup>

Care of the self (*epimeleia heautou* in Greek and *cara sui* in Latin) had, Foucault argues, held in Greece and Rome a precedence over the knowledge of oneself (*gnothi seauton*). A transformative care of the self had been a precondition for philosophical access to truth. Thus, for the Greeks and Romans there could be no truth without a "conversion" of oneself since, as Foucault puts it, "for the subject to have the right access to the truth, he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself."<sup>109</sup> For the Ancients, access to truth is inseparable from *askesis*. The role of knowledge is limited to assisting the subject to form his ethical being and is thus secondary to the care the subject takes in relation to itself. The Greeks and Romans problematized ethics as a relation to the excess of bodily pleasures and forces, *logos* was only instrumental to the ultimate goal of self-mastery or self-conversion. Ethical practices were not grounded upon a universal subject of knowledge capable of objective knowledge of, and obedience to a law and therefore, the subject of knowledge is itself never an object of knowledge.<sup>110</sup> Rather, the question of the subject always appears as a question of its relations to the world and to its ethical substance.<sup>111</sup> As such, the Ancients established a circular conception of truth: "to have access to the truth is to have access to being itself, access which is such that the being to which one has access will, at the same time and as an after-effect, be the agent of transformation of the one who has access to it."<sup>112</sup>

The priority of care over knowledge which begins with the Greeks and continues up to early Christianity undergoes a gradual separation from its relation to spirituality and philosophy. Christian ethical practices appropriate the notion of the care of the self yet in this later problematization, the subject emerges as a detached and universal subject of knowledge. Interiority becomes for Christianity an object of knowledge in terms of a question of nature and origin. Man begins to interpret the forces giving birth to his

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108 Michel Foucault, *Le Courage de la Vérité : Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres, Cours au Collège de France*, 1984. Paris: Gallimard, 2009. [Hereafter referred to as 'CV'] P.35, 287-93.

109 HH, p.15

110 HH, p.317

111 HH, p.318, Beatrice Han, "The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity."

112 HH, p.191

thoughts; he begins differentiating experiences as originating either from God or Satan.<sup>113</sup> This practice of mining the interiority of the subject by an examination of consciousness through a technology of confession eventually develops into a care of the self by the other in terms of disciplinary and bio-power.<sup>114</sup> In effect, the problematization of the relation to oneself is transformed into a problematization of the formation and disciplining of the other.

Foucault returns to Descartes' *Meditations* for the first time since the debate with Derrida to define the text as the decisive moment of this historical transformation between care and knowledge. As a 'meditation' the text demands an *askesis* or transformation so that the subject is capable to access truth and yet is simultaneously defined by a non-spiritual form of subjectivity. The subject with the 'right' to truth is identified through the exclusion of the care of the self since only a correct method is required to attain knowledge or truth.<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, Descartes forms a definitive juncture between ancient and modern since he produces a relation between the subject and truth without the necessity of a prior conversion. After Descartes truth is no longer thought in terms of power, contest, deliverance or conversion but in terms of adequation between idea and object.<sup>116</sup> Kant's status for Foucault is in this sense that of a supplement to or elaboration of the Cartesian determination of the subject. With Kant the question of the subject shifts from the Cartesian guarantee of truth in God to an analysis of man's faculties of representation.<sup>117</sup> The place of Descartes and Kant is thus crucial to Foucault's analysis since they mark a decisive turning point in the de-spiritualisation of the subject's relation to truth. A relation between ethics and knowledge emerges with them which finally effaces the Ancient experience defined by immanence and so not sustained by transcendental principles but through what Paul Rabinow calls a "continual self-bricolage" whereby subjectivity is not tied to a norm or law.<sup>118</sup> Ethics for the Ancients

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113 See FS, p.109

114 EWI, p.317; See also Beatrice Han in "The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity."; Edward McGushin in "Foucault and the Problem of the Subject" and Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

115 HH, p.190; Edward McGushin, "Foucault and the Problem of the Subject." P.638

116 Beatrice Han, "The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity."

117 HH, p.36. In this sense there is a reversal from the relative primacy of Kant in *The Order of Things* in Foucault's last works. If we proceed in terms of a question of the relation to oneself rather than the representative relation between subject and object, then it is Descartes and not Kant who assumes the status of founder of the modern *episteme*.

118 Paul Rabinow, "Introduction." EWI. P.XXXIX



was an order of life immanent to, and not external to life.<sup>119</sup>

The distinction Foucault draws between ethics based in care and knowledge of the self returns us to the question of the incommensurable difference between Derrida and Foucault which formed the terms of their engagement in the 'cogito debate.' As we saw above, ethics for Derrida revolves around the contamination and irreducibility of unconditional or transcendental demands and their impossibility or failure in their empirical or finite inscription. The 'medium' of differentiation, the relation between the same and the other occurs for Derrida at the level of the irreducibility of the transcendental demand of and for the other. The implicit contrast with Foucault's ethics almost precisely parallels Foucault's explicit critique of Derrida in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire.' That is, for Foucault, thinking the ethical involves looking to the multiplicity of discourses and practices which qualify particular forms of ethical subject in particular historical times and places. From the Foucaultian perspective, Derrida reduces ethics to the quasi-judicial question of the possibility of a universal or unconditional law and thus, conceals the 'true' medium of differentiation: the historical practices by which the subject identifies with a particular morality. Differentiation occurs as the manifestation of differing modes of power's relation to truth. On the other hand, from the deconstructive perspective, Foucault appears to occlude the very founding question of ethics: of responsibility and recognition of the other.

Before turning more closely to the question of the incommensurability of Derrida's and Foucault's ethics, one crucial question regarding Foucault's genealogy of ancient ethics remains; can his genealogy of ethics suggest a way in which power relations can be negotiated? How, in comparison to Derrida's ethics can it offer an orientation or principle of evaluation from *within* the irreducibility of violence? Given Foucault's refusal of transcendental questions, unlike Derrida, this orientation will not arise against the relief of an impossible horizon of non-violence. Rather, the 'better' and the 'worse' are contrasted by relating regimes to the genealogical question of their particular capacity to affirm the indissociability between knowledge and power. The capacity or incapacity to affirm the positivity of knowledge and power does not limit our ethical 'compass' to existential questions or affirmations. Rather, it brings into perspective material

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119 Frederic Gros, "Course Context." HH, p.532

dominations and thus, lies at the core of the distinction we set at the outset: between power and domination. This distinction is brought into stark relief in the history of the shift from the centrality of care to knowledge traced by Foucault.

Foucault argues that while the ancient notion of care of the self is grounded in a relation to truth in terms of *askesis* or ethos, the philosophical prioritisation of knowledge of the self reverses the relation: in modernity truth demands that the subject become other. This reversal of the primacy between care and truth embodied in the cogito would have a massive effect on the nature of modern relationality. Once subjectivation is sustained by transcendental principles rather than local and effective truths, subjectivity becomes tied to a prior norm, rule or law. Consequently, the function of care shifts from a relation which one forms with oneself to a relation to a given institution or individual. In this sense, in modernity power "begins to *take care* of its subjects."<sup>120</sup> Government is legitimated by its capacity to care for others.<sup>121</sup> Care becomes associated with normalization; morality is conflated with philosophical anthropology so that one must relate experience and choices to a given problematic object (sexuality, madness, criminality, entrepreneur) to which an expert has better access than the self so that thought and action are governed by their relation to what is considered 'normal.'<sup>122</sup> Any dissonance from the norm is thought to be the result of ignorance, moral weakness, biological defect or perversion and calls for further 'care.' Norms function as principles for differentiating, evaluating and recognizing individuals and thus, increased subjective capacities are no longer tied to a practice of freedom, the formation of a relation to the outside, but rather, an intensification of power relations.<sup>123</sup> In modern power apparatuses, the relation between inside and outside is mediated by the other and by a subjugation to universalising demands.

This contrast between the primacy of care and knowledge illuminates the link between Foucault's earlier and later genealogies. The genealogies of disciplinary and bio-power reveal the relation to oneself in modernity to be wholly integrated into moral and political systems. The poles of a 'better or worse' violence emerge on the basis of a care of

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120 Edward McGushin, "Foucault and the Problem of the Subject." P.641

121 Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*. P.56

122 Laura Hedgehold, *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault*. University Park: Pennsylvania UP, 2007. p.260

123 *Ibid.*

the self or care by the other which in turn lie in two divergent conceptions of truth as either effective or as transcendent. It is therefore, in terms of something like a 'desire' for the outside which might describe Foucault's privileging of the ancients since for them, this determination of the relation between inside and outside is absent.

### *Ethics as Counter-Discourse*

Foucault's most explicit and extensive production of a genealogy of ethics which could function as a counter-discourse to contemporary forms of normalizing power is to be found in his last two books; *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. Underlying the structure of both of these books is the construct of a four-part grid through which Greek, Hellenistic and Roman ethical practices are analyzed. In taking up this grid we can further distinguish or mark the singularity of ancient ethics in contrast to modern power and in particular, on the way the Ancients problematized what we call 'sexuality' in the formation of an ethical subject.<sup>124</sup> As such, by constructing an explicit contrast of the relation to the self in Ancient Greece and Rome with the early Christian and modern confessional experiences of the self, as we will see below, a clear evaluative analytic of negotiating power relations emerges, that is, of a formulation of better or worse violence.<sup>125</sup> Two broad modes of subjective experience are defined here through the ethical experience of 'sexuality' and it is to a closer analysis of their differences to which we now turn.

First, the substance of ethics or the material of moral conduct in the confessional apparatus described in *The History of Sexuality* is formed when subjective interiority is posited as an object of knowledge which is used to explain or regulate actions. Similarly, for the early Christians, the body is imbued with a sense of corruption and sin.<sup>126</sup> Yet

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124 The three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* show that 'sexuality' is not a transcendental or universal concept, but rather, a historical experience. Sexuality does not appear as a purely juridical or prohibitive element or object since prohibition, if it is effective, is tied to particular modes of submission. As such, the apparently universal concept of sexuality is eventalised as a series of configurations of the forces of the outside. On this point see Pierre Macherey, "Foucault: Ethics and Subjectivity." P.99

125 This distinction is suggested by Claire Colebrook, "Ethics, Positivity and Gender: Foucault, Aristotle and the Care of the Self," *Philosophy Today*. No.42, 1998. Pp.40-52; David Owen *Maturity and Modernity*, p.159 and Sebastien Harter, "The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault's Lecture Series 'L'Hermeneutique du Sujet.'" *Foucault Studies*. No.2, May 2005. Pp.75-96.

126 Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (Robert Hurley, Trans.) New York: Vintage. [Hereafter referred to as 'CS'], p.239

such a conception is nonexistent in Ancient thought.<sup>127</sup> Absent in Greek and Roman thought was any objectification of a prior interiority to be overcome or discovered. Both Greek and Roman ethics were grounded in an ontology of strength whose concern was the avoidance of excess.<sup>128</sup> Ethics revolved around questions of the use or excessive force of, pleasures and their attendant dangers and necessary modifications.

Secondly, for the early Christians the ethical 'mode of subjection' – the way a relation to obligation or moral rules through which one recognizes oneself as a moral subject is established – consisted quite simply in a submission to universal law.<sup>129</sup> Analogously, in modern bio-power one's relation to a norm determines one's place in a table or hierarchy via medical, legal and psychological discourses and technologies. By contrast, for the Ancients subjection was governed by need (itself governed by moderation), time (governed by circumstance, often in relation to a calendar or age) and status (governed by one's position in relation to others). There was no "table of forbidden" acts and instead, practices were guided by a question of the aesthetics of existence or what Foucault sometimes calls an 'art of living.'<sup>130</sup>

Third, in early Christianity the form of 'ethical elaboration' – the technology or ascetics through which the subject is transformed – is defined by what Foucault calls "decipherment of the soul and a purificatory hermeneutics of desires."<sup>131</sup> The modern confessional apparatus inherits Christian hermeneutics of interiority whereby ascetics consists primarily of confession and either penance (for Christians) or therapy (for moderns). Both Christian and modern secular ethics are grounded in the demand that the subject speak the truth of him or herself to the other and to have this truth re-interpreted and situated in relation to a law or norm. As such, ethical practices are grounded in self-renunciation and decipherment. For the Greeks the use of knowledge was guided by a reasoned measuring and control of the self in relation to one's conduct in order to find a centre of moderation or balance in relation to one's pleasures.<sup>132</sup> This conduct is characterized by Foucault as a "domination" over the self.<sup>133</sup> The Hellenists

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127 UP, p.11

128 UP, p.4

129 UP, p.27, CS, p.239

130 Timothy O'Leary. *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*. London: Continuum, 2006. P.42, UP, p.106

131 CS, p.239

132 UP, p.86

133 UP, p.68, 69

and Romans differed from the Ancient Greeks insofar as they were increasingly concerned with the dangers involved with the excess of pleasures and thus, placed a greater emphasis on asceticism; that is, on practices of abstinence and self-scrutiny and accordingly, an increased importance on self-knowledge and the practices of self-examination.<sup>134</sup> Concomitantly, they held a greater angst and attention to the relation between sexual act and body, an increased valorisation of the marriage bond as a universal form of mutuality, and an increased sense that the love of boys was problematic.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, the telos of ethical practice in early Christianity is characterized by the desire for self-renunciation.<sup>136</sup> The telos of the later confessional apparatus is the production of a 'normal' and productive citizen which does not disturb order and who is produced through an emancipation of one's 'true' self. Conversely, despite their differences, there is a central continuity running through Ancient Greece and Rome insofar as they shared an agonistic conception of the relation to the self grounded in a notion of an art of living that did not necessarily draw a distinction between aesthetic and ethical criteria. The Greeks sought a 'mastery of the self;' a freedom in relation to the pleasures which would be defined by a capacity for moderation.<sup>137</sup> Mastery of the self was a condition for the mastery of others such that the capacity to care for oneself was a precondition of political life.<sup>138</sup> For the Hellenists and Romans the end of ethics was a "conversion of the self."<sup>139</sup> They sought to produce a form of self-control which was no longer the Greek model of a triumph over pleasures but a juridical mode of self-control whereby the self would become an object of pleasure.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, they increasingly regarded the body and soul with suspicion and thus, accorded an increased polarisation between the love of boys and marriage.

Given the contrast between Ancient, Christian and modern ethics constructed here, it should be apparent that the significance of Ancient ethics for Foucault does not lie in what number of his critics perceive to be a celebration of highly individualistic

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134 Timothy O'Leary. *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*. P.73

135 CS, p.238

136 UP, p.27, CS, p.239

137 UP, p.78, 37

138 EWI, p.267

139 CS, p.64

140 CS, p.65-6

modes of practicing freedom.<sup>141</sup> Liberal critics of Foucault often argue that if power is omnipresent, then resistance to power cannot be preserved in Foucault's account.<sup>142</sup> Foucault's error in the eyes of his critics lies in failing to provide a foundation or space for resistance or a ground for the critique of power. Accordingly, the turn to ethics in Foucault's late work is viewed as an implicit admission of the absence of a concept of agency in the genealogy of power/knowledge while the ethics is also dismissed as a hyper-aestheticizing displacement of normativity.<sup>143</sup> Foucault's ethics are said to be caught in a relativism which can offer no perspective from which any order can be judged or resisted since they are grounded in the attempt to recover a heroic and rare vanguardist mode of self-transformation.<sup>144</sup> These interpretations all relate the genealogy of ethics to what is assumed to be a normative status or ground for Greek and Roman ethics in relation to Foucault's oeuvre. This of course, is the very move that Foucault, in attempting to displace transcendental grounds by proceeding immanently, seeks to avoid. In now turning in further detail to the 'principle of evaluation' which results from such a refusal of normativity I seek to show the way in which these critics are misguided.

### *Ethics and Immanence*

Rather than assigning a transcendental or normative status to ancient ethics, Foucault's genealogy of ethics functions as a counter-discourse which reveals the possibility of a different limit between inside and outside, a relation to excess wherein practices are not submitted to universalising rules - a "morality with no claim to universality" as Paul Veyne has put it.<sup>145</sup> The ancients did not possess a 'hermeneutics of desire' which asks what actions mean, but rather an immanent ethical discourse which focuses upon what it does and what its effects are. Truth had not been separated from power, but rather, was seen to be 'effective.' The Greeks and Romans did not posit a

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141 See for instance Richard Wolin in "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," and Michael Walzer "The Politics of Michel Foucault."

142 Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth." *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. P.90

143 Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault." P.53. See also Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth."

144 Broadly, the argument that there is a normative deficit in Foucault's work is also the one made by Jurgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and Nancy Fraser "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions." A reading of Foucault's ethics as the recovery of a heroic enlightenment subject is given by Simon Critchley in *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso, 1997; Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*.

145 Paul Veyne, "The Final Foucault and his Ethics." *Critical Inquiry*. (trans. C. Porter & A.I. Davidson). Autumn 1993. p.1-9. P.2

subjective interiority which could then be codified and used to explain and regulate actions. Instead, actions were given value and related to other practices. Without first positing a general, universal and transcendent good, there were only local, positive and specific valuations. 'Norms' in this sense were immanent to practices since the stylistic criteria upon which they were based excluded the necessity of universal moral law grounded in the supposed ethical substance of the subject.

Conceiving ethics at the level of practices as the Ancients did, affirmed for Foucault a potential which he had attempted to think throughout his oeuvre: a folding of the outside not subjected to transcendence, representation or universal structures and thus, not governed by an authority.<sup>146</sup> The Ancients affirmed for Foucault a pole of lesser violence in power relations since they marked the possibility of a relation to the outside which does not rely on the modern notion of a subject which "separates itself from what it is not and takes responsibility for itself" which Foucault had begun to attempt to displace in *The Order of Things*.<sup>147</sup> The Greek and Roman fold is not subjected to transcendence since it is not governed by a conception of the outside which thought re-presents and organizes.

#### *Foucault's Ethics, The Same and the Other*

Therefore, much as Derrida does, Foucault's genealogy of ethics reveal a conception of 'lesser violence' which functions to orient thought within an economy of power relations while disabusing it of the possibility of a normative ground. While ethics, as Foucault conceives it, does not provide the genealogist with a position beyond the perspectival logic that may seem to confine thought to relativism, it does provide a means by which power relations can be negotiated. Moreover, like Derrida, the force of this

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146 It should be noted that Foucault has suggested other places where such a thought of the outside was constituted. In *Security, Territory, Population* he suggests that the rise of monastic asceticism in the middle ages led to a number of practices wherein individuals were able to transform themselves without this transformation being governed by the authority of others. In the monastic community obedience to doctors, philosophers and abbots was given in the interest of arriving at a particular objective of health or virtue and not a good in itself. Moreover, medieval mysticism, posited a direct relation to God and formed a practice of self-transformation via the immediacy of this relation which allowed mystics to escape from religious practices of examination and confession and thus, to short-circuit church hierarchy. Both cases suggest the possibility of a multiplicity of non-normalizing technologies of the self in history. See STP, pp.174-177, 207-8. Similarly, in CV Foucault suggests that some trajectories in both modern art and revolutionary movements also represent such locuses.

147 Quoted from Nathan Widder, *Reflections of Time and Politics*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008. P.186

orientation arises from a 'desire for the outside' in Foucault's work insofar as the recovery of Ancient ethical practices signals the possibility of a relation to the outside or otherness which would not be subjected either to submission to a logic of representation nor the truth of an authority but remain immanent to singular and particular values and goals. Ethics would be grounded not in the desire to have access to truth but rather, would function to transform the self and the world.<sup>148</sup> In this sense, Ancient ethics affirm the positivity of power and its indissociable relation to truth. Furthermore, this Ancient problematization reveals the possibility of a refusal of the will to truth's domination and determination of the formation of the limit between inside and outside and the logic of identity which attends it and which is constituted and supported through carceral and bio-political institutions.

A further striking parallel with Derrida arises here. For Foucault's contrasting of the will to truth inherent to modern disciplinary and bio-power with the Ancients' affirmation of the positivity of power blurs the traditional distinction between 'is' and 'ought'. No system of ethics, not even that of the Greeks which Foucault implicitly favors, is given a transcendent status; their rules do not hold a juridical force over Foucault's oeuvre. On the other hand, ancient ethics are positively affirmed by Foucault since they are not governed by the metaphysical denial of the indissociability of power and truth. The distinction between description and affirmation collapses here in the articulation of a genealogical ethics of *amor fati*. The histories which Foucault describes are affirmed as opening thought to the play of forces yet it is the Greeks and Romans in particular which present the possibility of a social order revolving around this affirmation of positivity. Thus an immanent series emerges here: the strategy of immanence which circumvents metaphysical questions by attempting to think in terms of the problems through which they arise in turn affirms a particular problematization of ethics itself defined by immanence insofar as it does not seek to base its truths in some transcendent good.

Yet, a further question of the status or place of the other persists in Foucault's particular construction of a genealogical ethics which is both a refusal of transcendence and forms a particular orientation to negotiate the immanent field of power relations. Moreover, the question appears against the background of Derrida's ethics. For while

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148 CV, p.292



Derrida refuses the possibility of a transcendent ground or position of non-violence, he nevertheless suggests that an 'economy of lesser violence' is only possible against the background of an (im)possible horizon or messianic promise of non-violence. As Derrida puts it,

"a certain force and violence is irreducible, but none the less this violence can only be practiced and can only appear as such on the basis of a non-violence, a vulnerability, an exposition. I do not believe in non-violence as a descriptive and determinable experience, but rather as an irreducible promise and of the relation to the other as essentially non-instrumental."<sup>149</sup>

An ethics of lesser violence is thus possible Derrida argues, on the basis of an irreducible promise and desire for, a relation to the other *qua* other, a relation without determination. In contrast, Foucault's articulation of ethics as a relation or work upon the self seems to disqualify, as Butler and Spivak suggest, any constitutive questions of moral responsibility for the other. Around the question of responsibility or recognition of the other arises the common critique leveled against Foucault: that he reverses the centre of ethics.

Accordingly, Foucault appears to move in direct opposition to the heteronomy at the centre of Derrida's ethics. Moreover, Foucault notoriously seems to support this view in a late interview; "care for others" he says, "should not be put before care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior."<sup>150</sup> On the one hand, Foucault's rationale in making such an affirmation is quite clear. The ethics of a practice of freedom which forms a particular relation to the outside denotes what he sometimes calls a 'mastery' or 'discipline' of the self which is, as we saw, in contrast to a domination of the self by the other. Nevertheless, if the analytic of an ethics grounded in the relation one has to oneself is expanded to an analytic of relations to others, it will necessarily inhere to the agonistic logic of power relations. To expand or share the space of freedom with others is by definition to enter into a relation constituted by power and thus a strategic relation always constituted in advance. In this sense a methodological continuity runs between the genealogies of power/knowledge and of ethics.

For instance, like disciplinary practices, technologies of the self too are techniques

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149 Jacques Derrida, "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." p.83

150 EWI, p.287

which the subject operates upon itself. Dietary and sexual practices, physical exercises, letter writing and oral disclosures of the self all consisted in Antiquity as forms of *tekhne* or work which individuals would carry out upon themselves with the aim of becoming a particular type of subject. Ethics, the process of working upon the self is, one could claim, analogous to the process of domination described in *Discipline and Punish* – a domination exerted upon the self analogous to the process of *dressage* Foucault uses to describe the disciplining of the docile body in his history of the carceral apparatus.<sup>151</sup> In this sense, to expand ethical practice beyond the subject's relation to himself is to constitute a relationship that is not ethical, but rather one characterized by domination; by a control and conditioning of the other. Disciplinary techniques, when performed by the self upon the self according to a loosely defined moral code, constitute a sphere of agency. When such techniques are exercised by a subject over others, they constitute a relation of power; the contraction of possibility. It is assumingly for this reason that Foucault argues that the relation of government or care of the self “defines the relation of power over the self independently of any statutory correlation and any exercise of power over others.”

As we suggested above, the absence of a constitutive status for the desire for responsibility or recognition has left many of Foucault's readers arguing that what his work lacks is an account of ethical alterity which would give it motivational force. From the Derridean perspective there is a fundamental metaphysical error in Foucault's genealogy of ethics since it appears to be grounded in the autonomy of the subject. As such, Foucault's 'subject' appears as an attempt to suture or draw a closure around an aestheticized subjective identity in order to oppose it to what Foucault sees as a domination by the other which characterizes modern relationality. In questioning the status of the other in Foucault's oeuvre, Spivak, Butler et. al., regardless of their relation to a deconstructionist paradigm, nevertheless put to Foucault a typically deconstructionist question. For from the deconstructive perspective (though not exclusively) there is an absence of questioning and confrontation of the conditions for a relation to the other *as other* in Foucault's genealogy. The *de jure* opening of the inside or the same to an

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151 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). London: Allen Lane, 1977. [Hereafter referred to as 'DP'], p.138. A number of thinkers have suggested these parallels between the techniques of subjectivation in *DP* and ancient ethics. See for instance Sebastien Harrer, “The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault's Lecture Series *L'Hermeneutique Du Sujet*.” David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*.

unmasterable excess or otherness is neither questioned nor accounted for and thus implies, as Spivak argues, that a determination and closure of and to the other is inherent to Foucault's work. In other words, that ironically, what Foucault's genealogy of ethics lacks is an ethics; a conception of recognition and responsibility to otherness.

Still, these critiques of Foucault are legitimate only insofar as we privilege a quasi-transcendental account of originary violence (as for instance, Spivak does) and accordingly, veil the immanent account that arises in Foucault's genealogy. One particular strategy of thinking the 'medium of differentiation' necessarily excludes the other. Therefore, what these critiques obscure is that at stake here are two competing 'grand narratives' and the ethics of *amor fati* which arise from them. The appearance of otherness in Foucault's work occurs in a way which is radically incommensurable to Derrida's. For from Foucault's strategy of immanence, otherness is not conceived as an "oppositional" difference which lies outside the horizons of the same.<sup>152</sup> From the Foucaultian perspective, Derrida's project always begins from the twin and opposed poles of same and other. That is, for deconstruction the arrival of the other 'takes place' between two conflicting elements; the empirical and transcendental, general and singular, same and other, law and justice which deconstruction can then go on to show cannot be indefinitely united nor separated. Ethics always begins for Derrida in the recognition that no universal or unconditional ethical concepts can be located beyond their particular and determinate articulations. In contrast, Foucault attempts to leave absolutely no space for a transcendental horizon defining the border between the same and the other.<sup>153</sup> In Foucault's account, the conditions of any relation are, as we have seen, in constant transformation and immanent to their elements. Accordingly, Foucault does not locate otherness as transcendent to or in excess of the empirical since for him singularity and otherness always already defines the present.<sup>154</sup> In his book on Foucault, Deleuze aptly refers to Nietzsche's dictum of "the iron hand of necessity throwing the dice of chance" to describe the way in which power relations ceaselessly produce difference from out of positive, but never stable sets of varying relations between discourses, rules, practices, institutions, spaces and bodies.<sup>155</sup> Otherness appears in the constant play of differences

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152 Nathan Widder, *Reflections on Time and Politics*. P.185

153 David Webb. "On Friendship: Derrida, Foucault, and the Practice of Becoming." p.134

154 *Ibid.* p.128

155 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*. P.86

between chance [the outside] and necessity [the determinate inside].<sup>156</sup>

Therefore, Foucault's account of otherness is distinguished by the fact that he does not proceed by attempting to determine the formal structure of a given concept, but rather, to determine its place in a particular field of relations and the transformations it undergoes. He therefore posits no (im)possible movement of transcendence but rather, an irreducible instability in the play of difference is accounted for by the system of forces itself. The event or arrival of otherness is not thought in terms of (quasi)transcendence but is instead theorized as immanent to the system in which it appears. No radical interruption is theorized nor is one necessary since Foucault's genealogy shows the ways in which any system or field is in constant mutation and reconfiguration. Otherness appears from within a system; the same is always already other. As Pierre Macherey puts it,

“[i]t is as though the subject were the same of the other – the being, on the contrary, dialectically, the other of the same – that is, this ‘identity’ without substance, which has no other thickness, no other materiality, than that of a difference or a limit.”<sup>157</sup>

Otherness appears at the inside of the outside (at the limit of the inside – much like for Derrida). Yet for Foucault, Macherey continues, this limit is not,

“between two independent orders, for example, between a world of exteriority, where there is the other, and a world of interiority where there is only the same. But it is a question of that limit which, in every order, in every normed system, reveals a margin (a certain possibility of refolding) in it and not outside it.”<sup>158</sup>

Foucault thinks a different relation to the other than the one commonly conceived in contemporary theory; his is an *alterity without any mediation or opposition*.

## The Same and Other Between Derrida and Foucault

We are now at a point at which we might return to our fundamental question which first emerged in our discussion of the 'cogito debate': how can we think the difference between Derrida and Foucault? In the discussion of Derrida's 'Cogito and the History of Madness' and Foucault's 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire' in chapter 2, I

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156 Deleuze refers to the outside as a field of 'chance' in *Foucault*. p.117

157 Pierre Macherey, "Foucault: Ethics and Subjectivity." p.98

158 *Ibid.* p.100-1

suggested that these two thinkers posit two incommensurable 'media of differentiation' from which they attempt to think difference and the violence of relationality. This fundamental difference has re-emerged in various ways throughout our analysis. From the disruption of the empirico-transcendental double to the thought of the outside, the dislocation of the question of ground, and finally to the ethical question of the relation between same and other, what has continuously reappeared throughout this thesis is that the respective ways in which each of these two thinkers conceive this medium (or more aptly; media) in terms of a 'formal structure of transcendence' or immanence, is necessarily exclusive of the other. As such, in this section I want to argue that this apparently inescapable exclusion points to a realm of relationality and violence which emerges between them and yet which cannot be reduced to either thinker's account of relational violence. By approaching the question of the incommensurability of Derrida and Foucault's accounts what appears is an ethico-political violence which exceeds both of their accounts and thus, points to the very violence of attempting to think an ethics of an 'economy of violence.' An excess emerges between Derrida and Foucault that by definition eludes their own accounts. This excessive and irreducible violence marks the limit and the conditions of forming a mode of questioning and an ethics which affirms its own situatedness, particularity or finitude and thus proceeds strategically.

If we employ the theoretical strategies of either Derrida or Foucault to account for the difference between them, then given their incommensurable accounts, the other always appears to lack an account of the 'true' medium of differentiation. Since their ethics are both grounded in an affirmation of what 'is,' yet both such onto-political accounts proceed in terms of two distinct trajectories, the other's work appears as a violent reduction and determination of otherness or excess. In other words, if we select either the strategy of the 'aporia' or of the 'problem' as a starting point, the other necessarily appears to have failed to affirm the 'true' medium of differentiation. Each thinker implicitly or explicitly argues that they have accounted for the play of differences which is anterior to and constituted the medium through which the other's work proceeds and which he therefore also reduces. Thus, for Derrida, Foucault's play of force relations is constituted via the quasi-transcendental aporetic conditions of all thought and conversely, the concepts which Derrida deconstructs are for Foucault always already the effects of particular discursive systems. The charge of ethical failure, explicit in the cogito debate, is

generated by the strategic decision to negotiate finitude in one of two ways and thus, the decision for a particular narrative is the anterior condition to the charge of ethical failure. Both polemical strategies proceed by circumscribing the other within a general ontopolitical narrative which is anterior to the failure itself.

Accordingly, we cannot overcome the incommensurability of Derrida and Foucault in terms of a *rapprochement* by which we could identify common points that a dialogue between them might be construed. Reading the similarities and differences between Derrida and Foucault cannot be restricted to a question of slowly spiraling into a hermeneutic circle, constantly ironing out conceptual differences or locating points of convergence. To remain solely with this possibility is revoked at the outset since *each thinker posits an incommensurable 'grandeur narrative'* which acts as a methodological strategy which circumscribes the 'meaning' of the other's text. It was these two strategies which we described in chapter 3 under the names of aporia and problem. It cannot be a question of a circular hermeneutic exercise here, though if one were to insist on keeping with this Heideggerean formulation one could only do so by conceiving two separate circles between which we may only leap and wherein from the perspective of each, the other appears to be in error. It is in this sense that the Nietzschean formulation of perspectivism might be more apt in describing the polemic. For it is a case of two accounts of what 'is' and which recoil back upon their own authority which are at stake here. It is not therefore a question of dialogue between Derrida and Foucault, but a question of *dispute*. Theory enters an *agon* from which it cannot exit and that neither thinker can circumscribe since the terrain of the polemic emerges only in their competing articulations. There is only a silence between these two strategies. Moreover, it is a silence or gap which amounts to a violence which cannot be accounted for by either Derrida or Foucault's 'economy of violence' without reductively circumscribing the one or the other. Thus, it reflects the very nature of originary or inescapable violence: without positing a transcendent position for the theorist, their radical empiricism(s) can only think relational violence from a particular and situated position; a particularity or situatedness which their own work can never totally account for, but is in a sense blind to. In extending the violence of relationality to Derrida and Foucault's accounts of the relation between inside and outside we ascribe a more radical particularity to their very accounts of particularity.

Consequently, if we reduce the account of the relation between Derrida and Foucault to a deconstructionist strategy Foucault, as we have seen, appears to have failed to question the (im)possible conditions which make his analysis possible. Furthermore, we might argue as Spivak and Butler do that the absence of a constitutive question of otherness in Foucault's work discloses the absence of a motivational force to his genealogy and thus, points to the anteriority of the question of alterity prior to the positing of a problematization. In other words, there is an occlusion of the ethical question in Foucault's work. More generously, we might argue that the relation between Derrida and Foucault denotes a paradigmatic example of the impossibility of appropriating the other to the same. That Foucault's *other strategy* of thinking the 'between' must appear to have failed from the perspective of Derrida since no account of the other can escape a passage via the same. In other words, that Derrida could not possibly give an account of Foucault's work without reducing it to his own in some way. While potentially attractive, this meta-explanation is still caught in reducing the relation between Derrida and Foucault to a decidedly Derridean description. Before such an account has already begun, it is constituted in the 'decision' that deconstruction can circumscribe both genealogy and itself and as such, simply consists in a deconstructive description of both Derrida and Foucault's works.

Analogously, this reduction can be reversed by depicting the relation between Derrida and Foucault in Foucaultian terms. From this position as we saw in chapter 2, Derrida appears to elide the medium where difference occurs and thus, he disavows his own position within a particular power/knowledge apparatus.<sup>159</sup> In privileging transcendental philosophical questions (how can I be responsible for the other? how can I forgive? etc.) Derrida effaces the very particular fields of ethical technologies which construct subjects able to ask and understand these questions. In seeing all discourses through the horizon of philosophical questions, Derrida is thus blind to the singularity or particularity of his own discourse. On the other hand, a more generous Foucaultian understanding of deconstruction might argue, as Edward McGushin does, that deconstruction in itself qualifies as a mode of 'care of the self.' Deconstruction would constitute a form of ethical *askesis* insofar as it would consist in the subject's self-transformation in order to attain truth rather than a prior truth which determines the

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159 EWII, p.412

subject; deconstruction would consist in the establishment of a relation to oneself. As McGushin puts it, "[t]he subject who goes through the experience of a deconstruction attains a new self-determination in terms of responsibility."<sup>160</sup> Much as a 'generous' Derridean reading of Foucault inescapably reduces the latter's genealogy to deconstruction, viewing deconstruction as a 'care of the self' as McGushin does posits Foucault's account of ethics in terms of 'problems' as privileged and anterior to deconstruction. Deconstruction can only be read or understood in a favourable light once it is reduced to being one mode of care of the self and not as a 'grander narrative' of 'what happens.'

In short, once violence is universalized and thus the possibility of a transcendental position for thought is eliminated, thought affirms its own empirical and particular point of departure (this is one of the tenets of Nietzsche's perspectivism). It thus also affirms an excess, a play of difference which it cannot master and yet, will inevitably reduce. Derrida and Foucault both make this move in two different ways and thus, while both refuse the totalising effect of assuming a transcendental position, their very accounts of the impossibility of totalization or universality seem to have a totalizing effect insofar as each excludes and reduces the other's strategy. The seemingly inescapable reduction which their genealogical strategies seem to elicit against one another points to an excess which exceeds both of their accounts of excess; an otherness beyond their accounts of the relation between same and other.

## Conclusion

If we affirm the irreducible particular violence of each of these grander narratives how do we articulate philosophy's relation to politics? That is to say, if we situate deconstruction and genealogy as I have upon a polemical terrain which always exceeds their competing formulations of it, how then are we to conceive the status of their critical engagements with archipolitical attempts to master and govern this terrain? Do these two competing ethics of alterity carry a decidedly political import? It is to these questions that we now turn.

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160 Edward McGushin, "Foucault and the Problem of the Subject." P.633. Such a reading of Derrida has also more recently been proposed by Antonio Calcagno, "Foucault and Derrida: The Question of Empowering and Disempowering the Author." *Human Studies*. No.32, Vol.1. 2009.



## Chapter 5: THE DISPLACEMENT OF POLITICS

### Introduction

One implication of the affirmation of the contingency of any relational or political order inherent to post-foundational thought is the shift it effects upon the perceived role of philosophy in relation to politics. If, as I first suggested in discussing Nietzsche and Heidegger, the political denotes the contingent and violent character of all determinate relations, then the very denial inscribed in the tradition of political philosophy of the impossibility of a final foundation amounts to a 'depoliticization.' The philosophical tradition, possessed by a will to truth which has dominated the history of the West has been constituted by a denial, disavowal or in Bonnie Honig's terms, 'displacement' of the political for which, as Honig puts it,

"success lies in the elimination from a regime of dissonance, resistance, conflict or struggle... [Politics is confined] (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities."<sup>1</sup>

Faced with the displacement of the contingency of the political, the common task of post-foundational political thought is thus to *politicize* - to undermine and rupture the authority or hierarchy by which any given determinate order is legitimated and organised.

The formulation and critique of 'archipolitics' around which post-foundational political thought converges carries fundamental implications. This shared diagnosis of philosophy's traditionally repressive dominance and determination of politics implies the need for a re-articulation of its status in relation to dominant logics or systems. Not oriented by the task of legitimating a particular order, post-foundational thought assumes a different role: to *politicize*, that is to say, to return both concepts and the empirical institutions which they legitimize to the politico-polemical locus of their emergence. Theory assumes the task (though not reducible to theory) of the rupture of the social bond, of the *indetermination* of relation and thus, of the exposure and undermining of the violence which results from the artificiality of every social order.

It is within the scope of this articulation of the role of theory that we can once

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1 Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993., P.2

again pick up the dialogue between Derrida and Foucault. For it is precisely the 'desire for the outside' by which I have defined their ethics which points to a theoretical impetus to undermine or exceed any given order. It was argued in the previous chapter that Derrida and Foucault renounce the possibility of totally exceeding the violence of the ordinal but they nevertheless articulate two competing ethics of 'lesser violence' from out of the irreducible economy of the determinate. Yet in a more explicitly political inscription of these themes, that is, in moving from the question of their ethico-political 'orientations' to the nature of its political effects a different series of questions emerges. Once the outlines of an ethico-political orientation is established, the focus of inquiry shifts to its effectiveness upon a political terrain. How are determinate relations politicized? That is, how do we describe the capacity to effect transformations upon the field of social relations? Is there a disparity in the determinate politics we might derive from Derrida and Foucault? How is the incommensurability between Derrida and Foucault reflected when our focus shifts to the determinate political effects of deconstruction and genealogy? It is around an engagement with these questions that this chapter turns. I will begin by examining Derrida's and Foucault's divergent engagements with archipolitics before proposing that both thinkers pursue a displacement of archipolitics through a conception of democracy.

### **Derrida, Foucault and Archipolitics**

The concept of sovereignty – the *de jure* determination of the political – is a central target for both Derrida's and Foucault's pursuits of the disruption of the archipolitical. Sovereignty, a foundational programme for the justification of power, represents the claim to a right to power whose grounds reason would discover. Both thinkers pursue an engagement with this concept across a number of works and come to critique its continued centrality to political thought today. For both it seems, sovereignty remains a privileged locus of an archipolitical or foundationalist philosophical programme. As such, the aim of both of their accounts is to politicize and thus undermine sovereignty's determining logic. In engaging with the question of sovereignty their mutually exclusive methodological strategies of the aporia and the problem are explicitly inscribed upon a political terrain. Accordingly, the analysis of the question of sovereignty allows the inherently political nature of the incommensurability already

articulated in my analysis of the cogito debate begin to emerge more clearly. I argued there that their two accounts of the event of determination in Descartes implicitly points to a broader relational account and second, that their incommensurability (which I argued was apparent from the terms of the debate) points to a radical politicization of politico-ontological accounts of relationality itself. Let us turn firstly to Derrida's engagement with the question of sovereignty before contrasting his position with Foucault's.

### *Derrida's Deconstruction of Archipolitics*

One of Derrida's earliest attacks on archipolitics is to be found, albeit implicitly, in his essay 'Plato's Pharmacy.' Here, our focus should turn to the distinction made by Socrates between speech and writing as forms of good and bad representations of truth conditioned by their proximity to the *eidōs*. While speech is conceived in terms of *aletheia*, the unveiling of truth in its self-presence to itself, writing is described by Socrates as a support for memory and thus, as *lethe* or concealment. Writing, Derrida claims, as an external support or supplement to memory is thus for Socrates a form of "prosthesis."<sup>2</sup> Plato's *decision* to suppress writing is thus claimed to reflect the metaphysical desire – what in *Rogues* is called the “sovereignty drive” – to banish the external and empirical from meaning and value in order to posit a realm of pure presence or absolute origin which would govern it.<sup>3</sup>

Yet if the political implications of Derrida's early work were only implicit in this and other early texts, they become unequivocal in much of his later work. Like Arendt, Rancière and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, in *Rogues* Derrida looks to *The Republic* as privileged locus of sovereignty's appearance as a figure of philosophy's desire to dominate the political. In granting 'absolute sovereignty' to the *eidōs* of a 'Good' beyond Being Plato inaugurates the structure of the archaeo-teleological politics which have defined the West until today.<sup>4</sup> The idea is construed as both absolutely other, unconditional condition of knowledge and as that which gives power to knowledge; that which gives knowledge the

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2 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy." *Dissemination*. (Barbara Johnson, Trans.) Continuum: London, 2004. Pp.67- 186. See p.111, 113. On the political implications of 'Plato's Pharmacy' see Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos:Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida*. London: U of Chicago P, 1996. Pp.201-225

3 *Ibid.* P.104, 113, 162

4 RO, p.139

right to govern. Plato does not limit philosophy to attempting to think the absolutely unconditional but also inscribes it with the "mastering authority of architectonics" and thus inaugurates the metaphysical desire for the mastery and determination of the empirical.<sup>5</sup>

In this attempted violent reduction by or on behalf of the unconditional, deconstruction shows sovereignty to be permeated by an aporetic logic which Derrida comes to call, appropriating a term from immunology, 'autoimmunity.'<sup>6</sup> If immunity refers to a system's attempt to protect itself, to be pure or self-identical then autoimmunity refers to an error where the antibodies created to defend an immune system attack a body's own cells. Autoimmunity is, Derrida says, that

"strange illogical logic by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that it is supposed to protect against the other, to immunize it against the aggressive intrusion of the other."<sup>7</sup>

The production of a sovereign identity generates its own autoimmune process in striving for purity. "Nothing," Derrida says, is left "unscathed in the most autonomous living present without a risk of autoimmunity."<sup>8</sup> Sovereignty is, Derrida argues, a privileged figure of autonomy insofar as it is an *autos* which gives itself its own *nomos* and thus, is "the power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation."<sup>9</sup> Yet (and this will form the crucial point of engagement with Foucault) as soon as sovereignty extends itself or its empire in space or attempts to maintain itself across time, it "autoimmunizes itself."<sup>10</sup> As soon as sovereignty tries to protect or justify itself, it opens to the unmasterable excess of law and of language:

"[t]o confer sense or meaning on sovereignty, to justify it, to find a reason for it, is already to compromise its deciding exceptionality, to subject it to rules, to a code of law, to some general law, to concepts. It is thus to divide it, to subject it to partitioning, to participation, to being shared."<sup>11</sup>

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5 RO, p.143

6 As far as I am aware, this notion first appears in the essay "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." *Acts of Religion* (Gil Anidjar, Ed.) London: Routledge, 2002. Pp.40-101 Derrida also employs it extensively in "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides - A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida." in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. (Giovanna Borradori, Ed.) London: U of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. 85-136. and in RO.

7 RO, p.123

8 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge." p.82

9 RO, p.11

10 RO, p.109

11 RO, p.101

The sovereign's establishment of even a single law already opens it to critique in the name of that law. Pure sovereignty could only remain pure and undivided in pure silence and lawlessness and so in a total absence of sovereignty. To extend sovereignty to the empiricity of time and space is to subject it to the logic of autoimmunity and thus, to open it to its other.

A brief essay on the status of the U.S. Declaration of Independence as the ground or foundation of the U.S. state is exemplary of Derrida's revelation of the autoimmune logic inherent to all sovereign founding.<sup>12</sup> Here an aporia emerges between the Declaration's 'performative' and 'constative' status; between the event of its coming into being and the object which is brought into being.<sup>13</sup> The moment of institution, the event of the declaration of 'we the people' who assert themselves as independent and sovereign must exist *as a people* prior to the event of the declaration itself. "The signature," Derrida says, "invents the signer."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the aporia of the Declaration lies between its juridical or transcendental status and its *de facto* existence in space and time insofar as the existence of the people (the 'to be') and the declaration that forms the people (the 'ought to be') cannot be simultaneous and yet, must occur at the same time for the declaration to function.<sup>15</sup> The event of determination, of bringing something into being simultaneously implies that 'something' must exist anterior to the act of its determination.<sup>16</sup> The people are thus never present, autonomous, nor self-identical and thus, can only remain 'to come': "[a]nother subjectivity is still coming to sign, in order to guarantee it, this production of signature."<sup>17</sup> The event of the signature of the Declaration always presupposes its repetitions which are indefinitely still to come.

In *Specters of Marx* this spatio-temporal logic is referred to as the "disjuncture" at the heart of every founding event.<sup>18</sup> The final justification of any founding act is

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12 Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence." *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*. (Elizabeth Rottenberg, Ed.). (Tom Keenan & Tom Pepper, Trans.) Pp.46-54. [Hereafter referred to as 'DI'].

13 DI, p.49

14 DI, p.49

15 DI, p51-2

16 On this point, see Noah Horwitz, "Derrida and the Aporia of the Political, Or the Theologico-Political Dimension of Deconstruction." *Research in Phenomenology*. Vol.32, (2002). Pp.156-176. P.160

17 DI, p.50

18 As he puts it there, a "disjuncture in the very presence of the present, this sort of non-contemporaneity with itself." SoM, p.25

constantly deferred to an open future which never arrives as such. Every foundation or constitution of sovereignty cannot but be violent since there is no anterior law to justify it.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Declaration plays out the aporia of all sovereignty and autonomy – the paradox of something creating itself – since it demonstrates that the sovereign power must "presuppose itself in order to performatively enact itself."<sup>20</sup> Founding violence can only take place through an indefinite repetition and consequent in relation to the non-sovereignty and otherness that exceeds it.<sup>21</sup> As Derrida puts it, "[i]n signing, the people say – and do what they do, by they do so by differing or deferring themselves through the intervention of their representation, whose representativity is fully legitimated only by the signature."<sup>22</sup>

### *Derrida and the Limits of Politicization*

Deconstruction thus politicizes the legitimacy of authority, of any claim to sovereignty insofar as it returns the archipolitical displacement of politics to the originary violence from which it emerges. It is in this sense that we should understand Derrida's claims in *Specters of Marx* and "Marx and Sons" that deconstruction is inherently a "repoliticization."<sup>23</sup> Repoliticization, he argues, consists in the "question of putting into question again," and accordingly, of returning the determining event to its contingent and aporetic status.<sup>24</sup> However, there is another decisive element to the deconstructive engagement with archipolitics. If for Derrida a refusal to disavow originary *polemos* or violence is, as I argue in chapter 4, the condition for an other, (in)determinate and 'less violent' mode of relationality, he nevertheless insists in a number of texts that depoliticization is irreducible. As he puts it, "a repoliticization always involves a relative depoliticization, an awareness that an old concept of the political has, in itself, been depoliticized or depoliticizing."<sup>25</sup> Every politicization, insofar as it proceeds from a determinate and situated time-space, will be subject to a "law of finitude of decision and

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19 Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political*. p.99

20 Noah Horwitz, "Derrida and the Aporia of the Political." p.161

21 RO, p.123

22 DI, p.50. One should note that Derrida goes on to argue, much as he does in 'Cogito and the History of Madness', that it is only in grounding the authority of the Declaration in the (impossible) absolute power of God that the aporetic logic of its foundation can be stabilized. See DI, p.52

23 SoM, p.87 and Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons", p.221

24 SoM, p.87

25 Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons." p.223

responsibility for finite existences."<sup>26</sup> The deconstructions of the accounts of politicization of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt's own critiques of the archipolitical to which I now turn attest to what Derrida sees as the danger and violence inherent to any refusal to admit the irreducibility of politicization and so, of finitude and the irreducibility of relationality itself.

In 'Force of Law' Derrida reads Walter Benjamin's essay 'Critique of Violence' as a discourse which, like Heidegger's and Schmitt's, falls prey to the myth of a fall or decline from an ideal origin.<sup>27</sup> While never explicit, it seems that for Derrida, these three thinkers have in common an account of history as decline and thus, all see the necessity of a radical and total repoliticization. They all view "destruction" as a "condition of an authentic tradition and memory;" there is no limit to the emancipatory rupturing of the social bond in their work.<sup>28</sup> Yet, in positing an originary authenticity or politicization Derrida contends they potentially license any means by which to re-invoke an originary being-with others and so are complicit with the 'worst' violence.<sup>29</sup> It is in revealing the contingency and instability of Benjamin's theoretical schema that Derrida returns the text to its inherently finite and depoliticizing moments and accordingly, undermines the possibility of an absolute politicization. Benjamin, Derrida argues, "never gives up trying to contain in a pair of concepts and to bring back down to distinction the very thing that incessantly exceeds them and overflows them."<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, like Foucault, Benjamin is accused of reducing the violence of determination to a determinate history when, as we have seen, for Derrida violence is a condition of history.

One of Derrida's points of reference is the constitutive distinction in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' between 'mythic' founding violence and a 'divine' violence which "annihilates" the foundation discussed in chapter 4. Law is violent for Benjamin since it is an authoritative founding. Thus, what Benjamin is attempting to think through divine violence is a society without law or, as Derrida puts it, "an order of non-violence that

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26 SoM, p.87

27 Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. (Peter Demetz, Ed.; Trans. by Edmund Jephcott). New York: Schocken, 1986. Pp.277-300; FoL, p.259

28 FoL, p.261

29 FoL, p.261, Derrida even draws an implicit link between Benjamin's discourse and the Nazi final solution.

30 FoL, p.279

subtracts from the law."<sup>31</sup> Divine violence, the "violence of God" is not a violence of foundation but of the destruction and annihilation of boundaries.<sup>32</sup> For Derrida the absolute politicization of a revolutionary divine violence – the total indeterminacy of a society without law – which grounds Benjamin's account of mythical violence as 'decay' and 'loss' of a pure origin of (divine) violence marks it as "arche-teleological" and "arche-eschatological."<sup>33</sup> Benjamin thus effaces the finitude and the non-originary status of any origin and so he risks advocating the worst violence which would be legitimated by its capacity to institute the purity of the origin.<sup>34</sup> Benjamin's account of divine violence is haunted, Derrida says, by "the theme of radical destruction, extermination, total annihilation, beginning with the annihilation of the law and right, if not of justice."<sup>35</sup> The depoliticizing moment which Benjamin wants to overcome altogether is uncircumventable, the revolutionary and politicizing event can never be present. But therefore, it is also found in *every* moment, in every act of foundation or institution: "[p]oliticization, for example, is interminable even if it cannot and should not ever be total."<sup>36</sup> The revolutionary and politicizing moment cannot be identified in a lost origin or future horizon, but rather, every determination or founding moment insofar as it is subject to the logic of aporia or autoimmunity is always potentially politicizing.

Echoing 'Force of Law,' in *Politics of Friendship* Derrida engages Carl Schmitt's account of the political in order to undermine the determinate borders which underlie the latter's account of politicization. Schmitt defines the 'phenomenon of the political' as the event of the sovereign decision over the identification of the friend and enemy.<sup>37</sup> Like Heidegger and Benjamin, Schmitt's recovery of a properly political sphere not grounded in religious or economic phenomena occurs through his schema of the founding event of the political. Schmitt's account relies on the sovereign's positing of the "presence" or the "real possibility" of war between the friend and the enemy.<sup>38</sup> Yet in opposition to Schmitt, Derrida argues that the 'properly' political decision over the enemy can never be totally sovereign nor immune: "the purity of the *polemos* or the enemy, whereby Schmitt would

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31 FoL, p.265; see also p.284, 286.

32 FoL, p.287

33 FoL, p.281

34 FoL, p.281

35 FoL, p.258

36 FoL, p.257

37 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. (George Schwab, Trans.) London: U of Chicago Press, 2007. P.35

38 PoF, Pp.145-5



define the political, remains unattainable... no politics has ever been adequate to its concept."<sup>39</sup> Any attempt to define the political will always be exceeded by originary *polemos* since positing such a definition is itself a political act and thus, inherently partial and unstable. If Schmitt's definition of the political is grounded upon a notion of war as a 'real possibility' then, Derrida argues, this means it is caught *between* being "both/and" potential or actual. That is, as 'real' war is made 'present'; the decision over the enemy has already been made. Yet as a 'possibility' war remains a *telos*; an always possible event which cannot be made without an empirical determination of war itself by the sovereign.<sup>40</sup> Thus, if the friend-enemy distinction defines the political it in fact requires an anterior decision over whether the 'real possibility' (of war) is present or not.<sup>41</sup> The source or grounds of the decision is the aporetic notion of the 'real possibility' or "undecidable eventuality" of war.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, if for Schmitt war is the transcendental condition of politics because it is 'always present' then war functions as the ultimate criterion of politicization.<sup>43</sup> In thinking depoliticization as empirical erasure or effacement of the irreducible possibility of the presence of war Schmitt echoes Benjamin and Heidegger in falling prey to a nostalgic discourse driven by a teleological desire for the recovery of a lost violent origin. As it does for Benjamin, war or violence here attains a status of legitimacy in itself insofar as it is authorized in the name of an absolute repoliticization.

Contra Benjamin and Schmitt, Derrida affirms the consequences and stakes of the irreducibility of (de)politicization, then deconstruction will be *both* politicizing and depoliticizing. Yet my claim is that deconstruction is nonetheless depoliticizing in a way which Derrida does not and perhaps cannot acknowledge. For if, against Schmitt, Derrida argues that originary violence or *polemos* is anterior to and a condition of any particular determination of the political, there is still an anterior determination of originary violence or of what 'is' which is finite and partial, insofar as it is couched within a 'grander' narrative that excludes other accounts of originary violence. By comparing the Derridean account with Foucault's undermining of the archipolitical logic of sovereignty what emerges is a *polemos over polemos itself*. Indeed, the 'cogito debate' points to an account of the difference between them in these terms since it suggests each views the

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39 PoF, p.114

40 PoF, p.145-5

41 PoF, p.127

42 PoF, p.128

43 PoF, p.128, 126. I owe this point to Alex Thompson, *Deconstruction and Democracy*, p.158

other as having effaced the 'true' locus of originary violence and of the 'medium' where the decision or determination occurs. It is with this incommensurability in mind that we now turn to Foucault's genealogy of discipline as an alternate counter-history to the one dominated by the question of sovereignty.

### *Foucault's Problematization of Archipolitics*

Space precludes an extensive analysis of the critique of the juridical model of power which extends throughout Foucault's genealogical phase, his lectures and book on biopolitical governmentality in particular. Rather than provide a brief overview of these works, I take here as an example a more detailed analysis of *Discipline and Punish*. The latter book describes a broad historical transmutation of the status of sovereignty which occurs from the classical to the modern age. In the classical age Foucault argues, power operates through mechanisms of ordering and the exclusion of the disorderly.<sup>44</sup> Power relations were structured around the premise of the visibility of sovereign power which would reflect the might and glory of the ruler.<sup>45</sup> With the rise of the disciplinary apparatus in the modern age the question of punishment is transformed. No longer does it revolve around strategies of exclusion but rather, around the way order could be produced from disorder, its aim the formation of a productive and 'free' citizen and individual.<sup>46</sup> Thus, discipline is distinct from sovereignty insofar as it distributes power as widely as possible across society by a juridical rationality which punishes and controls deviance. Moreover, Foucault argues that political theory has almost totally effaced this massive disciplinary apparatus which appeared in modernity. Discipline, he argues, is not to be located at the level of the juridical or sovereign foundation of power but rather in what he calls a rationality, which consists in "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions."<sup>47</sup> If a 'medium' of determination is to be observed, it is what in terms of what Foucault famously calls a "micro-physics" of power.<sup>48</sup> A closer engagement with Foucault's displacement of sovereignty, to which we now turn, allows us to differentiate his account more clearly from Derrida's.

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44 The emergence of the asylum discussed in *Madness and Civilization* is archetypal of this form of power.

45 Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*. P.267

46 DP, p.211

47 PK, p.194. See also DP, p.215

48 DP, p.214

The telos of the disciplinary apparatus described in *Discipline and Punish* is the production of a normal and 'docile' body.<sup>49</sup> A particular conduct produced through regimens of training positions the individual in relation to a given norm allowing the identification of an abnormal element which further training aims to overcome. The "differentiation" which defines discipline is not of the act's relation to the law, but of the body's relation to the norm.<sup>50</sup> The relation between the body and power in discipline exceeds the sovereign decision of inclusion and exclusion, upon which Derrida focuses in his reading of Schmitt, insofar as it settles upon the desire to produce the visibility of the body to the gaze of normalizing power. Moreover, discipline's focus on the body translates to a broader focus on the social body. "The phenomenon of the social body," Foucault says, "is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very body of individuals."<sup>51</sup> The recognition of oneself and one's place in society is formed through an interiorization of the relation between the observers or trainers and the observed. Individuals, trained to function as a cog in a machine, begin to experience themselves as such. Anterior to the modern question of the free subject and the legitimacy of power constituted in a contractual relation are the practices for disciplining the body. It is discipline, as anterior locus of 'differentiation' of the individual and response to the problematisation of social order, which forms the conditions for a modern juridical power which traditional philosophical questions of 'legitimacy' and obligation have continuously effaced.<sup>52</sup>

The divergence from Schmitt or Derrida not to mention much of contemporary political thought is sharp here.<sup>53</sup> The conditions for a *de jure* determination of social order do not lie in the exceptional event or aporetic and autoimmune logic of any sovereign claim to ground and order a particular field of social relations, but rather, in the practices which seek to form an individual who inhabits the juridical order with as little

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49 DP, p.25

50 DP, p.178-9, 181; I owe the foregrounding of the concept of 'differentiation' in DP to Edward McGushin's *Foucault's Askesis*.

51 PK, p.54

52 DP, p.169;

53 Foucault's theorization of the immanence of power relations places him squarely in opposition to Lefort and Ernesto Laclau for example. The displacement of sovereignty also opposes him to Giorgio Agamben. On Foucault's divergence from the latter over the question of sovereignty see Paul Patton's "Agamben and Foucault on Biopower and Biopolitics." *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*. (Matthew Calarco & Steven DeCaroli, Eds.) Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007. For a defense of Agamben against Foucault see Catherine Mills' "Biopolitics, Liberal Eugenics, and Nihilism." in the same volume.

interference, resistance and heterogeneity as possible. At stake is the location of the event of determination through either a strategy defined by (quasi)transcendence or by immanence. We saw that for Derrida the constitution of sovereignty is destabilized through its circulation in the empiricity of time and space. Since at least *Of Grammatology* and especially the essay 'Ousia and Gramme,' Derrida has sought to show that the possibility of conceiving a present origin or foundation lies in the disavowal of the aporia between time and space or presence and absence. Much as he does in 'Declarations of Independence' for instance, in this earlier essay he claims that the metaphysics of presence is made possible by a linear conception of time which allows successive 'nows' to be conceived as simultaneous in space. Successive 'nows' are (im)possibly present: "[t]he impossibility of coexistence can be posited only on the basis of a certain coexistence, of a certain *simultaneity* of the nonsimultaneous."<sup>54</sup> The ramifications of this account of the aporia of space-time traverse Derrida's work. Presence, he repeatedly shows, is posited only in the effacement of the aporia which makes it possible insofar as time (succession) and space (simultaneity) are its mutually exclusive conditions.<sup>55</sup> Sovereignty, as event of foundation and self-identity, can never be present; it is always differed and deferred from itself insofar as it extends itself in time and through space.

Conversely, in Foucault's genealogical work the question of space and time is not conceived in terms of the impossibility of presence but rather, space and time are among a multiplicity of immanent conditions of determination. Disciplinary space is organised with the objective of making the body visible; of isolating, observing and controlling detainees, soldiers and students.<sup>56</sup> It is in terms of this objective that the division of institutional space isolates and circulates bodies through segments which make them visible and insert their elements into particular fields of knowledge. The disciplinary technique of 'rank' organises the grid of functional spaces so that the movements of bodies can be managed in their passage through different rankings or hierarchies. The individual becomes intelligible in his or her progress from one stage to another and accordingly, his or her identification is facilitated by the place he or she occupies in the segmented structure. One assumes the role of the space to which one is appointed and accordingly, the individual emerges through the functional demands places on him or

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54 Jacques Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme." *Margins of Philosophy*. P.55

55 *Ibid.*, p.65;

56 DP, p.141-3

her. Time, Foucault argues, is the operator of discipline. Discipline organises time into delineated parallel or successive segments; a serialization of time through order, level and task.<sup>57</sup> Discipline is the control and organisation of time: "[t]he disciplines, which analyze space, break up and rearrange activities, must also be understood as a machinery for adding up and capitalising on time."<sup>58</sup> Movement is subdivided and programmed through the minutest possible number of segments into a regulated repetition and thus, "a collective and obligatory rhythm."<sup>59</sup> Foucault delineates the 'time-table' as the primary temporal disciplinary technique. It allows the breaking down and ordering of each action of the body at each time of the day. The time-table is an instrument which allows the extraction "from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more useful resources."<sup>60</sup> In short, normalisation operates through particular organisations of time-space through which the object of power – the human body – becomes "no longer the mobile or immobile mass, but a geometry of divisible segments."<sup>61</sup>

Unlike Derrida's account of the aporia of space-time and its apparently devastating implications for any attempt to found or determine social relations, in Foucault's genealogy time and space are immanent to disciplinary practices. Space and time are both conditions and conditioned; they form positive conditions, immanent to their elements insofar as they make up modulating series of sites and modes of difference. Discipline enters the body into a particular time and space, itself organised according to particular objectives of control and training. The carceral organisation of time and space produces the 'presence' of the body as object of both knowledge and of disciplinary power.<sup>62</sup> The disruption of the founding or sovereign moment is thus not located in an engagement with the impossibility of its presence, autonomy or *ipseity*. Rather, it is premised on the notion that a juridical or contractual order is itself conditioned by the production of the presence of a normalized and objectified body in and by time and space.<sup>63</sup> For Foucault, the determination of relations cannot be reduced to the inherent instability of the extension of sovereignty or the founding event across space and through time. To question only the foundations and origins of power is, he argues, to depoliticize

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57 Keith Robinson, *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Thought*. P.163

58 DP, p.147

59 DP, p.151-2

60 DP, p.154

61 DP, p.163

62 Keith Robinson, *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Thought*. p.173

63 *Ibid.* P.171

it.<sup>64</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault famously claims that by remaining within the framework of this mode of analysis, "we still have not cut off the king's head."<sup>65</sup> It is only by locating the event in practices which parallel, if not condition the juridical that we can understand, Foucault argues, the production of order.<sup>66</sup>

Sovereignty cannot be, Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, the principle of intelligibility of social power.<sup>67</sup> Determination is to be located in a broad strategy or what Foucault calls the "assembly of a multiplicity."<sup>68</sup> In other words, a rationality and regime of practices localized in time and history which respond to a problematization of social order. As such, the singularity of the event of determination traced by Foucault operates in a way which must be seen as radically different from and incommensurable to Derrida's. The analysis proceeds in two ways. First, through the systems of power which consist of regulating, ordering, grading, examining, classifying and training. These in turn are linked to the production of true discourses "which serve to found, justify and provide reasons and principles for these ways of doing things."<sup>69</sup> The constitutive outside – the conditions of determination – emerges through a mapping of the event as a 'general technology of power.'<sup>70</sup> Knowledge, in other words, is dispersed into power relations through which it circulates yet which it effaces. Juridical discourse is thus mapped as an event and outcome of struggle.

#### *Derrida's Sovereignty vs. Foucault's Discipline*

The stakes of Derrida and Foucault's competing politicizations of archipolitics should thus be clear: the medium in which differentiation, or the event of determination, occurs. Two strategies emerge for undermining the domination of archipolitics by

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64 DP, p.92-7

65 DP, p.89

66 Spatial limitations dictate that an analysis of Foucault's 1976-79 lecture courses and *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* cannot be pursued here. These works form a further extension of his displacement of the question of sovereignty through the rise of what Foucault calls biopower. The genealogy of biopower does not displace but rather extends the analyses of *Discipline and Punish*. Biopower revolves not only around the disciplining of the abnormal but around the management of the population as a whole related to as a living organism which both grows and declines. Consequently, as Foucault argues in STP, from the perspective of biopower or governmentality, discipline appears as much more localized than DP suggests. If I have nonetheless traced Foucault's politicization of sovereignty in the earlier work on discipline it is because this work traces much more closely the role of space and time than the lectures on biopolitics and thus, lends itself to a closer comparison with Derrida's work.

67 DP, p.88-9

68 DP, p.92-3

69 Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect*. P.79

70 STP, p.120

opening it to the originary violence which it effaces. On the one hand, the impossible possibility of any concept or act of sovereignty and on the other, the fields of governmental practices which form the consensus conditional of sovereign power. I have discussed at length the claim made by Foucault in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire' and reflected in his genealogy of modern power relations which suggests that the Cartesian gesture is inherent in Derrida's account of politicization. As such, much as in his reading of Descartes, I claim that from the Foucaultian perspective Derrida appears to impose a meaning upon sovereignty in terms of status as a purely trans-historical question. In this sense the deconstruction of sovereignty is depoliticizing insofar as Derrida commits a violent exclusion in his interpretation of the aporia of sovereignty by locating it within the scope of 'transcendental philosophical questions.' It is possible to reconstruct a parallel argument from Foucault's later works. Derrida's account of sovereignty, to echo the early Foucault, "goes directly to the calling into question of the 'totality of beingness.'"71 Derrida continues to maintain the *sovereignty of sovereignty* insofar as the transcendental-philosophical understanding of political foundations effaces the broader disciplinary or biopolitical 'field of transformations' through which the determination of social order occurs.

What is the Derridean response to this Foucaultian critique? In chapter 3 we saw that in 'To Do Justice to Freud' Derrida returns to the polemic with Foucault and explicitly extends the claim he first made in 'Cogito and the History of Madness': that Foucault violently effaces the aporetic conditions of his own discourse and thus, violently determines the objects of his analyses. In other words, the Foucaultian displacement of the *de jure* or foundational moment would itself qualify as a foundational move. Like any totality, Foucault's displacement of sovereignty can be shown to be founded upon that which it excludes: "the evil slips in" as Derrida says in 'Plato's Pharmacy.'<sup>72</sup> The claim to have displaced the question of sovereignty itself relies on a sovereign and archaeo-teleological determination of the presence of sovereignty itself within history. It is the implicit identification and circumscription of the event (inherent to all Foucault's genealogies) which in *Rogues* Derrida argues disavows the unconditionality or otherness which makes it possible:

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71 EWII, p.412

72 Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy.' *Dissemination*. P.111

"[a] calculable event, one that falls, like a case, like the object of some knowledge, under the generality of a law, norm, determinative judgment, or technoscience, and thus of a power-knowledge and knowledge-power, is *at least in this measure* an event. Without the absolute singularity of the incalculable and exceptional, no thing and no one, nothing *other* and thus *nothing* arrives or happens... as other as the absolute exception or singularity of an alterity that is not reappropriable by the ipseity of a sovereign power and a calculable knowledge."<sup>73</sup>

While in 'Cogito and the History of Madness' Derrida argues that Foucault attempts to transcend the language of Western reason, in *Rogues* he seems to suggest that Foucault attempts to totally exceed archipolitics itself. Much as in his earlier critique, wherein he argues that the opposition between reason and madness cannot be exterior to language and thus can only be articulated in the language of reason, so sovereignty, Derrida appears to claim here, cannot be displaced except through an implicitly sovereign claim to transcend the "sovereignty drive." We cannot totally exceed the will to foundation except through a sovereign and founding move which inevitably repeats it insofar as it seeks to master and order that which it exceeds. Thus, if I characterized the implicit Foucaultian critique of Derrida as maintaining the 'sovereignty of sovereignty,' Derrida seems to accuse Foucault of attempting a sovereign determination and transcendence of sovereignty itself.

Recall that in 'Cogito and the History of Madness' Derrida argues that in *Madness and Civilization* reason and its other are located by Foucault within history. Thus, Foucault is guilty of a *de jure* determination of history whereby the presence of madness is made to appear. Similarly, in the genealogy of government, Foucault again implicitly appears to inhabit this apparent Archimedean position. The location of sovereignty as event *within* the empiricity of history presupposes the transcendental determination of history itself. Moreover, Derrida claims that the place of decision in Descartes occurs elsewhere than where Foucault locates it. The Cartesian exclusion of madness is not a particular event but the condition of the constitution of all language, reason and history. The exclusion cannot be contained within a determinate history since it is a condition of history itself. Concordantly, sovereignty for Derrida cannot be displaced or sufficiently politicized by a historical account of the emergence of a biopolitical technology of government since autoimmunity would have to be the very condition of Foucault's history of biopower. Anterior to its supposed disruption in history by a logic of biopower, sovereignty is made (im)possible for Derrida by the autoimmune logic which conditions it.

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73 RO, p.148



## The Question of Emancipation and Revolution

But what then are the implications of these two divergent strategies for politicizing the archipolitical? Insofar as the Derridean and Foucaultian politicizations of sovereignty form two modes by which dominant political logics are challenged and undermined and insofar as they disturb the given and redefine the possible, can they be said to be emancipatory? Moreover, what would it mean to speak of theory as emancipatory in these terms? Certainly, both refuse the traditional conception of emancipation as the promise to overcome an ideological distortion of a determined social objectivity through a positivist account of man's 'true humanity' or what Ernesto Laclau describes as the transparency of an "absolute coincidence of human essence with itself."<sup>74</sup> Both Derrida and Foucault refuse what they view as the eschatological discourse of revolution grounded in the desire to 're-appropriate' or 'actualize' a positive conception of a true human essence.<sup>75</sup> Both Derrida and Foucault thus, as is well known, seek a different notion of emancipation, one not subsumed to the promise of a determined mode of relationality to be founded or rediscovered in some determinate future but rather suggesting the ever-present possibility of resistance and change and of a less oppressive order. But both also hold that the determining violence of ordering is irreducible and thus, that a total and revolutionary overcoming of this violence is impossible. For both thinkers, revolution, rather than having a liberating effect, functions to determine the relational by inscribing it within the circularity of a teleology which acts as a self-authorizing and violent determination. Both problematize the distinction between a wholly exceptional revolutionary event and more localized and modest reformism.

### *Derrida and Emancipation*

It is in this vein that, much as Foucault had already claimed thirty years earlier in *The Order of Things*, Derrida argues that the truth of Marx's discourse is caught in a circular logic which depends on a promised futural realization of a scientific prognosis. The 11th of the *Theses on Feuerbach* amounts to a call by Marx for a future in which his theoretical programme will be realized and as such, his discourse is not to be judged in accordance with its scientific value but rather by its power of producing emancipatory change. Yet the call to revolutionary action is made in the name of a determined

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74 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*. P.1

75 This formulation is made by Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, p.83. See also Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, p.111; Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*. p.190

communism or what Derrida describes as "the real presence of the specter" and the insertion of a teleology into his history which accompanies it.<sup>76</sup> It is in this sense that Derrida refers to Marx's history in the particularly cumbersome terms of an "onto-theo-archeo-teleology" which insofar as it determines the future "cancels historicity" itself.<sup>77</sup> In attributing a status of necessity to the overcoming of capitalist appropriations and distortions of the ideals of emancipation Marx invokes a future that would simultaneously undo futurity as such. Thus, for example, the *Communist Manifesto* is, Derrida argues, marked by a logic of 'incarnation;' whereby a privileged agent of history becomes identical to itself in a determinate future.<sup>78</sup>

Derrida's ethico-political move in relation to Marx is to detach the latter's account of history from a fixed narrative of emancipation. If communism is the 'specter' haunting Europe as the famous first line of the text claims, then its determination by Marx amounts to a desire for the "end of the spectral."<sup>79</sup> The desire for a future present wherein the specter will become present to itself signals a desire for the "end of the political as such."<sup>80</sup> In the face of the violent and reductive maneuvers which he views operating in Marx's texts Derrida's politicization, oriented by a 'desire' for the other, operates a 'dis-juncture' on Marx's historical narrative between capitalism, communism and Marx's critique.<sup>81</sup> Mirroring the move he makes in 'The Force of Law' Derrida displaces Marx's future present communism with the 'messianic' promise 'that there is a future.'<sup>82</sup> Against Marx's emancipatory eschatology he posits an "interminable, infinite... critique" which refuses to disavow the outside which makes it possible.<sup>83</sup>

Yet insofar as Derrida reveals the precariousness of the Marx's account of emancipation what remains for politics? Given the Derridean account of relationality there can be no privileged site or form of politics yet, this does not mean that the possibility of politics is withdrawn either. Rather, politics occurs in the inescapable

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76 SoM, p.103. Conditional to Marxist critique for Derrida is the reduction of the irreducibly 'spectral' or 'hauntological' to material conditions through an ontology of social relations within a mode of production, whose task is to produce the transparency or presence of these relations. See also Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*. P.85

77 SoM, p.74, 87

78 Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*. P.88

79 SoM, p.103

80 SoM, p.102

81 Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time*. London: Routledge, 2007. P.138

82 Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, p.60

83 SoM, p.90

process of (de)politicization; each politicization opens any determinate politics to the otherness which exceeds it and which it has violently reduced. Still, politicization cannot in itself become the object of a politics or movement since we are always situated within determinate relations and so finite decisions are irreducible. Alex Thompson has deftly described the aporetic logic which defines the Derridean account of the political:

"[t]here can be no politics of the moment of politicization, since it has no content, nothing that can be acted upon - it is the suspension of all decision... Any political decision, any political event must be an experience of depoliticization by definition; it sets a rule... Politicization cannot be the object of a political demand; what complicates this structure is that every political demand, while depoliticizing, will attest to a possible repoliticization."<sup>84</sup>

Thus, total depoliticization as it occurs in Plato's or Marx's text is impossible since it is always being undone and politicized by the aporias which it cannot master. Deconstruction opens these determinations to the otherness which they violently exclude. On the other hand, total politicization, which Benjamin and Schmitt attempt to think, cannot be appropriated. Any particular politicization emerges from the finitude of determinate relations and thus, in contrast to Heidegger, Benjamin and Schmitt, will always involve a decision and thus determine in its turn. Every politicization must negotiate the determinate and thus, cannot be made present.

Accordingly, as Alexander Duttman put it to Derrida in a late interview, deconstruction, insofar as it affirms the determinate as inescapable, amounts to a reformism since "each decision calls for another one" and thus, inaugurates an interminable process of reform after reform... However, given that no determination or decision is ever total or originary, every depoliticization is inescapably open to the possibility of another repoliticization and in this sense, deconstruction appears to describe a "permanent revolution."<sup>85</sup> In this sense, deconstruction is equally 'both/and' reformist and revolutionary insofar as the account of the (in)determinate *between* which it proffers cannot be reduced to either term. No determinate politics can perfectly correspond to the absolute contingency of a politicization since no politics can escape finitude and thus, violence. Nor can the political be reduced to any particular form or field since every determination is potentially politicized.

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84 Alex Thompson, *Deconstruction and Democracy*. p.167

85 Jacques Derrida (with Alexander Garcia Duttman). "Perhaps or Maybe." *PLI*, Vol.16 (Summer, 1997). Pp.1-18. Quoted on p.11; Alex Thompson points to this interview in *Deconstruction and Democracy*. P.173

### *Foucault and Emancipation*

Unlike Derrida, Foucault's relation to revolutionary thought, and to Marx in particular, has been a constant if under-theorized element throughout his oeuvre. In the early essay 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' Foucault argues Marx produces a mode of interpretation which is a constant and indefinite undermining of the 'signs' of capitalist economy. Yet he maintains that while Marx introduces a thought of "the violence, the incompleteness, the infinity of interpretations", given his emphasis upon an eschatology and ideology Marx "enthron[e]s the terror of the index or to suspect language."<sup>86</sup> Building on this argument, in *The Order of Things* Marx's discourse is said to be caught in the humanist 'double.' Marx produces a discourse which guarantees its validity through the postulation of an eschatology which grounds it.<sup>87</sup> Foucault argues, much as Derrida does, that we must draw a sharp break between Marx's work as interminable critique on the one hand, and its teleological strains on the other. Accordingly, it is in the spirit of interminable and militant critique that Foucault explicitly privileges Marx's journalistic texts such as 'The 18th Brumaire' and 'The Civil War in France.'<sup>88</sup> These texts, much like Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?', form what Foucault would come to call 'histories of the present' which, without producing or being grounded in totalizing claims, study the conditions which form the present as singular events.<sup>89</sup> He contrasts the analysis of the present from what he sees as Marxism's assumption of a "totalizing historical position" on the one hand and from attempts to ground the authority of Marx's work in a scientific discourse on the other.<sup>90</sup>

Foucault's 1976 lecture course *Society Must Be Defended* further extends the critique of eschatology in Marx. Here, he argues that discourses around race war prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries furnished Marx with the model of class war.<sup>91</sup> Class war, he argues, originates from early nationalist notions of the presence of a war in society between two irreducible groups whose inequality is masked by the equality of law and right. Marx's socialism risks universalizing an authentic subject of freedom and an

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86 EWII, p.278

87 OT, p.340-3

88 PK, p.76. See also Bradley J. MacDonald, "Marx, Foucault, Genealogy." *Polity*. Vol.34, No.3. Pp.259-84. P.275

89 *Ibid.*, p.76. See also Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" EWII, pp.303-320

90 *Ibid.*, p.80-1, 85.

91 Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*. (Mauro Bertani & Alessandro Fontana, Eds.) (David Macey, Trans.) London: Penguin, 2003. P.79; Warren Montag, "Towards a Conception of Race Without Racism." p.117

accordant emancipatory praxis, and in doing so is always in danger as Warren Montag suggests, of reverting to the primitive state of an openly racist politics from which it arises.<sup>92</sup> Like Laclau or Rancière, Foucault argues that Marx's privileging of and "obsession" with class as emancipatory agent effaces the multiple possibilities of struggle and forms struggle takes by reducing it to a pre-determined concept and agent. If struggle is not to be reduced it cannot be located and defined in advance. The theoretical preoccupation with determining the agent of emancipation is displaced by Foucault with a question of the locus of already existing and potential spaces for struggle. Foucault does not set out to found resistance or struggle since his analyses show it to be always already occurring and so the task becomes to trace its manifestations. To determine a subject of struggle and resistance in advance is to efface the multiplicity of places and forms which struggle takes.

In refusing to conceive power as negative force, Foucault also refuses the whole thematics of revolution prevalent in Marx at times and central to modern political thought as a whole. Foucault argues that we must overcome the notion that revolution guarantees that the struggle which it produces and describes or its discourse cannot be re-captured, colonised or recuperated by a dominant logic. Any discourses of resistance, Foucault says, "no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation."<sup>93</sup> In assuming the totalizing perspective which revolutionary discourse demands, the revolution is seen as a disappointment when it either fails to occur or provide the utopia it promises, leads only to resignation. Like Derrida, Foucault's refusal to adopt a revolutionary discourse reflects in definitively political terms the refusal of what in chapter 3 we called a 'pre-ordinal authenticity' – access to an outside beyond all forces of determination and domination. In other words, for both thinkers revolution presumes access to a position beyond all determinate relations; either through the promise of a non-violent future regime or the reference to, as Foucault puts it, "a nature or human foundation which, as a result of a certain number of historical, social or economic processes, found itself concealed, alienated or imprisoned in and by some mechanism of repression."<sup>94</sup> Foucault does not seek to disregard all

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92 Warren Montag, "Towards a Conception of Race Without Racism." P.117

93 PK, p.86

94 Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of Concern of Self as a Practice of Freedom." EWI, p.282

emancipatory movements; an anti-colonial liberation for instance, is indeed liberating.<sup>95</sup> The risk involved for Foucault (as for Laclau and Rancière, for instance), is rather that such a movement should be seen as totally liberating. The danger of revolutionary discourses is that they should assume that "man will be reconciled with himself."<sup>96</sup> Foucault dismisses what calls he 'bourgeois' accounts and uses of history which posit a "great continuity" beneath revolutionary upheavals thus asserting the illegitimacy of revolutionary breaks from an underlying historical unity.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, revolutionary discourses too are said to efface the locus of struggle, revolt and discontinuity. The concept of revolution reduces resistance or revolt to power as a property or sovereignty of a given social group or class.

Foucault locates an emancipatory operator around the complimentary notions of revolt and resistance. Revolts, Foucault claims, interrupt the continuity of history; they emerge from 'outside' history and escape it.<sup>98</sup> By reading revolts as 'revolutions' we tame them by including them within the rationality of a history.<sup>99</sup> Revolution, Foucault says, is "a giant effort to domesticate revolts within a rational and controllable history."<sup>100</sup> The discourse of revolution has become a standard for evaluating and even "disqualifying" revolts.<sup>101</sup> For Foucault, the question of the difference between revolt and revolution is a question of what I have argued is the difference between immanence and transcendence. Reading revolt, resistance or struggle in terms of the discourse of revolution, that is, as a singular and total or radical transformation places a burden upon it to effect a transcendence of power relations; on the promise (and ultimate failure) of what in his 1984 lectures Foucault says is an 'other world' [*autre monde*] which would justify it.<sup>102</sup> Revolutionary discourse effaces the locus where transformations are, have been, and can occur. It effaces the actual and possible becoming other immanent to power relations. Events are multiple, discontinuous and are not grounded by any great continuity.<sup>103</sup>

There is neither an essential nature to be liberated nor a global or single

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95 *EWI*, p.282

96 *EWI*, p.282,

97 Michel Foucault, "Return to History." *EWII*, Pp.419-432. P.423

98 Michel Foucault. "Useless to Revolt?" *EWIII*. Pp.449-453. P.449

99 Michel Foucault, 'On Revolution,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. No.1(1981). Pp.5-9. See p.6

100 Michel Foucault, *EWIII*, p.450

101 Michel Foucault. 'On Revolution,' p.6

102 See *CV*, p.293 and *passim*.

103 Michel Foucault, *EWII*, p.429

programme which a revolution would transform. Resistance is contingent, local and has no privileged locus or agent, it is simply always already occurring: "people revolt: that is a fact."<sup>104</sup> Every power relation, every actual or potential hegemonic relation is politicized. Thus, no revolt is necessarily legitimate or illegitimate, liberating or limiting, since every revolt necessarily risks its own re-articulation in terms of a dominant logic: "[m]y point is not that everything is bad. But that everything is dangerous... and that we are always in a position of beginning again."<sup>105</sup> Since no revolt can totally exceed determinate power relations, every act calls for further resistance. Like Derrida, Foucault assumes a position *between* a total politicization and depoliticization; neither a revolutionary transcendence of determinate relations to a pre-ordinal authenticity nor a total depoliticization which would be defined by the total reification of power relations. Both, in other words, assume an account of the event which views the conditions of possibility of transformations as ineradicable – both total determination or absolute indetermination are foreclosed as possibilities.

Indeed, Derrida and Foucault both theorize a relation between philosophy and politics which precludes the possibility of a deduction of political praxis from philosophical analyses. No determinate task follows from the politicization(s) effected by deconstruction or genealogy. This locus 'between' the contingent and the determinate therefore is also the locus of politicization of philosophy or political ontology itself. It is a space that cannot be resolved, closed or violently effaced, yet it is nevertheless inscribed with a particular political, if nevertheless minimal and 'weak,' telos by Derrida and Foucault. For it is a locus that only democracy, for both thinkers, can mark or represent.

In their late works both Derrida and Foucault come to think a form of democracy opposed to, and which undoes the will to truth. Democracy is a privileged political form for both thinkers insofar as they each view it as opposed to the 'sovereignty drive:' the disjunction between truth and power which in one form or another has sought to displace the political. In this sense, democracy is the genealogical political form *par excellence*. But what makes democracy 'radical'? How does it suggest the possibility of transgressing the hold of the will to truth? What implications does thinking Derrida's

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104 Michel Foucault, EWIII, p.452

105 Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics." EW1, p.256

and Foucault's ethico-political orientations in terms of a radically democratic horizon have for an articulation of the locus of their polemic? It is to these questions to which we now turn.

## Radical Democracy

An early and influential account of radical democracy emerges from Claude Lefort's *Democracy and Political Theory*. Democracy, Lefort maintains, is a particular 'mise-en-forme' or founding social principle, one wherein the political is detached from other references and becomes an autonomous activity unto itself; in democracy "power is an empty place" as he famously puts it.<sup>106</sup> Freed from any positive content, power in modern democracy becomes the object of a contest.<sup>107</sup> Lefort's account of radical democracy has not been without its critics (Foucault among them), yet his affirmation of the irreducibility of the polemical echoes the fundamental claim of theorists of 'radical democracy' and also distinguishes it from liberal and communitarian forms. Thus, theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe, William Connolly and Rancière to name but a few, all affirm an essentially contentious and polemical notion of the democratic. Democracy does not produce a rational consensus for these thinkers; contestation lies on an ontological level; irreducible competing accounts of the social and the political are at stake in democratic contest.<sup>108</sup> Radical democrats thus affirm the incommensurability of competing political claims rather than seek their reconciliation within a broader rational discursive horizon or foundational equality. Accordingly, procedural and deliberative forms are rejected on the grounds that they hold implicit foundational assertions. Both Dahl and Habermas for instance, assume the possibility of the neutrality of democratic institutions and of reasoned and rational debate which will inform the determination and administration of proper policies while radical democracy wholly rejects this perspective.<sup>109</sup> Democracy is taken to be open-ended so that struggle is not limited to the site of the state, democratic institutions must themselves remain open to contestation if a

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106 Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*. P.225

107 *Ibid.* p.7

108 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso, 2000. P.21; Adrian Little & Moya Lloyd, "Introduction." *The Politics of Radical Democracy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008. P.3-4; Lasse Thomassen and Lars Tonder, *Radical Democracy: Between Abundance and Lack*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.

109 On the critique of Habermas, Dahl and other liberal theorists of democracy see in particular Chantal Mouffe's *The Democratic Paradox* and *On the Political*. London: Verso, 2005.



prevailing regime is to be qualified as democratic. Democracy by definition cannot be founded or limited, it accepts the absence of an ultimate ground. As Nancy succinctly puts it in a recent essay, "[t]here is no 'demarchy:' the people do not make principle."<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, both Derrida and Foucault theorize democracy as a 'force of weakness.' For as genealogical thinkers they refuse the possibility of transcending the play of differences between forces or originary violence and simultaneously affirm the finite, violent and determinate nature of all thought. Through the strategies of the aporia or the problem their thought thus recoils upon itself, affirming its own violence and its own contingency. Accordingly, democracy is *the* political form which figures these genealogical logics since, for both thinkers, democracy is characterized by an absence of ground, its form or structure does not exceed the horizons of contingency which its' principle implies. Democracy is marked by weakness and fragility (both in ontological and historical terms) since in principle it affirms its own contingency, affirms itself as violent and determining and thus always risks displacement. Let us now turn to these two parallel competing accounts of democracy as aporetic and as problematic.

#### *Derrida's Democracy To Come*

The notion of 'democracy to come' which becomes increasingly prevalent in Derrida's late work might be said to form the ethico-political horizon of deconstruction in general. This is an admittedly intrepid claim insofar as it is problematic to assert anything finally determinate and non-contingent about deconstruction at all without effacing the very contingency which this work shows to be ineradicable. That said, if we have affirmed that Derrida's work, like Foucault's, opens up a space between politicizations and particular politics, it is 'democracy to come' which, more than any other name, stands for this (im)possible place.

What does it mean to say democracy is 'to come'? As the term suggests democracy is always futural, on a horizon which never arrives. But this does not entail a utopian future arrival of democracy since democracy cannot be made present. Democracy has an irreducibly messianic or promissory structure and thus, cannot be determined in advance or made present. For democracy to be as such would mean that unconditional justice,

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110 Jean-Luc Nancy, "On Democracy." (Gilbert Leung, Trans.), paper circulated at the conference 'On the Idea of Communism' held at Birkbeck College, March 13-15, 2009.

equality or freedom (or any other concepts we associate with democracy) would be made conditional. Yet, as we have seen, the recuperation of unconditionality by a *de facto* programme or law will, by definition, violently exclude or determine and call for further democratisation in its turn. Accordingly, democracy is always promised and undermined, constantly deferred to an open future which never arrives.

So far the impossibility of reducing democracy to a determinate presence only affirms that it resembles the aporetic structure of all concepts as Derrida describes them. To affirm the privileged status which democracy holds for deconstruction requires a second move. Democracy is distinct from all of Derrida's other 'non-synonymous' signifiers of the aporetic because it is an autoimmune concept whose critique – of a lack of equality or freedom – is always made in the name of democracy. Self-critique and openness to otherness and to a future that comes is, unlike other terms, intrinsic to democracy. Democracy, in Derrida's terms, is a "force of weakness" insofar as inscribed within it is the self-deconstruction or autoimmune force of opening to otherness. Democracy, in this sense, recoils upon the will to truth since it posits no originary ground or transcendent truth which governs it. The very structure or determination of democracy is inherently open to democratic decision. Democracy invites contestation, is always open to further democratization.

Democracy is therefore distinct since it implies a form of relationality which demands, more than others, an open interpretation. As Derrida puts it, "[o]f all the names grouped a bit too quickly under the category of 'political regimes'... the inherited concept of democracy is the *only* one that welcomes the possibility of being contested."<sup>111</sup> Democracy, by definition, explicitly figures its autoimmune logic insofar as it assumes the possibility of self-critique in its own being. At the core of democracy is what Gasché says is a notion of the "self-contestation of the *autos*."<sup>112</sup> Unlike other concepts, democracy is defined by the *fact* that it is not governed by a will to truth. The process of determining who, what and how to govern, and not its particular outcomes is the movement which democracy names, a process which in turn, itself remains in question. It is the absence of a foundation which defines democracy: "[t]he absence of a proper form, of an *eidos*, of an

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111 Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity." P.121

112 Rodolphe Gasché, "In the Name of Reason: The Deconstruction of Sovereignty." *Research in Phenomenology*. Vol. 34 (2004). Pp.289-303. See p.291.

appropriate paradigm... that is what makes democracy unrepresentable in existence."<sup>113</sup> In short, democracy to come openly inheres and figures the autoimmune logic which is the condition of all political regimes and all relationality. Unlike other political forms, the autoimmunity opening to the other is an *explicit* condition for democracy, the more autoimmune a regime becomes, the more it opens to otherness the more democratic it is.

Derrida traces a number of explicit democratic aporias that suggest that, unlike other forms of political regime, democracy in its avowed autoimmunity is the 'least violent' form of regime. First, as Derrida puts it, "the *alternative* to democracy can always be required as a democratic alternation."<sup>114</sup> A suspension of democracy, against for example an anti-democratic party, is a means of both protecting democracy and also the "suicide" of democracy.<sup>115</sup> In situations such as the suspension of elections in Algeria in 1992, in order to prevent an expected victory by an avowedly anti-democratic religious party, democracy can only protect itself "by limiting and threatening itself."<sup>116</sup> Moreover, democracy is necessarily a 'cracy' or *kratos*.<sup>117</sup> Insofar as any democracy is bound by a territory or defined by a particular population it will exercise some sovereign power, rule through the force of some laws and thus, exclude in its turn. Democracy is unthinkable without some *ipseity* yet every sovereignty is anti-democratic, putting some limits on democracy.<sup>118</sup> However, in democracy in particular the identity of the sovereign is never stable, insofar as the people rule no sovereignty can be final.

Furthermore, in order to be democratic any notion of equality will have to be unconditional, that is, equality will have to assume a state "where every other is *equally* altogether other."<sup>119</sup> Yet in order to function democracy must calculate; citizens from non-citizens or an elected majority from a minority.<sup>120</sup> Thus, the "law of number" necessary for any determination or measure of equality cannot do justice to either equality as such nor to the singularity of every counted other.<sup>121</sup> The reduction to number which any democratic equality requires will necessarily be violent and reductive of the equality of all

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113 RO, p.74

114 RO, p.31

115 RO, p.33

116 RO, p.36

117 RO, p.12

118 RO, p.37

119 PoF, p.22

120 PoF, p.22, RO, pp.52-3

121 RO, p.34

and the singularity of every one. The order of calculability, to which democratic equality is always reduced, must therefore negotiate with what is beyond calculation. In brief, all of these paradoxes point to the explicitly and inherently aporetic nature of democracy which allow it to function as the 'least worst' political form for Derrida, one which figures the nature of relationality as all of his work describes it.

### *Foucault and Democratic Parrhesia*

Unlike the close attention given to democracy in Derrida's work, the concept has had little discussion by Foucault's interpreters. While thinkers such as William Connolly have long insisted on the presence of a democratic ethos in Foucault's work, such an ethos could only be implicit given the near total absence of any discussion of democracy in his work.<sup>122</sup> With the recent publication of his final two lecture courses at the Collège de France this is no longer the case. The account of democratic parrhesia or truth-speaking in the 1984 course titled *Courage de la Vérité* in particular, points to, I will argue, democracy's status as the ethico-political horizon of genealogy as a whole. The underlying condition for democracy is that which all Foucault's work since at least the early 1970s show has been lost throughout the history of the West: a notion of truth inseparable from power.

Foucault argues that there are at least two central elements to understanding democracy's status for the Ancient Greeks. First, that democracy has a particular political form.<sup>123</sup> Greek democracy is defined by two central formal or juridical principles: the guarantee of equal participation in the exercise of power (*isonomia*) and the equal right for all to speak before the assembly (*isegoria*).<sup>124</sup> Theorizations of democracy, primarily restricted to this *de jure* level of analysis, have effaced the defining feature of Greek democracy: the particular problematization of the political which Greek "experience" or "practice" provoke.<sup>125</sup> This second element – the particular experiential or problematic structure of democracy – defined by a game of democratic power, procedures and

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122 William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault." *Political Theory*. Vol.21, No.3 (1993). Pp.365-89. Connolly nevertheless wrongly locates a Foucaultian democratic ethos in a strict (quasi-transcendent) opposition between self and other.

123 Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres: Cours au Collège de France 1982-1983*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008. [Hereafter referred to as 'GSA'] GSA, p.145

124 Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2001. [Hereafter referred to as 'FS']. P.22

125 GSA, p.146

techniques for the exercise of this power and the ethos of individuals within this game – is not only central to understanding democracy as a political system but is also effaced by the majority of post-foundational formulations of democracy. While Foucault refers to Lefort’s account, one could also add Derrida as well as Laclau and Mouffe to a list of thinkers who efface the singularity of democracy as a political experience and event.<sup>126</sup>

The political experience of Greek democracy is characterized by the Greek practice of truth-speaking called *parrhesia*.<sup>127</sup> *Parrhesia* was central to early Greek political experience since it formed a “modality of truth-speaking” which is “*alethurgique*.” That is, *parrhesia* refers to a manifestation of truth and not an epistemological mode of truth linked to method, a truth grounded in the opacity of prophetic truth-speaking nor the technical knowledge of a teacher.<sup>128</sup> As a mode of speaking, *parrhesia* is defined by three key elements. First, it signifies a coincidence or identity of *bios* or subject and his *logos* or discourse which enunciates a truth. In *parrhesia* the subject is the enunciator of a truth and not an object of truth. Second, *parrhesia* is characterized by risk and courage.<sup>129</sup> In speaking the truth the subject risks angering or hurting the interlocutor; truth should be revealed in its totality, no matter the consequences.<sup>130</sup> It is thus “truth, in the risk of violence.”<sup>131</sup> Thirdly, conditional for *parrhesia* is the acceptance of the 'game' of truth by the recipient of truth speaking; there must be a "pact" between the speaker and the other.<sup>132</sup> The requirement of courage extends to the interlocutor insofar as he must be willing to listen to the truth no matter how hurtful or infuriating it may be.

In *Courage de la Vérité* Foucault develops extensive readings of Euripides *Ion* and Thucydides account of Pericles’ Funeral Oration in particular, in order to show that *parrhesia* forms the primary condition of agonal democracy in 5th and 6th century Greece. While the constitutional guarantee of equality was of course necessary, much

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126 GSA, pp.145-6, 156, n.7

127 It is the problematization of *parrhesia* by the Greeks, beginning with Euripedes which forms the object of Foucault’s final genealogies.

128 CV, pp.4-5. 'Alethurgique' is Foucault’s own term which he derives from the Ancient Greek *alêthourgês* which the editors of CV tell us Foucault defines in his unpublished 1980 course as “the ensemble of possible procedures, verbal or non-verbal, by which we bring to light that which is posed as true, in opposition to the false, the concealed, the inexpressible, the unpredictable, the forgotten.”, CV, p.20, n.3

129 FS, p.16

130 FS, p.16

131 CV, p.12

132 CV, p.13

more importantly democracy consisted in the *parrhesiatic* act of speaking a truth in the Assembly to which one is committed in order to guide the *polis*.<sup>133</sup> *Parrhesiatic* democracy formed the condition for an "ethical differentiation" through which the true interests of the city were determined.<sup>134</sup> The 'best' for the city was able to emerge insofar as 'differentiation' was recognized not on the basis of an objective truth or norm but through an agonal contest insofar as truth was recognized on the basis of its power to inspire, command and contest. As Foucault puts it, "[t]he discourse of truth introduces a difference... only some can speak the truth."<sup>135</sup> An effective democratic polity was grounded in the courage, frankness and directness among citizens to speak and the willingness among the Assembly to listen and recognize those that spoke the truth. The condition for agonal democracy was thus the constitution of a space for "a *logos* which will exercise its power and its influence."<sup>136</sup> In short, democracy was possible insofar as truth or knowledge was not opposed to power.

Both Foucault's 1983 and 1984 lecture courses trace the events whereby, near the end of the fifth century B.C., democracy in Athens comes into crisis. The possibility of speaking the truth and of the truth emerging from the agon come into question. The problematization of democracy, Foucault argues, shifts from the themes of its mythical and heroic origins exemplified by *Ion* and Pericles Funeral Oration so that democratic *parrhesia* itself becomes a problem and object of angst. The production of 'ethical differentiation' which lay at the core of democracy begins to be viewed as its "weakness" and its "fragility." The ethical differentiation constituted by *parrhesia* and at the core of agonal democracy necessarily institutes informal inequality and difference into the formal democratic condition of equality. For democracy to produce truth, Foucault maintains, a resulting inequality between speakers is necessary. On the other hand, truth is always threatened by democracy insofar as all are able to speak such that nothing guarantees that the 'best' will emerge through its practice. The strength of democracy is a force of weakness:

"no democracy without true discourse, since without true discourse it will perish; but the death of true discourse, the possibility of the death of true discourse, the possibility of the reduction to silence of true discourse is inscribed within democracy. No true discourse without democracy, but true discourse introduces differences within

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133 Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*. P.15

134 CV, p.35

135 *Ibid.*

136 GSA, p.157

democracy. No democracy without true discourse, but democracy is a threat to the very existence of true discourse."<sup>137</sup>

Beginning in the 5th century B.C. critiques of democracy proliferate, democracy ceases to be seen as a privileged locus of truth-speaking.<sup>138</sup> Plato is exemplary of the view that democracy forms a danger to the city insofar as its condition of equality leads not to the emergence, but to the effacement of the possibility of 'ethical differentiation' and thus, of the appearance of truth. Because it permits all to speak democracy cannot guarantee that the 'best' will emerge and thus, is problematized on the grounds that it may impede the possibility of ethical differentiation. What the argument implies is that there is a 'fragility' inherent to democracy insofar as it does not and cannot 'found' or guarantee truth.<sup>139</sup> For the critics of democracy democratic truth-speaking is open to the threat of rhetoric and flattery; modes of speaking where *logos* and *bios* are disjoined and additionally, the Assembly offers no guarantee that others will listen and will not suppress the truth.<sup>140</sup>

What implications should we draw from Foucault's account of the fall of democracy? The portrayal of democracy in his last lecture courses as a political regime wherein truth is not disjoined from power should be viewed as central to understanding both Foucault's opus and the political ethics which arise from it. Democracy is the form of political regime which excludes the demand to obey commanded by the power of a transcendent or scientific truth characteristic of all subsequent Western political forms. Democratic *parrhesia* is a 'less violent' mode of relationality. Yet it is this very 'lesser violence' which also marks democracy as inherently weak. In the absence of a foundation which would guarantee the emergence of a particular truth in advance, democracy is traversed by an intrinsic 'fragility' as its inescapable condition. This fragility, if the regime is to remain democratic cannot be transcended since democratic polity by definition is not to determine or found truth in advance. Moreover, Foucault shows metaphysics to emerge as a desire and attempt to master and overcome the fragility of democratic truth.

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137 GSA, p.168; Paul Allen-Miller, "Truth-Telling in Foucault's 'Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres' and Persius 1: The Subject, Rhetoric and Power." *Parrhesia*. No.1, (2006), Pp.27-61. See p.33

138 CV, p.35

139 GSA, p.167

140 Foucault argues that Plato sees the death of Socrates as a suppression of *parrhesia*.

The Platonic invention of a truth beyond being emerges as a response to what Plato saw as the emergence of a lack of harmony among Athenian citizens between their *bios* and their *logos* and the consequent incapacity of speaking or recognizing true discourse in the democratic polis.<sup>141</sup> The Socratic confrontation of the citizen displaces the demos to become the medium through which true discourse might care for the polis by commanding the interlocutor to bring their *bios* in harmony with their *logos*.<sup>142</sup> The Platonic response to the fragility of parrhesiastic truth in the demos displaces the Assembly as locus of truth and relocates it to the philosophical question of essence.

Thus, the *Alcibiades* is typical insofar as the question of the unity of the relation between the subject and truth is relocated from the demos to Socrates' confrontation with a single citizen whereby truth does not emerge through a contest but in a rupture with the sensible world. The parrhesiastic question of the power of truth, of the relation between the *logos* and the *bios* is displaced by a question of the 'soul' as the object which gives access to truth.<sup>143</sup> Viewed as an "ontological reality distinct from the body" the metaphysics of the soul founds, through theoretical contemplation, an originary relation between the soul and a transcendent truth.<sup>144</sup> From the *Alcibiades* Western thought inherits a discourse of transcendence, spread by Christianity and developed by metaphysics and biopower, postulating a relation to truth via a 'monde autre' and a demand for obedience (to God, his representatives, or later, a secular scientific authority) in order to access truth.

For Foucault, democracy's fragility or weakness results from the fact that it is organised around an experience of truth not grounded in a metaphysical essence which transcends its appearance. Democracy, in other words, is a regime in which truth is not dis-jointed from power. Relations to others are not subjected to or governed by context-independent rules or normative criteria, and thus, are free from the demand for order and obedience which has dominated relationality in the history of the West. Democracy is a regime wherein truth emerges in agonal struggle and as such arguably forms the

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141 FS, pp.100-1

142 FS, p.97, 100; CV, p.69, 79, 102.

143 CV, pp.116-7

144 CV, p.117; Frederic Gros, "Situation du Cours." CV, pp.313-328. See p.321; Foucault argues that the tradition of immanent critique is also founded by Plato in the *Laches* which does not question the essence of truth but how one should 'care' for oneself in order to access truth.



ethico-political horizon of all of Foucault's interventions insofar as his genealogies target the postulation of a normalizing truth and its demand to obey. Insofar as nothing external to democratic practices ensures that a truth will emerge, nothing external to it can function as its guarantor or ground. Democracy for Foucault, is thus inherently *problematic* and, as his genealogy of parrhesia shows, it is only in the Platonic and then Christian postulation of a metaphysical essence that democracy and the inherently agonal nature of the political is displaced.

### **Democracy, Incommensurability, Polemics**

Is there any particular significance to their competing accounts of democracy as opposed to the epistemological, ontological and ethical discrepancies and disagreements between them? Initially, it would appear that, aside from what I have claimed is its significance as an ethico-political horizon in their work, the comparison of Derrida and Foucault on the question of democracy does not contribute to our ability to think through the difference between these two thinkers. In this sense, as I claimed above, the implicit debate over the nature of democracy reflects a more fundamental divergence over the decision between immanence and (quasi)transcendence insofar as democracy is conceived in terms of either the aporia or the problem. However, to limit one's analysis of the implications of their competing notions of democracy to these terms is to neglect a further essential insight both for our understanding of the polemics between Derrida and Foucault and more broadly, for the terms it suggests for thinking post-foundational accounts of the political.

I have shown that Derrida and Foucault explicitly in the cogito debate and implicitly throughout their work see one another as having failed to think the 'true' locus of differentiation and determination and thus, circumscribe one another within the limits of metaphysics in a way analogous to Heidegger's insertion of Nietzsche within the confines of metaphysics. Both Derrida and Foucault draw the conclusion that the other's failure is signaled by his accession to a transcendent metaphysical stance in excess of all relation. But I have argued that the equality in this twofold circumscription points to the relational character of their thought. That is to say, each theorist's critique of the other is in total conformity with their broader 'ontological' view such that it is confirmed only

from *within* the 'perspective' of Derrida's deconstruction or Foucault's genealogy – each is able to restrict the work of the other within the confines of the metaphysical. To the extent that their accounts are self-affirmingly finite and situated there is no position beyond the relational which they both seek to express from which the polemic between them can be decided. Yet this also means that their incommensurability points to a broader polemical/political space which cannot be described as such since it only emerges *between* them, confirmed only in the equality of their incommensurability, a polemical space that can only be inferred but never described in itself.

What are the implications of this notion of the polemical for thinking a post-foundational understanding of the political and a radical democracy? Theorists of radical democracy, I argued, share the notion that democracy is truly democratic insofar as the form and structure of democracy itself is in question. They all share the view that democracy must be open not only to differing perspectives and opinions but must admit that irreducible 'ontological' accounts of the very nature of the ethical and political are at stake. The fundamental terms of democratic contest cannot be determined in advance if democracy is to be sustained. Yet these thinkers describe the nature of this irreducible contestability in competing and often incommensurable terms. For instance, Mouffe's Schmittian conception of agonism, Rancière's notion of the emergence of the claim to equality from the 'part that has no part,' Nancy's re-inscription of *mitsein* or most of all, Derrida's and Foucault's formulations of the democratic as figuring the aporia or problem form competing accounts of essential contestability. The polemics between Derrida and Foucault are exemplary for us since they stage the paradox of post-foundational thought: they both affirm a radically democratic political form yet reduce it to their own onto-ethico-political 'perspective.' The democratic contest in which their own philosophy might be situated is thus potentially disavowed and the locus of the polemic is limited to one or another perspective upon it. This move is in a sense irreducible for two reasons. First, as Derrida and Foucault both affirm, there is no extra-relational position from which the 'medium' of relationality may be appropriated and secondly, it follows that every 'perspective' will be irreducibly finite and violent. Consequently, the incommensurability between Derrida and Foucault begins to suggest that we must expand our understanding of the political to admit that no single onto-political account or 'grander' narrative can in itself be said to finally describe the nature of

relationality, even if as it is in Derrida and Foucault, an affirmation of originary violence and finitude is built into that account.

The polemics in excess of either the Derridean or Foucaultian onto-political perspective points to an indefinitely broad democratic field, irreducible to its determination by any 'grander' narrative while simultaneously pointing to the politicization of the philosophical itself. That is to say, once we affirm this more radical relational field, irreducible to its accounting by any particular narrative no matter the lengths to which it affirms its own finitude or situatedness, is always conditioned by the polemico-political move of producing a 'grander' narrative to begin with. Here, radical democracy signals not only one or another account of the irreducibility of political contestability, but the very contestability of these accounts themselves. Thus, the possibility of the polemical is always anterior to particular polemics themselves. Philosophy is politicized, but also democratized. This is not to reduce the philosophical to the exchange of opinions but to a form of agonism in excess of any account of agonism and thus, guarantees the continued possibility of agonistics.

## Conclusion

These claims for the irreducibility of democracy and agonism as potentially forming the locus of philosophical polemics should not be seen to bring my own argument into affinity with the liberalism of a thinker like Richard Rorty. Indeed, Rorty may affirm the priority of democracy to philosophy but any similarities end there. Rorty famously claims that the affirmation of contingency that proceeds from Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault; the 'postmodern' decentering of subjectivity which grants a certain freedom and autonomy is, he argues, "pretty much useless when it comes to politics."<sup>145</sup> As such, the work of Derrida and Foucault is always reduced by Rorty to a practice of self-creation restricted to the private sphere.<sup>146</sup> This is because, Rorty argues, these philosophers and philosophy in general, has little if anything to say to his liberal conception of politics as the pragmatic pursuit of justice. Yet it is not difficult to see that Rorty's is the formulation of an extremely vague and broad liberal ideology in which his

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145 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. P.83, 65

146 *Ibid.*, p.120. See also *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

liberal “ironists” are circumscribed. The point is that Rorty disavows that his liberalism, and the positing of a public/private divide which follows from it, are themselves contingent and open to contestation. Derrida and Foucault cannot be so easily reduced to a liberal practice of self-creation, liberalism is not immune to critique and circumscription. Yet if Rorty’s attempt to ‘neutralize’ the polemical nature of the political (to use Schmitt’s terms) is relatively clearly contestable, there is nevertheless a more substantial challenge to Derrida and Foucault which emerges in recent political thought and is grounded in the claim that both thinkers fail to pose a serious challenge to contemporary liberalism and capitalism. It is this debate that we now seek to examine.

## Chapter 6: Derrida, Foucault and the Politics of Universalism

### Introduction

Can the schema of philosophy's relation to politics derived from the question of relation in Derrida and Foucault be extended beyond the specificity of their 'onto-political' accounts? Is there a limit or paradox *internal* to Derrida and Foucault which allows us to construct a 'perspectival' schematic but marks the work of these two thinkers as deficient? Or, to articulate these questions in a political register, might their strategies of politicization, of the ascription of the irreducibility of an economy of violence as 'founding' their parallel yet distinct ethico-political strategies be sufficiently emancipatory? Might a politics of *indetermining* or un-bonding the relational exhaust the political possibilities of a thought affirming its own relational status? This chapter will pursue these questions by first discussing the increasingly prominent calls for the necessity of a formulation of universality if a truly emancipator politics is to emerge in late capitalism. It will then go on to discuss Derrida's and Foucault's own theoretical engagements with contemporary capitalism and liberalism before entering their work into a dialogue with the political ontology of Alain Badiou, perhaps the most influential and powerful critic of post-Heideggerean thought and proponent of a politics of universalism.

### The Return of Universality

Wendy Brown and Diana Coole are both exemplary of a theoretical disposition which claims that there are intrinsic limits to the effectiveness of post-foundational political thought and to deconstruction and genealogy in particular. Without denying the significance, influence and potency of Derrida's or Foucault's work, Brown and Coole both ultimately question the political effectiveness of ethico-political strategies which result or at the very least, take their bearings from their work. For Brown the key insight to be derived from 'postmodern' theory is the potentially liberating effect of the affirmation that everything is at least potentially politicized insofar as it points to the

artificiality of every ordering and hierarchy in some way.<sup>1</sup> Yet this radically politicizing perspective, both Brown and Coole claim, is inherently limited because it fails to think the “collective” nature of politics. That is, post-foundational accounts suppress a second key element of the political which Brown defines as “negotiating the powers and values of enduring collectivities.”<sup>2</sup> Or as Coole puts it,

“philosophies that begin with heterogeneity and flux [...] are inimical to the subsequent derivation of a politics[...] precisely because the political is the domain of collective life, it necessarily engenders, and indeed requires, shared practices, habits, norms, languages, no matter how diverse its participants.”<sup>3</sup>

Not limited to Brown nor Coole, a number of thinkers who seek to re-articulate the status of universality itself in politics draw inherent limits to the Derridean and Foucaultian strategies of politicization. For it is generally through a re-articulation of the status of universality that the apparent inability to construct a collectivist politics in Derrida and Foucault appears as a particularly debilitating element of their work.<sup>4</sup> Thus, lying at the core of recent discussions of the inherent limits of deconstruction and genealogy is the perceived necessity of a broader conception of universality as an emancipatory category of collective action.

Whilst it is overly simplistic and reductive to suggest that a Marxist-influenced theory focuses on collective struggle while a Nietzschean one looks to individual efforts to realize the *Übermensch*, nonetheless, this apparent need for a universalizing emancipatory discourse is itself centered upon a particular understanding of late capitalism's status as *the* dominant political logic in the world today. For example, while affirming the post-foundational claim that every universal must by definition itself be contingent and particular, Étienne Balibar has argued that 'our' situation today is nevertheless defined by what he calls “real universality.”<sup>5</sup> For Balibar, 'real universality' is not a utopia or telos which philosophy or politics seeks but rather, our 'actual condition' defined by, in his words, the “actual interdependency between the various units” and the processes which

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1 Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. P.76

2 *Ibid.*

3 Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism*. London: Routledge, 2000. P.9

4 Though this is not necessarily Coole's claim.

5 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*. London: Verso, 2002. P.147

involve them.<sup>6</sup> Balibar is offering a unique description of what is usually referred to as globalisation; the concrete material processes which increasingly merge all elements of social life throughout all corners of the world. As it stands, Balibar claims, “the 'limits' or 'extremities of the world' have now been reached by various modes of exploration, or the expansion of dominant, unified technologies and institutions have incorporated 'all parts of the world.'”<sup>7</sup>

Balibar's account of the universalising processes at the core of late capitalism should however, not be understood as a re-articulation of by now well-worn truths about globalization. There is an element to his account which sets it apart insofar as he claims that our contemporary 'real universality' is defined by what he calls a 'generalization of minority status.'<sup>8</sup> Balibar argues that the notion of a hegemonic centre from which, or by which one is excluded is imagined, there is no more 'centre' to these processes but rather an indefinite “multiplication of centres.”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, a politics based on the perception of wrongs committed by a hegemonic 'centre' against particular groups or individuals through which emancipatory claims are often articulated today and which (rightly or wrongly) are generally thought to be inspired by Derrida and/or Foucault among others, appear in Wendy Brown's words, as “generic claims of particularism endemic to the universality of political culture.”<sup>10</sup> The affirmation of particularity or difference in itself thus merely certifies the differential and differentiating power of late capitalism such that the ethico-political imperative against the totalizing force of dominant logics merely reflects its own situation; difference itself functions as a form of arche-logic. One finds parallels to Balibar's account of 'real universality' in the work of a number of his contemporaries. Thus, Rancière argues that the assumption of a plurality of differences or differential identities has become a contemporary form of universality.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Alain Badiou, upon whom we will focus below, claims that 'difference' is inconsequential, difference is simply what there is and thus, implies that difference in itself cannot function as the ground of an emancipatory politics. An ethics of difference or otherness, Badiou argues, leaves one caught “oscillating between the abstract universal of capital and

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6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, P.150

10 Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments.” *Political Theory*, Vol.21, No.3 (1993). Pp.390-410. P.393

11 Jacques Rancière with Kate Nash. “Post-Democracy, Politics, Philosophy: An Interview with Jacques Rancière.” *Angelaki*. Vol.1, (1996). Pp.171-8. P.177

localized persecutions” without challenging the ‘false universality’ of capitalism itself.<sup>12</sup>

For all of these thinkers, the problem with a politics grounded in claims of difference is that it does not present a serious challenge to the ‘real universality’ of late capitalism but rather, confirms its dominance. In claiming recognition or legitimacy for a particular group (e.g., women, gays, ethnic or cultural groups, etc.) one is caught, as Rancière puts it, between either the “submission to the universal as formulated by those who dominate” or the “confinement within an identitarian perspective in those instances where the functioning of the universal is interrupted.”<sup>13</sup> The initially progressive critique of universals, ‘grand narratives’ and their hegemonic subordination of cultural, social and sexual differences also risks its reduction to a set of self-righteous groups claiming the objectivity of an identity. Accordingly, difference itself becomes fixed as a position; one’s place in the system does not change yet one acquires the status of victim or minority.<sup>14</sup> One might thus say that a politics of difference is only effected from *within* the foreclosure of the universalising effects of contemporary liberal capitalism or, as Wendy Brown puts it, the claim to difference or singularity is “partly dependent on the demise of a *critique* of capitalism and of bourgeois cultural and economic values.”<sup>15</sup> The demands of minority or particular identities are easily addressed by the capitalist system and thus, do not put that system itself in question.<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, an ‘onto-political’ strategy is required that would be in excess of the affirmations of differentiation which might be said to characterise genealogy and deconstruction insofar as their theorizing of the political is restricted to localized strategies of politicization. What is required is a politics which operates at the level of universality that can rival that of capital itself and thus, to ensure that the struggle against capital occurs on a plane other than that of capital.<sup>17</sup> Or as Balibar formulates the question: “[h]ow can we *universalize resistance* without *reinforcing* the exclusive identity and

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12 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003. P.12,7.

13 Jacques Rancière with Kate Nash. “Post-Democracy, Politics, Philosophy: An Interview with Jacques Rancière.” P.177

14 cf. Benjamin Ardit and Jeremy Valentine, *Polemization*. P.IX

15 Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments.” P.394, see also Slavoj Žižek, “Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!” *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso, 2000. P.96

16 See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*. P.209

17 Peter Hallward puts the question in these terms in “Badiou’s Politics: Equality and Justice.” *Culture Machine*. Vol.4, 2002. ([www.culturemachine.net](http://www.culturemachine.net)) (Accessed 12 June, 2009).



otherness which the system already produces and instrumentalizes?"<sup>18</sup>

If the hypotheses developed around the problem of incommensurability thus far in this thesis are to be extended beyond Derrida and Foucault, an articulation of the limits of the effectiveness of collective and universalist emancipatory strategies should also be subject to the modulations inherent to post-foundational polemics. That is to say, if Derrida and Foucault are both to be circumscribed within a logic of 'real universality' then it should be possible to locate, as the condition for this circumscription, a divergent articulation of the medium of differentiation to either the aporia or the problem. The condition for their circumscription is assumingly the production of a different 'grander' narrative within which deconstruction and genealogy can then be located. Alain Badiou's political ontology of the event is a particularly adept example<sup>19</sup> of such a circumscription since his work has been perhaps the most potent and influential post-foundational philosophy in recent years. At the core of his work lies precisely the attempt to articulate, in contrast to Derrida and Foucault, an ethics and politics of universalism which would conceive the possibility of effecting a radical transformation of the current situation. At stake between Derrida, Foucault and Badiou is thus the articulation of a terrain upon which an effective resistance to liberalism can be effected. Before bringing the insights of Badiou's political ontology to bear on Derrida's and Foucault's work, I will briefly describe the potential terms in which an opposition to liberalism is constituted by deconstruction and genealogy.

## Derrida, Foucault and Liberalism

### *Derrida and Liberalism*

To my knowledge Derrida's most rigorous and extensive engagement with the logic of contemporary liberalism occurs in the discussion of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* in *Specters of Marx*.<sup>20</sup> The target of Derrida's reading is the triumphalist discourse of neo-liberal capitalism which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union that permeates Fukuyama's book. Derrida claims that Fukuyama's discourse

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18 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*. P.17

19 Anything more than a single example far exceeds the scope of the present work.

20 Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Harper, 1993.

reflects a "new world order" grounded upon a celebratory 'death' of Marx and Marxism which signals, he argues, an "unprecedented form of hegemony."<sup>21</sup> Fukuyama is archetypal of the celebration of the apparently unchallenged arrival of the telos of liberal capitalism, that is, the conditioned emergence of the "ideal orientation" of global humanity to the telos of liberal democracy.<sup>22</sup> Once Marxism had apparently died as a political force in 1989, Fukuyama argues that the arrival of a worldwide liberal democracy is an inevitable eventuality. Any particular failures or inadequacies to have arrived at this end already are merely 'empirical' and contingent and do not reflect or affect the ideal movement of liberal democracy.<sup>23</sup> For Fukuyama, any failure in the realization of liberal democracy across the globe is only a *de facto* or empirical one and does not affect the *de jure* truth of liberalism.<sup>24</sup>

Derrida inserts his deconstruction of the hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism in the space *between* Fukuyama's 'arche-teleological' affirmation of the unstoppable universal ideal of liberalism and the merely contingent 'failures' to have emerged in its totality already. Not unlike Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism's 'neutralization' of the conflictual nature of the political, Derrida argues Fukuyama is able to posit the principle of liberalism and its universality only through a brutal and violent effacement of the war, totalitarianism, conflict and suffering which have always, and continue to, accompany any liberal discourse.<sup>25</sup> It is in other words "evil in general" which Fukuyama and those like him, disavow.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, in opposition to the teleology of Fukuyama's liberal idealism, Derrida calls upon what he names the 'ten plagues' which mark the most severe failures and tragedies of this liberal new world order: unemployment, homelessness, economic war between states, the contradictions of the free market and its control of international law; the destruction of states via foreign debt; the arms industry; nuclear proliferation; inter-ethnic wars; the mafia and drug cartels; the domination of international law by a small number of nuclear states.<sup>27</sup> These plagues are not mere contingent and ephemeral events which the spread of liberalism will overcome. They cannot be reduced to Fukuyama's "idealist" logic, but rather, are correlative with liberalism

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21 SoM, p.50

22 SoM, p.57

23 SoM, p.57

24 SoM, p.64

25 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. p.69.

26 SoM, p.69

27 SoM, pp.81-4.

itself.<sup>28</sup> As Derrida caustically puts it,

"at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity."<sup>29</sup>

In several shorter essays mirroring the terms of the critique of Fukuyama Derrida has deconstructed the hegemonic logic and claim to universality and neutrality of globalization, or what he calls *mondialisation*. Derrida insists on this other name, best translated as 'world-wideization' because he argues that the process is far broader than mere territorial changes which globalization implicitly indicates. Globalizing 'teletechnologies' create a unity or world not only through territorial expansion but rather, through the expansion of markets, technologies, values, popular culture, etc. Much like his deconstruction of Fukuyama's neo-liberal discourse, Derrida targets the contradictions which he argues are inherent to globalization. On the one hand, the name refers to the process of opening and increasing inter-connectivity of borders, markets, and so on. On the other hand, it brings with it increasing inequalities within this new global space.<sup>30</sup> Discourses around globalization generally disavow that the openings and connections the process conditions are not equally beneficial to all if in fact it is beneficial to some at all.<sup>31</sup> Globalization is, in effect, not very global at all. Accordingly, globalization he argues, is a 'pharmakon,' it is both "*for better and for worse*."<sup>32</sup> Inherent to its concept is both the chance of increased democracy but also, increasing inequality. Globalization is an inherently violent and particularising process defined by a narrow 'Christianization', a Eurocentrism and a marketization of the world, yet for globalization to succeed or proceed, it must maintain a certain universalising or unconditional element.<sup>33</sup> A globalizing process cannot maintain its identity across time and space without a certain openness to, and malleability in the face of particularities and differences of culture, language, geography, etc. Thus, it is on the basis of this inescapable unconditionality or autoimmunity of hegemony and homogeneity that globalization can be challenged.<sup>34</sup>

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28 SoM, p.86

29 SoM, p.85

30 Jacques Derrida. "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides - A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida." P.121

31 *Ibid.*, p.122

32 *Ibid.*, p.124, 123

33 Jacques Derrida, "Globalization, Peace, and Cosmopolitanism." *Negotiations*. Pp.371-386. See p.375-6

34 *Ibid.*, p.373

These readings of the spread of liberal capitalism open a disjuncture between liberalism's ideals and empirical reality. They show that the universality to which liberalism lays claim is a chimera, it is always accompanied by the spread of inequality and empirical violence. However, we should not proceed too quickly to suggest that Derrida's 'resistance' to liberalism remains caught within the confines of liberal concepts, reduced to the demand for more liberal equality, freedom and justice and so risk an extension of the state, of juridical power, of capitalism, etc. The binary trap of *de jure* and *de facto* liberalism is exceeded, Derrida suggests, insofar as it is questioned through the "inspiration" of a certain "Marxist spirit."<sup>35</sup> It is the refusal to disavow the militant and interminable critique which Marxism has produced which would put the ideal of liberalism in question by exceeding its economy altogether.

Yet, this is precisely the type of claim which draws the ire of his critics since in *Specters of Marx*, where this 'Marxist spirit' is derived, Derrida primarily seeks to question the possibility of Marx's determination of the 'actual material conditions' of existence in the name of the irreducibility of the spectral or 'hauntological' which incessantly disrupts the terms within which Marx defines the material and the living.<sup>36</sup> Marx's critique is itself shown to be subject to the vagaries of the aporetic such that a number of theorists have wondered what, if anything, is left of Marxist theory and praxis once it has undergone Derrida's intervention?<sup>37</sup> From Fukuyama to Marx to globalization and beyond Derrida presents an indefinite series of depoliticizations and repoliticizations. Neither universalist nor reducible to their particularity, neither reformist nor revolutionary, they point to a critique which is necessarily infinite and a political terrain determinable only as the locus upon which these oscillations between the determinate and indeterminate play out endlessly. It is the irresolution of the aporia itself which, for Derrida, promises the interminability of critique and politicization.

### *Foucault on Liberalism*

Perhaps the starkest contrast between Derrida and Foucault, but also between Foucault and most post-foundational political thought is drawn in the latter's 1979 lecture

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35 SoM, p.85

36 cf. SoM, p.170

37 Terry Eagleton's is the most polemical, though certainly not the only, critique of Derrida's reading of Marx. See Eagleton's and Aijaz Ahmad's contributions to *Ghostly Demarcations*.

course on neo-liberal governmentality. The novelty of his analysis emerges from the refusal to view liberalism as Schmittians such as Chantal Mouffe have as a juridical 'neutralization' of the political. Liberalism is politicized by Foucault not insofar as it forms a hegemonic effacement of its own particularist status nor its telos of consensus, but insofar as it is perceived as a broad governmental rationality or programme whose conditions of possibility lie in the production of a new object of government loosely assembled by a particular notion of the 'market.' Liberalism is not, from Foucault's perspective, a doctrine which theorizes the natural freedom of the individual, it is a governmental rationality which involves a multiplicity of interventions for the promotion of a specific form of life and social order.

*The Birth of Biopolitics* traces a series of crucial epistemological transformations in 19th and especially 20th century liberal discourse which Foucault argues mark the emergence of a new form of biopolitical government. Classical liberalism appears, Foucault argues, as a critique of biopolitical police governmentality's ability to govern the market and market relations for maximum economic development.<sup>38</sup> Liberals posit the state's perceived lack of knowledge, its incapacity to master the complexity of market forces as an internal limit to government: government should not prevail over individuals' freedom to produce and exchange and should be measured by "the regulative ideal of personal autonomy."<sup>39</sup> The constitution of the market as object of knowledge enabled the state to extend the range of activities over which it could be said to hold true knowledge and to anchor criteria for this truth in the nation's economic vitality. The constitution of the market, like madness or sexuality, allowed the formation of an "apparatus [*dispositif*] of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between truth and false."<sup>40</sup> Governmental effectiveness and legitimacy was reflected in the level of understanding of what was perceived as the independent forces of life and respect for the autonomous development of the market.<sup>41</sup>

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38 BB, Pp.4-5

39 Barry Hindess, "Liberalism, Socialism and Democracy: Variations on a Governmental Theme." *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government.* (Andrew Barry, et. al., Eds.) London: UCL, 1996. Pp.65-80. See p.65

40 BB, p.19

41 BB pp.15-17

Foucault locates a central shift from Classical liberalism in two primary moments in which hegemonic neo-liberal discourse proceeds in the twentieth century. First, early 20th century Ordo liberalism re-defines capitalist rationality by developing an anti-natural logic of the market.<sup>42</sup> The market for ordo-liberalism was not a natural reality with its own laws as classical liberals believed. Pure competition was neither natural nor real but rather, the telos and justification for political intervention and for government. Markets, in short, required state intervention to function.<sup>43</sup> Foucault argues that Ordo-liberalism's anti-natural conception of the market fulfilled a strategic function of marking a strict dichotomy between the economic base and the legal-political superstructures as untenable since the non-natural market is a field of intervention. Politically, this meant that anti-naturalism allowed for the formation of a logic of 'saving' capitalism. If capitalism does not exist in itself but is a historically singular form one had to construct a capitalist polity.<sup>44</sup> Social intervention would be employed in order to anchor and universalize the entrepreneurial and competitive social form. In the latter half of the 20th century, the 'Chicago school' theorists radicalized Ordo-liberal premises. The logic of the anti-natural market was extended to all social spheres such that the distinction between the economic and the social was effaced; the social is redefined as economic. As a result government itself was conceived as a form of enterprise whose task was to universalize competition and increasingly extend market systems of action.<sup>45</sup> No longer considered as only one sphere among others, economics increasingly defines all social behavior and relations.<sup>46</sup>

This underlying conception of anti-naturalism meant that unlike classical liberalism, the neo-liberal conception of social agents is not grounded in a universal account of human nature, but rather, in an artificially created behaviour. The ground of political legitimacy is not conceived as a natural freedom, but rather a produced artificial freedom of entrepreneurial and competitive behavior. Conceived in terms of a multiplicity of governmental practices or interventions, liberalism is thus not grounded in the promotion of a minimal state or a theoretical postulation of a 'neutral' terrain but by a multiplication and intensification of state intervention whose goal is to form

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42 BB, p.120, 161 and more broadly, the lecture of February 7, pp.101-128.

43 BB, p.121. The lecture of February 14 examines Ordo-liberal governmental practices in detail. See pp.129-158.

44 BB, pp.164-5, 175

45 Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Biopolitics' - Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality." *Economy and Society*, Vol.30, No.3, (2001). Pp.190-207.

46 *Ibid.*, and BB, p.219.

'enterprising' agents who will inhabit this terrain.<sup>47</sup> Neo-liberalism is not defined by the loss of authority of the state, instead it transfers state responsibilities to 'rational' individuals through the logic of giving life an entrepreneurial form. A behaviorally manipulated being is linked to a correlative governmentality whose role is to alter the social environment in the interest of the ascendancy of rational choice as mode of behaviour.<sup>48</sup> As Nicolas Rose argues, the 'expert' functions as a hinge between the individual and liberal governmental power in a way which requires almost no direct repression or intervention on existence. The liberal ethical demand to govern oneself allows power to bring individual conduct in line with broad liberal political and statistical objectives.<sup>49</sup> These techniques parallel and develop the confessional model; teachers, doctors, job counselors and market researchers among others, armed with the authority of scientific knowledge, manage and form individual life as enterprise to ensure the proliferation of liberal objectives of productivity, competitiveness, consumption and innovation.<sup>50</sup> Increased productivity and efficiency are no longer primarily governed by disciplinary techniques but managed through an engagement with the desire for self-fulfillment insofar as the objectives of the organisation or increases in consumption are continually aligned with the desires of the self.

### *The Critique of Liberalism and Incommensurability*

In question between these two accounts of liberalism is not only a 'theoretical' account which would identify the way in which liberal capitalism seeks to constitute a neutral and universal space of the political, the stakes are much higher. The response to the question of politicization, of how to politicize – through the strategy of the aporia or the problem – points to the locus or terrain upon which the contemporary hegemony of neo-liberalism can be resisted. For Derrida, that locus appears in the 'disjointure' between liberalism's ideals and empirical reality; a disjointure which itself points to the irreducibility of the aporetic and so, the indefinite possibility of critique. For Foucault, the conditions for the liberal determination of relation and thus revolt against them should be located elsewhere. The constitution of liberal 'neutrality' is conditioned by the

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47 Thomas Lemke, "The Birth of Biopolitics."

48 See BB, lecture of March 28, pp.267-86. See also Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity." *Foucault Studies*. No.6 (2009). Pp.25-36. See pp.28-9.

49 Nicolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. P.155

50 *Ibid.*, p.157-60

formation of an 'entrepreneurial' subject who relates to herself and to others in the terms of a governmental rationality of biopower and who thus aligns herself with the objectives of this particular mode of eliciting social order. As such, it is a different relation to the self - one freed from the demand to attach the self to an exterior norm - which Foucault's genealogy of liberalism calls for.

The Foucaultian 'desire' for the other gives a radically different orientation in the face of the hegemony of liberal capitalism to Derrida's. The violence of liberalism occurs at the level of practices; a knowledge of the market, disjoined from its own relation to power is constituted as the object by which a relation to oneself is governed by a biopolitical truth. The possibility of disrupting this determination must thus target not the impossible possibility of its conditions, but the immanent possibilities of becoming other in the disconnection of the becoming of the self from the "intensification of power relations."<sup>51</sup> It is perhaps in this sense that it is the lectures on liberal biopolitics that form the hinge between Foucault's genealogies of power-knowledge and the later works on ethics. For the structuring of possibility by liberalism occurs for Foucault in the intersection between one's relation to oneself and to the authority and power of the norm of *homo oeconomicus*. As such, it is upon the terrain of the invention of non-normalizing relations to the self upon which the possibility of exceeding liberal capitalism lies.

#### *Circumscribing Derrida and Foucault in Capitalism*

If Derrida's and Foucault's engagements with contemporary liberalism locate the terrain of its de-stabilization or resistance in terms of the ethico-political logics of a 'desire for the outside' described in chapter 4, an articulation of the limited effectiveness of these strategies would have to call for their circumscription within an articulation of the nature of the *real* universality of late capitalism. It is through this understanding of capital as contemporary medium (or media) through which differences are produced that both Derrida and Foucault, though in different ways, may be said to fail to think the 'real' nature of this medium, the terrain upon which it is to be resisted and accordingly, theorize an insufficient provocation in relation to it. From the perspective of the differentiating force of 'real universality' the ethics of alterity articulated by Levinas and radicalized by Derrida appears as a "modesty" and "moderation" on behalf of

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51 Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" p.317



philosophy.<sup>52</sup> That is, deconstruction appears to dispense with emancipatory possibilities altogether for a reflection upon the irreducibility of its own violence and hubris.<sup>53</sup> The ethical 'recoil' of deconstruction and genealogy appears as an inherently 'melancholy' thought, a "resigned" or "cynical" stance defined by the announcement of the failure of one's claim concurrent with its production.<sup>54</sup> Derrida's ethics of the aporia seems to abandon democratic solidarity to a preoccupation with absolute dissymmetry. Both Rancière and Badiou for example, argue that politically, the affirmation of dissymmetry in relation to the other is reflected by the logics of humanitarian intervention insofar as they are derived from a constitution of the other as victim and thus, restrict the other's appearance to his/her inequality and radical passivity.<sup>55</sup>

The account of the limits of the emancipatory force of Foucault's work through the perspective of 'real universality,' much like the circumscription and critique of Derrida, lies in the question of Foucault's ability to posit a terrain in excess of dominant political logics today. For example, Balibar argues that in positing the immanence of resistance to power Foucault fails to think the "transformation of the world" which would condition the possibility for an ethics of the care of the self.<sup>56</sup> In positing the absence of any gap between conditions and the conditioned Foucault, like Derrida, is caught in an interminable ethical pessimism which limits the possibilities for political transformation.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the refusal to posit any form of essential distance between the subject of resistance and the conditions which it resists leave Foucault incapable of conceiving an emancipation which would subvert the system which generates it.<sup>58</sup> Analogously, for Badiou this deficiency in Foucault is a direct result of his failure and refusal to think what the former calls the "genericity" of a given time (discussed below).<sup>59</sup> Foucault's emphasis on the particular and local targets upon which power is exercised leaves him without any

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52 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*. P.136

53 *Ibid.* P.135

54 This claim is made by Slavoj Žižek in "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" P.93 and "Melancholy and the Act." P.665. See also Alain Badiou's *Ethics*.

55 This claim is made in very similar ways by Jacques Rancière in *Disagreement*, p.135-6 and Alain Badiou in his *Ethics*, P.9

56 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*. P.15. See also Étienne Balibar, 'Foucault and Marx: The question of nominalism', in Timothy J. Armstrong, ed., *Michel Foucault Philosopher*. New York: Routledge, 1992..

57 See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*. P.251-5

58 *Ibid.*

59 Alain Badiou & Bruno Bosteels, "Can Change Be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou." *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*. (Gabriel Riera, Ed.) Albany: SUNY, 2005. P.256

effective means to found the universal 'truths' which found any genuinely emancipatory politics.<sup>60</sup>

Recall that we examined critiques of this form against Derrida and Foucault in chapter 4 and claimed that they were based on a mis-reading of these authors. It was argued that the notions of an inherent 'hesitancy' in Derrida's work and the lack of a source of resistance in Foucault were grounded in a misapprehension of the conditions of their respective 'grander' narratives, of the terms of which their ethics' of *amor fati* were articulated. Thus, if the potency of these ethico-political strategies are once again being reconsidered here it is because they appear in a totally different light in terms of the theorization of the 'real universality' of late capitalism. In other words, the critiques of the lack of emancipatory strategies in Derrida and Foucault gain their force from within an other circumscriptive horizon. A horizon which on the one hand, views capitalism as a single dominant force of the organisation of human collective existence and which conditions every element of social, political, cultural, intellectual and emotional life and, on the other hand, views the deconstructive or genealogical critique of totalization and its affirmation of difference as itself, at least in part, not lying in excess of this universality. From the horizon of 'real' universality the politicizations effected by deconstruction and genealogy are ultimately insufficient since they fail to address what is the apparently 'real' horizon within which they are constituted and as such one may perhaps go so far as to claim, as Slavoj Zizek does, that the effects of their ethico-political strategies are no different than the 'essentialisms' which they target.<sup>61</sup>

Zizek and Alain Badiou both claim that the affirmation of contingency merely reflects, rather than challenges capitalism since the latter as a system thrives upon the breakdown of traditional relations and capitalises upon new identities. In other words, it is capital itself which conditions contingency. Thus, the nihilistic destabilizing of foundations first described by Nietzsche and Heidegger is not to be located in the internal logic of philosophy or metaphysics. Rather, for both Zizek and Badiou contingency is produced by the "metanarrative" of capital which in turn forms the "historic medium of

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60 *Ibid.*

61 Slavoj Zizek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso, 2000. P.106

ontology.”<sup>62</sup> Anterior to the philosophical articulation of contingency is its constitution in the rupturing force of capitalism itself: “[c]apital is the general dissolvent of sacralizing representations which postulate the existence of intrinsic and essential relations (between man and nature, men, groups and the Polis, mortal and eternal life, etc.).”<sup>63</sup> From this perspective real universality forms the unavowed conditions for both deconstruction and genealogy. If, as I suggested in chapter 4, we could defend Derrida or Foucault by pointing to the misinterpretations and reductions of their work by Žižek, Badiou, et. al. this would be to miss the essential point here. Rather, I will seek to show below that this third circumscription too fits the model of polemics and the politicization of philosophy by which I have argued all post-foundational thought is characterised. The complexity, differences and debates among the group of thinkers discussed above precludes the possibility of a detailed analysis of all of their work. Instead we will take Alain Badiou's recent work as perhaps the most rigorous and influential example of the way in which the proponents of 'real' universality fit our model of the relational nature of political thought.

### Alain Badiou's Political Ontology

Badiou claims that his philosophy begins with the question first posed by Heidegger. Like the latter he attempts to overcome the question of 'beingness' to think Being in itself.<sup>64</sup> Both Heidegger and Badiou critique the metaphysical subordination of Being to a principle defining all beings or what Badiou, in his own characteristically mathematically derived discourse calls simply, the 'one.'<sup>65</sup> Moreover, like Derrida and Foucault, Badiou's ontology is oriented towards thinking an outside anterior to any determinate relational field; all three thinkers are defined by the effort to orient thought via an inaccessible experience of the indeterminate. Yet Badiou seeks to interrupt the relation between Being and 'beingness' or the 'one' in a way incommensurate to Heideggerian 'Abbau', deconstruction or genealogy.

Badiou's answer to the ontological question of Being *qua* Being is to assert that

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62 *Ibid.*; Alain Badiou, *Manifesto For Philosophy*. (Norman Madarasz, Trans.) New York: SUNY, 1999.P.58

63 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*. P.56

64 Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*.(Norman Madarasz, Trans.) Albany: SUNY, 2006. Pp.33-6. Although Badiou does not capitalise 'Being' I will do so in order to remain consistent with my treatment of Heidegger in chapter 1.

65 Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*. (Alberto Toscano & Ray Brassier, Eds.)London: Continuum, 2006.[Hereafter referred to as 'TW'].Pp.39-41.

Being is 'pure multiplicity' which, he argues, can be said only by mathematics. Only mathematics speaks ontological truths and thus, articulates what can be presented of pure Being.<sup>66</sup> Crucial here is the distinction he draws between multiplicity and the 'one.' The one, he claims, "is not," Being can be reduced to neither unity nor identity and cannot be defined. All unifying principles fail to express Being since, as pure multiplicity, it is "without-oneness."<sup>67</sup> As Badiou puts it, "if the one is not, it follows that the multiple's immanent alterity gives rise to a process of limitless self-differentiation."<sup>68</sup> This distinction, fundamental to Badiou's ontology proceeds from his claim that if Being is to be conceived as pure indeterminacy, inconsistency or multiplicity ontology cannot proceed in terms of any attempt to define or represent Being. Any determinate 'one' can only be the result of an operation of 'counting' pure multiples: "[t]he counting of one is no more than the system of conditions through which the multiple lets itself be recognised as multiple."<sup>69</sup> Yet since 'pure inconsistency' or without-oneness cannot be presented in itself it can accordingly only be affirmed by an axiomatic decision, one which is borne out by the presentation of what 'is' as pure multiplicity to us.<sup>70</sup> No limit or constitutive condition of the multiple can be posited since to do so is once again to elevate the sovereign position of some 'one.'<sup>71</sup>

In affirming the primacy of the axioms of mathematical set theory Badiou posits a radically different mode of thinking the indeterminate to the thinkers we have discussed at any length thus far in this thesis; Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. For Badiou only a purely axiomatic thought makes it possible to think multiplicity without thinking it as an object or referent which would then be defined, experienced, represented or ordered.<sup>72</sup> It is mathematical set theory for Badiou which prescribes the steps whereby any identity or one is determined as the result of an operation of 'counting' upon a multiplicity.<sup>73</sup> According to the axioms of set theory any situation can be posited as an infinite set, that is, as a 'generic' multiplicity determined by some counting

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66 Peter Hallward, "Depending on Inconsistency: Badiou's Answer to the 'Guiding Question of all Contemporary Philosophy.'" *Polygraph*. Vol.17. Pp.11-25., See also Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics*. Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008.

67 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. (Oliver Feltham, Trans.) London: Continuum, 2005. [Hereafter referred to as 'BE']. Pp. 24-5; TW, p.41

68 TW, p.42

69 BE, p.29

70 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*. P.32

71 TW, p.41, Peter Hallward, "Depending on Inconsistency." P.18

72 *Ibid.*, p.17

73 *Ibid.* p.19

operation.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, set theory submits that the number of possible subsets always exceeds the number of elements of any set. In an infinite set the excess of subsets would thus be immeasurable. Since Badiou asserts that every human situation is an infinite set, accordingly, in all human situations there is an immeasurable excess of parts over the whole. The upshot is thus that any human situation can only appear through the suppression of an immanent anarchic multiplicity, and as such, what 'is' cannot be articulated either in terms of a founding principle or an originary finitude.<sup>75</sup>

The central axiom of Badiou's ontology therefore states that every situation is founded upon pure inconsistent multiplicity, or what he calls a 'void' or 'empty set'.<sup>76</sup> Since any given presentation of a multiple implies the absolutely unrepresentable, "void" is the proper name of Being.<sup>77</sup> Since any unity of elements is imposed by a count the void must be what precedes it. Any presentation or counting thus necessarily forces the void back into its nothingness, indeed, pure multiplicity or inconsistency can only be inferred or deduced through the claim that any counting or determination constitutes an operation so that 'something' is prior to the count which the latter always excludes.<sup>78</sup> The count in other words, is only retrospectively apprehended as an operation.<sup>79</sup>

If from the perspective of a given count or what Badiou calls 'situation' the void appears as nothing since it cannot be counted, it is not simply non-Being since it is at the same time the stuff of which determinate or consistent presentations are made. The void is thus that which is not subject to counting or rather, that which can only be counted as 'nothing' rather than something and is in this sense 'void' for the situation.<sup>80</sup> The void is thus, in Badiou's words, inconsistent multiplicity "*according to a situation,*" it is that in the situation which presents nothing (in the set of numbers 1,2,3,4.... 0 is void since it is foundational for the set, yet cannot be counted as a 'one').<sup>81</sup> For while every situation has its way of counting its members the void is what only appears as unauthorized, unqualified and un-counted and thus, what makes up the Being of a situation.

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74 An introduction to the mathematics of set theory is provided by Peter Hallward in *Alain Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp.323-348.

75 Badiou argues that set theory posits that infinity is another name for multiplicity. See TW, p.45

76 See BE, Meditation 4.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*

79 Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and Their Time*. London: Continuum, 2007. P.69

80 BE, p.53

81 BE, p.56, italics added. Peter Hallward gives this example in *Alain Badiou*.

Any situation is structured by a particular count or criteria of 'belonging' and 'inclusion' such that counting results in a sort of meta-structure which Badiou calls the 'state of the situation' and which in turn, designates the situation as 'one.' Moreover, there is a constitutive distinction between presentation and representation in relation to the state. Presentation refers to the fact that each unit is presented or counted in the same way. Presentation is therefore always egalitarian since ontology has absolutely nothing to say about empirical processes of counting, insofar as it belongs to a set each element counts as one.<sup>82</sup> Yet the state organizes the anarchic multiplicity of subsets into a coherent 'representation' which is a function of classifying or ordering the situation. Representation supplements presentation insofar as it makes the inclusion of its elements discernible. Significantly, an element can be presented without being represented. That is, it can belong to the situation without being included in its state such that it lies on 'the edge of the void,' at the limit of pure generic or indeterminate multiplicity and thus, without being included in the state of the situation since the state is nothing but resistance to or prohibition of the presentation of the void, of generic multiplicity and it is in this sense that Badiou defines the state as an always violent inclusion whose effect is "the disjunction between presentation and representation."<sup>83</sup> For example, a family of undocumented migrants within France might be counted as a 'family' and *belong* to the situation of the French state yet they are not *included* in it; that is, they are presented, but as non-citizens are not represented in the situation of social life in France.<sup>84</sup> Their existence within the French situation is foreign to the very logic of that situation.

It is in terms of the disjunction between presentation and representation that Badiou's ontology is defined as subtractive and through which we will locate his political orientation since the aim of subtractive ontology is to describe the conditions that will allow one to move beyond the state of representation to a situation of pure presentation.<sup>85</sup> Any counting as measure, calculation or ordering establishes categories of existence so that counting is therefore never totally distinct from its terms and as such always presumes the presentation of pure multiplicity. For if, as I claimed above, every 'one' is the result of an operation of the count it follows that what 'is' counted is not one, 'something' precedes

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82 Peter Hallward, "Badiou on Inconsistency." P.12

83 BE, p.99, 130 and more broadly, BE meditation 8.

84 cf. BE, p.174

85 Gabriel Riera, "Introduction." *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and Its Conditions*. (Gabriel Riera, Ed.) Albany: SUNY, 2005. P.3

every count or order. As with Derrida and Foucault, it is the inference of the artificiality of every hierarchy or ordering of relations which for Badiou affirms the irreducibility of contingency and thus, structures the possibility of an 'emancipatory' *indetermination* or rupturing of the determination of relations. Furthermore, much as in Derrida and Foucault it is a particular understanding of 'the event' which lies at the core of Badiou's ethico-political orientation.

Strictly speaking the event is not an ontological category in Badiou's work since its status is extra-ontological. Yet it is through his concept of the event as truth-procedure that we can perhaps most clearly distinguish Badiou from Derrida and Foucault and the implications of his thought for an account of the relational. Badiou defines the event of truth as a break with knowledge and with all established criteria, as he puts it, "truth makes a hole in knowledge."<sup>86</sup> Truth is subtracted from the ordering of particular situations and so emptied of content and as such is affirmed as open to all and thus, as universal. The archetype of a truth-event is to be found in Badiou's reading of St.Paul. The event of truth which struck St.Paul on the road to Damascus, that of Resurrection, suspended all rituals and laws while founding as the sole truth-procedure necessary to be a Christian, open to all without reservation, was the public and militant avowal of that faith: "[t]he One is only insofar as it is for all: such is the maxim of universality when it has its roots in the event."<sup>87</sup> Unlike the other Apostles, Paul's concern was not with the re-foundation of the Jewish community and its laws, Paul's truth was indifferent to the state of the situation and by definition, totally inclusive.

As Balibar points out, Badiou's notion of the event marks it out as a radically different historicization of truth to both Derrida's and Foucault's.<sup>88</sup> From Badiou's perspective Derrida's de-stabilization of idealities in their dissemination in time and space subsumes the question of truth to a hermeneutical-theological question of meaning while Foucault's prioritization of truth's material effects brackets the question of truth altogether. Common to both is the absence in their thought of what Badiou's ontology claims is the generic and universal nature of any truth and thus, a failure to think the

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86 *Manifesto for Philosophy*, p.80, BE, p.327

87 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, (Ray Brassier, Trans.) Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003. P.33, 76

88 Étienne Balibar. "The History of Truth: Alain Badiou in French Philosophy." *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*. (Peter Hallward, Ed.) London: Continuum, 2004. Pp.21-38. P.28

event as such. In question is accordingly the identification of differing loci of the event, a discrepancy which carries over to ethics and politics to, in Badiou's case, constitute an altogether distinct and universalist terrain upon which dominant logics are resisted.

But how then does the event, wholly in excess of the situation, occur? It is here that some element in excess of belonging to the situation or at the 'edge of the void' (discussed above) holds a crucial function.<sup>89</sup> An element in excess of belonging to the situation provides in its indetermination an "evental site" insofar as it is a sheer singularity from which an event can emerge (consider '0' in the number series 1,2,3,4 which cannot itself count as a number or the undocumented family member who counts as a member of the family, but in himself remains "un-presented" within the situation).<sup>90</sup> An element that goes un-counted by the state of the situation is by definition singular and totally self-defining (since it is not counted by the situation) and therefore acts as a potential catalyst for change and transformation of the way a situation organises its elements since the situation cannot be maintained as it is while 'counting' this element.<sup>91</sup> For undocumented workers, a total reformulation of the logic of the state is required – a transformation of the legal, economic and socio-political fabric – if their existence as members of the situation is to be recognized.

Since the event fails to "connect" to the state of the situation, the state cannot recognize it, the event, in Badiou's words, "surges up as such beyond every count."<sup>92</sup> There can be no knowledge of the event since its very nature is to interrupt the order of knowledge so that not unlike its status for Derrida, the event is "undecidable" and "supernumerary" from the perspective of the situation.<sup>93</sup> In short, the event forges a caesura in the state since it produces a perspective of which the situation can have no knowledge and points to the void or inconsistency out of which the situation emerges. The event is simply that moment when the ordering, hierarchy and rules through which things appear in the situation are suspended and Being is exposed as what it is, as pure multiplicity and anterior to every determinate relation. It allows all elements in the situation to count as the same and thus, allows equality to serve as the rule of

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89 BE, Meditation 16.

90 BE, 174. See also p.81-9, 185-90

91 cf. BE, p.192

92 TW, p.101

93 BE, p.202, 207, Meditation 28



representation insofar as it is grounded in pure multiplicity.

Because the event always implies a rupture with the situation, it therefore connotes two further key elements; that any truth event requires the intervention of a subject and that the event is always divided into two. First, the event calls for a subject who asserts and verifies, by examining or 'investigating' one by one the connection of the infinite number of in-situation multiples to the event, the existence of the supernumerary in the situation. The subject is a local operator of the production of truth and so does not precede the event but rather, the event is what makes a process of subjectivation possible.<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, the subject's interpretative intervention declares or decides if an event is presented in a situation by 'forcing' a name out of an un-presented element of the site. The event, in other words, demands naming from the subject (e.g., Christ's Resurrection, the French or October revolution) since only through a subjective intervention on behalf of truth can an event be circulated and named. For example, an analysis of the history of France between 1789-94 can account for all the terms which belong to this historical situation (the guillotines, the massacres, English spies, etc.) but this presentation of the revolution acquires an identity through an "axial term" (in this case Saint-Just's declaration that the 'revolution is frozen').<sup>95</sup> The event is thus signified by a singular point (a declaration or act) which functions as a pivotal moment (the Road to Damascus for the early Christians or Saint-Just's declaration for the French Revolution). An event is never affirmed by all within the situation and it is thus the militant work of the subjects for whom it appears to decide its undecidability so that a truth appears to all in the situation. In Badiou's words, the subject "generate[s] veridical statements that were previously undecidable."<sup>96</sup>

It is in terms of the concept of intervention that Badiou's crucial ethical operator of 'fidelity' emerges.<sup>97</sup> Ethics is defined by the general principle of faithfully continuing a truth-process, to preserve the rupture with a situation which the event signifies and is characterised by Badiou through the ethical imperative of "keep going!" or "never forget what you have encountered."<sup>98</sup> Fidelity sets forth the command not to subsume the event

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94 Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.48; BE, p.391

95 BE, p.180

96 BE, p.417

97 BE, *Meditation 21* and *Ethics* pp.41-2

98 *Ethics*, p.52

to the law of a situation but rather, to maintain its singularity and transform one's own life through its terms. Moreover, insofar as the event exceeds a situation and demands an intervention, if it is to be maintained qua event it must divide into two.<sup>99</sup> Since the event is indiscernible in the situation and only guaranteed by an intervention there must thus be a division between those who do and do not affirm it.<sup>100</sup> There is always an essential division between the state's counting and a revolutionary event since the event is always illegal for a state which cannot account for it.<sup>101</sup>

### *Badiou's Emancipatory Political Ontology*

What relevance does this ontology hold for the terms of the debate over the status of the universal in the resistance to dominant logics or systems? Like Derrida, Foucault and all post-foundational thought, Badiou's ontology indicates a re-articulation of philosophy's relation to politics. Much as for his two predecessors, ontology does not serve to generate philosophical or scientific principles which seek to explain or determine the political, philosophy is actively engaged in politics. For Badiou, politics (like the three other "generic procedures" of love, art and science) forms philosophy's 'conditions.'<sup>102</sup> Philosophy does not produce truths but rather, truths condition philosophy, that is, philosophy "seizes truths" such that its role is to think the events that orient it.<sup>103</sup>

For Badiou, politics is defined by its collective and universal nature. Unlike mathematics or love whose subject may be finite (for Badiou love is between two people), the subject of politics is by definition universal and infinite.<sup>104</sup> Thus, the condition for an emancipatory politics is that its truths be collective and universal, that is to say, addressed and open to all who proceed from the event.<sup>105</sup> An 'unqualified equality' is the only criterion of politics: "equality is politics, such that *a contrario*, any in-egalitarian statement, whatever it be, is anti-political."<sup>106</sup> To the extent that politics for Badiou is intrinsically collective and universal, it is thus opposed to the finitude at the core of the 'weakness' of the Derridean and Foucaultian ethico-political orientations. Indeed, its universal

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99 BE, Meditation 20; TW, p.101

100 *Ibid.*

101 BE, p.205

102 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*. (Jason Barker, Trans.) London: Verso, 2005.; *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Pp.33- 6.

103 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*. P.123-7, 37-8

104 Peter Hallward, *Alain Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. P.224

105 Badiou, *Metapolitics*. P.141

106 BE, p.347

character denotes that there is no intrinsic limit to collective politics, it is by definition infinite since politics presents the infinite of every situation.<sup>107</sup> Activity is therefore qualified as political only insofar as it seeks a total transformation of the situation in, as Peter Hallward puts it, “the interest of the universal interest.”<sup>108</sup> Any activity restricted by a principle narrower than an absolutely infinite, universal and collective demand for equality is simply not politics but only a negotiation of determinate relations *in situ*, a “mixture of power and opinions.”<sup>109</sup>

Badiou calls the axiomatic prescription of equality 'justice.'<sup>110</sup> Philosophy subtracts the axiom of pure equality from within social processes and thus, amounts to a practice which calls for a justice open to all.<sup>111</sup> The axiomatic character of Badiou's politics of equality follows directly from his ontology since politics is that activity whereby pure belonging or presentation is abstracted from all representations.<sup>112</sup> Politics is grounded in the ontological principle that all elements which belong to a situation are presented in the same way. Insofar as equality is subtractive, its criteria cannot be defined by any positive content nor prescribe its terrain or terms, it is only defined by the 'negative' moment of rupturing, of the undermining of determinate relations, that is, of moving from consistency to inconsistency.<sup>113</sup> As such, political truth is always a “trial and trouble” and accordingly, also a “rupture and disorder.”<sup>114</sup> Rather than stabilizing or legitimizing social relations, it presents only their moments of inconsistency. No matter how open a situation might be to accommodating particular claims or terms, there are for Badiou moments of transformation so extreme that the situation will cease to be the same situation it was prior to them. The French, Russian or Cultural revolutions did not occur through a reformist democratic openness to differences but through radical disruptions of the logic by which members of those states were represented.<sup>115</sup>

In distinction to Heidegger's *dike* and the Derridean and Foucaultian accounts of

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107 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, pp.142-3.

108 Peter Hallward, *Alain Badiou*. P.229.

109 Badiou, *Metapolitics*. P.97, Peter Hallward, *Alain Badiou*. P.229-230

110 *Ibid.*, p.97

111 *Ibid.* P.142

112 Peter Hallward, “Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice.”

113 *Ibid.*, p.104

114 *Ibid.*, p.100, quoted in Peter Hallward, *Alain Badiou*. P.224

115 *Ibid.*, p.39-40. Sam Gillespie, “Beyond Being: Badiou's Doctrine of Truth.” *Communication & Cognition*. No.36, Vol.1, 2003. Pp.5-30.

the founding-unfounding of relation which proceed from it, Badiou's notion of justice seeks absolutely no "foundation of social bond."<sup>116</sup> Unlike Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault who all insist upon the de-politicization that always accompanies every rupture of the social bond, justice for Badiou involves only "attempts to seize the egalitarian axiom in a veritable political sequence."<sup>117</sup> In other words, while none of these thinkers seek to legitimize any particular foundation, they all in some sense see the founding or determining moment as irreducible. This irreducibility in turn sets the terms for the affirmation of finitude which by contrast, Badiou's axiomatic universalism totally rejects.

### Intersections Between Badiou, Derrida and Foucault

There are nevertheless a number of intersections between Badiou's and Derrida and Foucault's ethico-political strategies. First, the fundamental point of convergence between them lies with the aim of thinking the relational in itself, that is, the pure plurality of human existence. Once every order or hierarchy is conceived as artificial, philosophy's relation to the political is theorized as the attempt to think being-with in itself and is not involved in the proposition of principles to legitimize and determine the good order. Political thought is restricted to positing the anteriority of an excess of all determinate relations and of theorizing the nature of the event of its reduction or determination (as disavowal of the aporia, the coagulation of power relations or the count). In relating every determinate order back to the contingency of its origins theory has a liberating effect, for if no particular order is natural or necessary none can claim legitimacy. Moreover, if every order is the result of a determination then philosophy in turn must affirm its own status as departing from particular political conditions, the anteriority of the indeterminate is only ever thought from *within* the determinate and to fail to affirm this relational point of departure is to return philosophy to its sovereign position governing the empirical.

But crucially, for Badiou, politics does not involve the affirmation of differences which escape any determination and thus, place dominant logics in question as it seems to for Derrida and Foucault. Difference for Badiou is not an emancipatory operator since

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116 Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*. (Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens, Eds. & Trans.) London: Continuum, 2003. P.58

117 *Ibid.* P.54

the accommodation of differences does not pose a radical challenge to the state. Claims for recognition and legitimacy by particular communities or identities remain congenial to the logic of liberal capitalism insofar as they rely upon a decision of the state to supply their recognition and are thus inserted within its logic. On the other hand, truths eliminate differences and testify to the latter's insignificance since truth points to the infinity of the collective. Truth is, Badiou says, “*indifferent to differences.*”<sup>118</sup> It is the collective, axiomatic and universal nature of truth and of politics which marks the ultimate discrepancy of Badiou from Derrida and Foucault as well as most post-foundational political thought.

Everything here hinges upon the terms in which the conditions of the event are articulated and the accordant terrain upon which its effects might be located. From the perspective of Badiou's subtractive ontology, both Derrida and Foucault err insofar as they trace the de-stabilization of a dominant order in such a way that it is forever relegated to 'real universality's' margins. In the indefinite unveiling of the aporetic or problematic status of any universal, Derrida and Foucault both renounce the possibility of ever constructing a politics in Badiou's sense, a universal and axiomatic claim to equality. A political ethics oriented by a 'desire for the other,' in what Badiou would see as the self-limiting of its articulation to particular and marginal sites of determination, fails to produce any account of politics which might productively subvert the logics within which it is articulated.

For Badiou deconstruction constitutes a rigorous thought of the indeterminate or in his words, “inexistent,” yet in refusing to stray from what he describes is for Derrida the “*impossibility of the inscription of the inexistent*” he thus restricts the transformative potential of the event.<sup>119</sup> For while both Badiou and Derrida orient their notions of the event around something which totally exceeds the situation, the latter confines its appearance to a 'trace' of the ineffable while Badiou situates the transformative potential of the event in the evental site and thus, from within the situation (yet in excess of the count of the

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118 *Ethics*, p.27

119 Alain Badiou, “Homage to Jacques Derrida.” *Adieu Derrida*. (Costas Douzinas, Ed.) London: Routledge, 2007. Pp.34-46. P.40. A briefer version of the same argument is made in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2*. London: Continuum, 2009. Pp.545-6 and *Pocket Pantheon*. (David Macey, Trans.) London: Verso, 2009.

situation).<sup>120</sup> As such, Badiou seeks to overcome the indefinite oscillation between same and other, inside and outside in terms of which deconstruction operates. So while for Derrida determinately deciding the truth of the event is ultimately impossible, it is precisely this apparent ethico-political impasse generated by deconstruction which Badiou moves to overcome by justifying every commitment in terms of its universal and infinite nature.<sup>121</sup> Yet, if for Badiou Derrida attempts to point to the indeterminate *as indeterminate* in thinking its withdrawal from every presence, Foucault's error seems to be the failure to think the event at all. Since change is always located within and between given fields of power-knowledge by Foucault, what is missing from his account is that which totally exceeds the field itself, that is, the event of truth.<sup>122</sup> Since Foucault always locates what he calls the event as occurring within power relations, his analyses forever remain at the level of systems of knowledge within the situation while we know that for Badiou, truth is wholly in excess of knowledge. Accordingly, the political implication of Derrida's and Foucault's failures to think the event in Badiou's terms is that the possibility of a collective and absolutely universalist politics subtracted from differentiation is totally foreclosed. In short, what seems to be lacking in both thinkers is the possibility of accounting for the conditions for a radical transformation of the determinate.

Yet, if I am suggesting that Badiou implicitly and occasionally, explicitly circumscribes the genealogical politics which, in distinct forms, emerges from Derrida's and Foucault's work to enunciate their situatedness *within* the logic of the situation it should nevertheless be possible to suggest the reverse. The central focus of such a circumscription would have to revolve around the key terms of Badiou's ontology, that is, the theorization of the relation between Being and the event. An enduring criticism of Badiou's work since *Being and Event* is the apparent elitism and heroism upon which his notion of the event relies.<sup>123</sup> Why, for instance, are some moments (St. Paul, the French or Russian revolutions) named as events and not others? We know that for a moment to be an event for Badiou it must be universal and that politically this means that it must concern all as posited by the axiom of equality. But, as John Mullarkey points out, the

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120 cf. Peter Hallward's "Translator's Introduction" to Badiou's *Ethics*. P.XXVII

121 *Ibid.* P.XXVI

122 Alain Badiou & Bruno Bosteels, "Can Change Be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou." P.256

123 See Simon Critchley, "Fault Lines: Simon Critchley in Discussion with Alain Badiou." (Jon Baldwin & Nick Haeffner, Eds.) *Polygraph*. No.17, 2005; John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2007.

question thus lies with how this universal 'all' is to be determined, how the infinite count in itself to be decided: "how is equality to be fleshed out – in welfare, in rights, or just in counting?"<sup>124</sup>

In posing this sort of question are we not entering once again the terrain of deconstruction? That is, of the aporetic oscillation produced in the relation between the universal and the singular in its articulation as a political process. For example, if the truth-event is to include all without limit we are driven towards irreducible aporias of an infinite count: should a city welcome its enemies, should I give to the poor until I am poor? Or alternately, as Mullarkey argues, if we restrict, as Badiou does, the political process to some (apparently arbitrary) qualifier – which in Badiou's case is the limitation of universal emancipation to humans and for instance, not animals, plants or even robots do we not unjustifiably restrict in some way the universality of the universal?<sup>125</sup> As Laclau has argued, Badiou's formalist universalism may be operative at the purely mathematical level, but at the level of social analysis it cannot be maintained.<sup>126</sup> No universal can transcend its singular and particular inscriptions and thus, no universal can be emptied of all content. It is far from clear that Badiou's political ontology escapes the complexity, vagaries and aporias of the indefinite differential movements of idealities in time and space theorized by Derrida once universality is implemented as a political prescription and process.

This line of questioning also points us towards a possible Foucaultian circumscription of Badiou whose contours have been pointed to by Peter Hallward. For Badiou's equation of politics exclusively with universal and collective militant criteria forecloses political engagement with potentially progressive yet ultimately perhaps merely reformist 'social work' (Hallward's examples include poverty reduction, welfare, education). Maybe more importantly, Badiou's political ontology threatens to veil what for Foucault are the local sites, procedures and rationalities which make up the 'micro-physics' of power and which, in their coagulations or sedimentations, make up a dominant political logic.<sup>127</sup> For Foucault, it is because mechanisms of power do not

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124 John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy*. P.117.

125 *Ibid.* P.121

126 Ernesto Laclau, "An Ethics of Militant Engagement." *Alain Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. Pp.120-137. P.126

127 See Peter Hallward, *Alain Badiou*. P.279

emanate from a single site or centre that they cannot be resisted in terms of a single logic. Reference to a single term of 'state' effaces both the multiplicity and complexity of power-knowledge and restricts the irreducible resistance which accompanies, in differing intensities, every application of power.

As we have seen, both Derrida and Foucault problematize the logics of revolutionary politicizations in ways which appear inimical to Badiou's political ontology of the event. For Derrida the possibility of politicization is irreducible yet since any particular politicization will necessarily be finite it will always entail a relative depoliticization which, in turn, opens the possibility of further politicization. In Foucault's genealogy, struggle is simply always possible, everything can be politicized and it is precisely in the attempt to produce a rationality for, or the conditions of, revolt that we tame and reduce it. Derrida and Foucault both view difference as irreducible so that the event or the emergence of the new cannot ultimately be closed. It is thus in some sense the aim of their work to liberate the power of this contingency where it has been disavowed or determined by philosophy, ethics and politics. Determinate relations are in this sense only contingently determinate since there is an absolute irreducibility of the event from the conditioned. In locating transformative possibilities as emerging within determinate relations both thus preclude the need for an account of the wholly exceptional, non-relational and heroic character of the event in Badiou's terms.

## Conclusion

Does this mean we can place Badiou within the logics of perspectivism by which I've defined post-foundational onto-political accounts? Is Badiou's ontology and his universalist politics amenable to the schema of polemics through which I have framed a dialogue between Derrida and Foucault? The defense of such a claim would require an extensive engagement with Badiou's opus and with his recently translated *Logic of Worlds* in which some of the questions we have posed to Badiou are further addressed. This work exceeds the scope of this thesis yet I think we can nevertheless begin to suggest, as I have done above, the terms upon which such an operation would proceed. Moreover, Badiou's work is in a sense an even more coherently circular 'grander' narrative than either Derrida's or Foucault's. Badiou's account of ontology as mathematics, as pure



multiplicity elaborated by set theory affirms his own starting point within the terms of his ontology. That is, he affirms that the maths of set theory itself is born of an event and sustained by fidelity (Badiou's among others).<sup>128</sup> Badiou's preference for multiplicity is an explicitly ethical event and has the status of an axiomatic "decision."<sup>129</sup> Yet, to suggest that Badiou thus affirms the relational situatedness of his account would be to overstate the point. For the axioms of set theory through which his ontology emerges testify not to the finitude of the accounts origins but rather to the infinite and limitless nature of multiplicity.

Moreover, Badiou's work certainly poses a challenge to the polemico-perspectivist account of incommensurable political ontologies developed in this thesis. His critiques of Nietzsche's will to power as an attempt to think the ineffable and of his 'reduction' of his truths to his own enunciative position evidence the difficulties of thinking Badiou's ontology in the same terms as Derrida's or Foucault's.<sup>130</sup> Yet Badiou's is an oeuvre which is still being developed and re-articulated. His recently published *Logics of Worlds* begins to address some of the questions we have raised here over the difficulties his account faces in thinking within the situation and it is perhaps in looking to work he is currently producing that we may seek to further think his relation to the work of Derrida and Foucault.

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128 BE, p.23-81 passim

129 TW, p.41

130 On Badiou's critique of Nietzsche see "Who is Nietzsche?" *Pli*. Vol.11, 2001. Pp.1-11 and *St.Paul*, pp.60-2.

# Conclusion:

## Perspectivism in Excess of Derrida and Foucault

*'In every philosophy there comes a point at which the 'conviction' of the philosopher enters on stage.'*  
Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

### The Question of Perspectivism, Again

We conclude by returning to the fundamental paradox articulated in the introduction to this thesis: 'how are we to think the differences and divergences between political ontologies which provide an account of the nature of the relational while simultaneously affirming the finite and political status of that very account?' This thesis has not sought a resolution to this apparent dilemma, nor is it certain that one is or should be found. Indeed, rather than resolve the paradox, the aim of this thesis has been to question and explore the conditions and implications that issue from it. As the introduction to this thesis suggests, post-foundationalism signals the essential contestability of *political concepts* yet my claim has been that this also implies the contestability of *conceptions of the political* and in turn, a shift is required in the way we think the relation between philosophy and politics. It is here that an account of the political through the question of relationality becomes indispensable. For if any concept of the political is contingent, the affirmation of this contingency should also involve a reversal of the relation between philosophy and political ontology. Philosophical discourse itself must be situated within the post-Heideggerean depiction of the (dis)ordering movements of political determination if it is to accord with the post-foundational thesis. Once the autonomy of philosophy's enterprise of providing and justifying foundations for relational existence is disturbed by the affirmation that this gesture is pre-eminently violent and political, then the priority of the philosophical over the political can no longer be maintained. The 'political', as event of determination, can no longer be reduced to any particular sphere or institutions, and moreover, every philosophy must be affirmed as emerging from a given determination of the political.

The full implications of this account of political ontology only emerge insofar as we think it from out of the question of relation – something which political thought has

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<sup>1</sup> BGE, 8

generally failed to do. The claim underlying this thesis has been that through an analysis of the question of relationality it becomes apparent that any account of the event of determination itself proceeds from out of its situatedness within the determinate. There is an irreducible opacity inherent to every political ontology. While politics can no longer lay claim to secure grounds, the gesture of rethinking the ontological cannot be separated or abstracted from the determinate conditions into which it is 'thrown.' Insofar as it does so it will necessarily be partial, oblique and contingent. It is by placing the formulation of this inherent partiality and contingency of political thought at the core of the analysis that this thesis has demonstrated that a polemic can be traced between Derrida and Foucault in terms of their accounts of (de)politicization, the polemic between them is shown to result from their pursuit of two parallel yet radically incommensurable philosophico-strategic accounts of de- and re-politicization. Throughout, it has been by foregrounding the question of relation that the analysis of Derrida's and Foucault's 'grander' narratives has proceeded without effacing the fact that philosophy is in itself political, that is, inextricably tied to determinate relations. That is to say, any account of the relational itself begins from out of particular and determinate (social, linguistic, economic, sexual, political, etc.) relations. Accordingly, any descriptions of the nature of the political as a contingent field of relations and the concordant determinations or reductions of this contingency are themselves affected by and have effects upon that field. Any absolute autonomy philosophy might hold in relation to the political is irrevocably undermined.

In positing that the dialogue between Derrida and Foucault occurs over the question of the 'medium' or terrain wherein relations are contingently determined a number of questions emerge that cut across their works. First, epistemic questions about the possibility of a knowledge that can conceive this 'medium' while simultaneously avowing its own situatedness. Accordingly, chapter 2 had sought to show both that the polemic between Derrida and Foucault is irreducible, but also that they pursue analogous philosophical orientations, in turn often resulting in parallel themes in their analyses. Second, it was through ontological questions about the being of thought, its relation to its outside and relationality's own emergence or generativity that Chapter 3 examined the simultaneous convergence and divergence between Derrida and Foucault through the scope of their methodological principles (the mode by which their questioning proceeds

in negotiating its own finitude and contingency). Third, the question of the possibility of providing an orientation for a self-affirmingly situated thought was pursued in chapter 4 through an engagement with the question of ethics (the way by which their philosophies admit their own inherently violent or reductive nature yet nevertheless seek to formulate a 'lesser' violence). Finally, the question of the possibility of a situated and finite thought that might nevertheless maintain an emancipatory orientation was pursued in the engagement with politics in chapter 5 (Derrida and Foucault's re-articulations of philosophy's relation to the political, of the notion of emancipation and of democracy).

It is thus in tracing the polemic between Derrida and Foucault as two ways of thinking the relational that I have sought to demonstrate that there exists a politicized or polemical space that exceeds their accounts and which appears only negatively – inferred in the moments where their divergence points to the fundamentally incommensurable nature of their work. It is the self-affirmingly particular and situated origins of their thought that points to the fact that something of the relational by definition always exceeds their responses to the above questions (since any response to the question is always accompanied by an irreducible opacity).

In addition, in chapter 6 I sought to suggest that this form of polemic is not restricted to Derrida and Foucault, but might also be extended to more recent post-foundational thinkers such as Alain Badiou, who have sought to overturn the theme of finitude as it emerges in Heideggerean and post-Heideggerean thought. While Badiou may provide one of the most powerful critiques of Derrida and Foucault, his ontology too may be susceptible to a circumscriptive critique through either a Derridean or Foucaultian perspective and thus, to the vagaries of polemics of the relational described in this thesis. That is to say, one may locate moments of incommensurability between Badiou, Derrida and Foucault which in turn, produce a recoil in Badiou's text onto its own situatedness in a relational field which ultimately, it cannot account for. What is more, this incommensurability – between Derrida, Foucault and perhaps Badiou – itself points to a broader account of the relational. For if there are inherent limits to every political ontology, and no particular ontology may claim a final interpretation of those limits (since this interpretation is always liable to be circumscribed by another one), then we can infer that there is an absolute excess of the relational anterior and irreducible to any

'grander narrative' which seeks to describe it. In other words, there is by definition something of the relational which inherently resists or withdraws from its inscription by any particular political ontology. As a result, if there is already broad agreement among post-foundational thinkers of the polemical nature of all political concepts, then the point of debate should be transformed from the traditional question of the grounds of legitimacy to competing (and possibly incommensurable) accounts of the polemical, to the violence and determination of relationality itself.

## Formulating Polemics

There are certainly resonances between the formulation of philosophical polemics developed in this thesis with other recent accounts of the polemical and of incommensurability, Jean-Francois Lyotard's and Jacques Rancière's in particular. It is important to briefly review them here in order to underline the particular questions that my own account of polemics raises for political thought. Perhaps most well known and influential of these is the conception of incommensurability in the work of Lyotard. Lyotard's claim in *The Postmodern Condition* that any narrative can be shown to fail to meet its own criteria enacts the shift discussed in my Introduction, from a question of foundations to an examination of their conditions and effects. Since there is no ultimate foundation, Lyotard argues, agonism is irreducible. In the works following this text, Lyotard continues to seek to develop what he describes there as "a theory of games which accept agonistics as a founding principle."<sup>2</sup> In *Just Gaming*, written several years later, Lyotard supplements his notion of agonism with a conception of "incommensurability." Located in the intersections between 'language games' (a term Lyotard appropriates from Wittgenstein denoting systems wherein meaning is produced), incommensurability follows from Lyotard's claim that the absence of any criteria of judgment over competing language games implies that such judgments can only be existential choices, resonates with my own argument for the impossibility of finally deciding between 'grander' narratives.<sup>3</sup> In *The Differend*, the titular term replaces the notion of 'incommensurability' developed in *Just Gaming*. *Differends*, Lyotard argues, occur between incommensurable language games, in his words, they represent "a case of a conflict between (at least) two

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2 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. P.16

3 See Jean-Francois Lyotard & Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*. (Wlad Godzich, Trans.) Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1985. P.16

parties that cannot be equitably resolved for a lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments.”<sup>4</sup> There are only, he claims, differends or “abysses” between perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Here, Lyotard's formulation of the differend accords with my own claims for the ultimate irreducibility of polemics. Agonism is irreducible and irresolvable since the means of establishing a common 'reality' between perspectives or theories is itself an agonal question or object of agonism.

Rancière explicitly distinguishes his own formulation of polemics from Lyotard's conception of the *differend*. Rancière argues that the *differend* is restricted to naming the conflict inherent to the “structure of community,” that is, it names a merely legalistic or 'police' problem.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, to Lyotard's *differend* Rancière opposes his own formulation of polemics as 'disagreement' or 'dissensus' which he describes as

“a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying... It is the conflict between one who says white and another who says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness.”<sup>7</sup>

How does this notion of incommensurability as 'disagreement' differ from Lyotard's? Rancière locates the divergence in political terms. For Lyotard politics is located in every (inherently violent) decision over the linking of language games or 'phrases' while ethics would involve “bearing witness” to and avowing inherent incommensurability.<sup>8</sup> While Rancière agrees that conflict occurs at the intersection of two heterogeneous logics, crucially, he diverges from Lyotard in claiming there is a fundamental equality underlying any disagreement. Disagreement, which amounts to politics itself, is always between the 'police' and the fundamental equality which any hierarchy or order presumes. That is, because any order or hierarchy presumes and requires a basic shared understanding of orders and rules it must implicitly presume the fundamental equality which it explicitly denies.<sup>9</sup> So while for Lyotard a *differend* is always violently decided and reduced by what he calls a “wrong,” for Rancière a “wrong” refers to the distortion by any order of the

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4 Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. (George van den Abbeele, Trans.) Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989.

5 *Ibid.*, p.150

6 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*. P.18. For Rancière 'police' refers to all dominant social logics.

7 *Ibid.*, P.X

8 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend*, sections 22-3.

9 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, p.16

equality anterior to and conditional of any inequality.<sup>10</sup> Polemics thus occur at the intersection of “equality and its absence together.”<sup>11</sup>

Much like the formulation of philosophical polemics developed in this thesis, both Lyotard and Rancière think the political as a process whereby the foundations (or lack thereof) of social order are in dispute such that there are no criteria by which the dispute can be settled. Both seek to theorize polemics in terms of incommensurability, that is, without a referent, standard or criteria outside of or not subject to polemics. Moreover, much as it is formulated in this thesis, both claim that philosophy or 'theory' does not attain an autonomy or Archimedean position beyond the polemical. Yet the very difference between Lyotard and Rancière itself points to the more all-encompassing and irreducible description of the polemical developed in this thesis. For there is nevertheless an irreducible incommensurability that takes place between Lyotard's fundamental notion of the heterogeneity of language games or phrases and Rancière's own axiomatic affirmation of a fundamental equality.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, while Rancière assents to Lyotard's notion that all 'translation' marks a violent betrayal of the incommensurable, he argues that Lyotard's formulation of this violence functions as an alibi for inaction. That is, Lyotard's 'wrong' functions as yet another 'ethics of alterity' (discussed in chapters 5 and 6) which produces an “experience of impotence” whereby “any process of emancipation is perceived as the disastrous attempt to deny the disaster that enslaves the mind to otherness.”<sup>13</sup> As such, if we are to follow Lyotard the only possibility we are left with is an avowal of our finitude in speaking the unnameable.<sup>14</sup> Politics, if it is to be emancipatory, must proceed from a principle of equality that contests the constituted differences maintained by the police. Yet conversely, one might claim in defense of Lyotard that heterogeneity precedes any conception of equality. Thus, the fundamental equality that for Rancière is anterior to and conditional of disagreement itself might be said to presuppose that a cultural or social *differend* has

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10 *Ibid.*, p.39

11 *Ibid.*, p.89

12 The axiomatic status of universal equality in Rancière's work brings him close to Badiou, something the latter acknowledges, though not uncritically. See Badiou's *Metapolitics*, pp.107-23.

13 Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics.” Unpublished manuscript written in response to papers presented at *Fidelity to the Disagreement* conference, Goldsmiths College, London, 17 September 2003.

14 *Ibid.*

already been effaced.<sup>15</sup> A certain heterogeneity (cultural, linguistic, etc.), as Lyotard formulates it, would always be prior to any equality.

Accordingly, from these seemingly irreducible oscillations between their competing accounts of the polemical, it seems that between Lyotard and Rancière there emerges two incommensurable circumscriptions, their divergence constituted by the incommensurability of the sources of polemics that they posit. From this admittedly extremely brief analysis of these two influential notions of polemics and incommensurability it follows that, in their intersections and accordant mutual circumscriptions, it is an irreducible polemics itself and not heterogeneity in Lyotard's sense nor equality in Rancière's that emerges as anterior condition. Any attempt to define or 'ground' the polemical – no matter how minimally both thinkers seek to do so – is always itself a polemical move.

These claims should not be understood to imply that all philosophy is thus relativized, but rather, it is *politicized*. Here, Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism becomes prescient. Recall that in chapter 1 I argued that Nietzsche's perspectivism does not undermine his 'grander narrative' of will to power, indeed, it is totally in accord with it. There is no will to power 'in-itself' but only its transitory and partial expressions in particular perspectives. However, this does not entail a vicious circularity between Nietzsche's affirmation of the irreducibility of the situatedness of his account and the 'universalizing' objectives of will to power as ontology. Instead, will to power as a 'grander narrative' is evaluated on the grounds of its capacity to account for and *circumscribe* within its terms, other competing accounts (by metaphysics, positivism, etc.). Indeed, Nietzsche already understood that once philosophy lost its metaphysical pretensions, it could thereafter only be perspectival. That any 'grander narrative' or 'weak ontology' it were to produce would necessarily have to recoil back upon the site of its enunciation. Nietzsche had therefore already partially discerned the means by which post-foundational thought would proceed. That is, as I have claimed, in terms of polemics in which one seeks to account for the conditions of the interlocutor's account. Philosophy is thus politicized insofar as it becomes an *agonism* between onto-political perspectives competing over the power to circumscribe the other within their grander narratives.

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15 This claim is developed by Jean-Louis Déotte in "The Differences Between Rancière's *Mésentente* (Political Disagreement) and Lyotard's *Différend*." *SubStance*. Vol.33, No.1 (2004). Pp.77-90



Yet because the articulation of relationality, polemics and incommensurability in this thesis rarely exceeds the scope of the encounter between Derrida and Foucault (with the exception of the relatively brief discussion of Badiou's political ontology in chapter 6) its scope is admittedly partial and inconclusive. In other words, the claim that these formulations extend beyond the particularity of the two philosophical oeuvres examined here can only be a hypothetical one; a premise from which future research might proceed. If the formulation of agonism that emerges in this thesis is to be maintained then it must be sought in a broader depiction of the *topos* and the intersections between the multiple and varying articulations of the relational operative in philosophy and political today. In this regard, a number of thinkers might be brought into such a discussion. For instance, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière all proceed from basic principles analogous to those of Derrida and Foucault. All of these thinkers situate their thought in relation to localized and finite conditions and relations, all affirm the inherent contingency of any order and all seek to avow the artificiality and violence of any ordering or hierarchy – both conceptual and political. Yet to proceed from these general claims to a confirmation of the extension of our formulation of agonism and perspectivism would require an analysis of the terrain or media upon which the ultimate incommensurabilities between these thinkers might be said to emerge, the points at which their 'grander' narratives might be said to make them deaf to one another. This is both to affirm the particularity and finitude of this thesis as well as an appeal for further engagement with the multitude of questions it begs.

A final and significant question remains here over the relation of philosophy and politics. How are we to conceive 'theory's' relation to the political once we affirm the situated and agonal nature of all theory as we have done here? Once philosophy is politicized to the extent it is in this thesis how is the proper territory (if there is one) of philosophy to be mapped out? The aim of this thesis has not been to offer definitive answers to these questions but rather, to begin to relocate the nature of our questions regarding philosophy's relation to politics. That is to say, it is this politicization of philosophy – conceived through the question of relation in the work of Derrida and Foucault – that this thesis has sought to trace. The way in which these broader questions might now be addressed remains the object of further work.

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