Epistemological Regularities of the Surface Gaze in the works of Michel Foucault and Clement Greenberg

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the concept of the "surface gaze" as it appears and is developed in the works of two very different thinkers: French post-structuralist philosopher and historiographer of the human sciences Michel Foucault, and American modern art critic Clement Greenberg. The emphasis is placed on the shared epistemological determinants of the "medical gaze" as it is formulated by Foucault, and the "flat picture plane" as it is articulated by Greenberg. This will entail a thorough examination of the philosophical and, in the case of Greenberg especially, art historical traditions from which both emerge. Conclusions, supported by respective and comparative assessments of the intellectual legacies of each, are formulated from close readings of seminal texts, specifically Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (1963) and Greenberg's most influential writings on modern art, including "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Modernist Painting" (1960).

For Carl Arnold, who gave me books and time...

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Introduction

My concerns are essentially formal and epistemological: I will trace the emergence of modern "visuality" in two disparate fields, at some, though not too great, historical distance from each other. My investigation consists of a reading of Michel Foucault's *Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, as well as a number of other important texts by the author, alongside certain of Clement Greenberg's seminal essays, among them *Toward a Newer Laocoon*, and *Modernist Painting*.

I am of course dealing with two very different kinds of thinkers, a postmodern historiographer of the human sciences, on one hand, and a high modernist critic who epitomizes the modern tradition of evaluative art criticism on the other. Both propose and develop two notions of opticality; Foucault posits the emergence of the "medical gaze" from the clinical spaces of the early nineteenth century; Greenberg devoted his most important and rigorous thought to articulating what he understood to be the revolutionary means of modern painting: flatness and the delimitation of flatness. My purpose will be to discern certain common formal features of both medical and aesthetic perception as formulated by the two, with special reference to their shared emphasis on the "surface." This "surface" forms a plane of intersection which I believe offers an exceptional opportunity to examine

the epistemological conditions through which, during the period of modernity, visual reduction becomes a predominant mode in two very different fields.

Again, the methodological and ideological differences between Foucault and Greenberg are great. But it will be my effort to demonstrate that the developments these thinkers map out, specifically the emergence of medical perception, and the optical mode of painting that commences, according to Greenberg, with Manet, can be read as markers of the same changes that took place in the fundamental structures of knowledge that began to take shape beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Because of the nature of my investigation it will be necessary to explore not only the ways in which both Foucault and Greenberg describe and explicate these developments, but also to examine how each is situated, shaped by, and resists the discursive formations from which they emerge. Both authors propose new methods and criteria for the examination and evaluation of their subjects; and both, in their unique fashions, simultaneously offer histories of concepts which determine the epistemological grounds of their own disciplines. Both set out to determine the relevant concepts that determine the disciplines, and both demonstrate that prior to the 'first order' positive assertions of the disciplines themselves are a set of shared constitutive philosophical concepts. Indeed, for both, the disciplines (from the human sciences, medicine, economics, to the fine arts and criticism) function as

individual or specific sites -- in Foucauldean terms discursive surfaces -- on which the philosophical enterprise is recurrently redistributed.

Foucault is of course situated on 'our side' of modernism, so to speak; he is not invested in maintaining the "infinite continuity" of a specific discourse, but of making explicit the ways that discourse precedes and constitutes its objects.[1] His position is perfectly summed up in the following passage from "The Discourse on Language": "(We) should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand-in-glove with what we already know; there is no prediscursive fate disposing the world in our favour."[2]

Greenberg, in high modernist fashion, devoted himself to a 'manifest' discourse on modern painting that would ensure the discipline's continuity. For Greenberg, critical discourse clearly bore the capacity to explicate and illuminate the object of its analysis; but it is also the case, read retrospectively through Foucault, that Greenberg's critical program constructed its material objects ("American Type Painting," "Colorfield Painting," "Post Painterly Abstraction") and placed these objects within grandly modernist narrative sequences. In turn, Greenberg's critical writings functioned as the discursive template, setting down in quite explicit fashion late modern painting's limits and forms of expressibility, to which at least two generations of artists and critics were obliged to follow or resist.

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[1]Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, I972), 25.

As different as their purposes are, their projects are fashioned out of the philosophical movement set into motion by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant, its speculative formal side, as well as its skeptical and ethical injunction to 'critique,' are crucial to both thinkers. Indeed both can be seen as two of the last century's most distinguished descendents of the Kantian legacy. Hence, in the chapter that follows "The Epoch of Space," I offer a thematic preliminary sketch of the Kantian milieu, and follow this with a retrospective reading of Kant's conception of the transcendental aesthetic through Foucault's conception of discursive space sketched out in the opening chapter of *The Order of Things.*

In the second chapter I will examine the philosophical, aesthetic and political foundations of Greenberg's thought in Kantian philosophy, Marxism and nineteenth-century positivism; this will be followed by a similar examination of Foucault's philosophy. The final chapter will explore the parallel ways both propose the emergence of new forms of highly specialized visual consciousness in very distinct and specialized fields: early nineteenth century medical perception, and the formalist aesthetics of nineteenth and twentieth-century modernist painting.

Such an examination within the discipline of Art History would not have been possible without the important work done over the last two decades which has, in interdisciplinary fashion, explored the intricate historical nature of visual experience. Svetlana Alpers groundbreaking work of 1980 *The Art of Describing:*

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[2]Ibid., 229.

Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century was among the first significant works in the field to address the epistemological interpenetration of scientific and visual cultures, mapping out, among other things, the relationship of Johannes Kepler's theories of ocular structure to seventeenth-century Dutch painting.

This work was followed by a stream of historical and critical investigations by others that moved the discipline of Art History beyond traditional hermeneutical and/or iconographic treatments of significant works toward a broader understanding of visuality and visual culture. Armed with the latest developments in post-structuralist thought -- semiotics, historiography, gender studies, psychoanalysis and Marxism -- vanguard historians and theorists beginning in the early to mid l980s addressed the larger constitutive web of scientific, ideological, and philosophical discourses from which artistic and critical practices emerge. Of special importance to my own work, and to my own particular methodological approach, is W. J. T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Word, Text, Image* (l990). This work is among the first to apply the close reading methods of literary theory to a textual treatment of visual art; his scrupulous reading of Gottfreid Lessing's *Laocoon* discerns a political and ideological arche-text bound up in the contemporaneous cultural rivalries between the emergent nation powers of France, Germany and England. This aspect of Mitchell's work informed not only my methodological approach but contributed to my understanding of Greenberg's work, whose discursive ties to Lessing I will elaborate briefly in this work.

On the heels of Alpers' work there followed a series of important investigations of visual culture's ties to philosophical and scientific knowledge which set further forward the discursive course which I have followed. Jonathon Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (l990) explored in Foucauldean fashion the heterogenous advances made in "rationalized" or technological modes of visuality and the effects of these developments on the construction of new subject-positions and observers. Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing* (l989) developed Walter Benjamin's dialectical approach to modern culture to further draw out the interconnectedness of various forms of modernist visuality, broadening both the field of objects and the methods of investigation available to art historical scholarship. Barbara Maria Stafford's *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (1991) and Lisa Cartwright's *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (1995) both explored the impact of modern medicalisation on the construction of the body in medicine and art.

To this partial but significant list of interdisciplinary work must be added Martin Jay's seminal historical study of 'ocularcentrism' as it is paradoxically manifested in modern philosophy. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1995) provides both a comprehensive philosophical history of ocularcentrism in Enlightenment thought as well as a critique of those strains of modern thought which have, to Jay's mind, over-determined a certain brand of Cartesian rationalism. Jay proposes a philosophical history of modern

vision made up of a multiplicity of heterogenous and sometimes competing "scopic regimes," a history not strictly dominated by a tyrannical system of perspectival or panoptic surveillance.

Deriving incentive and methodological support from the advancements of the previously cited scholarship, it is the purpose of this thesis to follow through on my own, no doubt to some quite peculiar, speculations on two very different thinkers without committing unacceptable textual violence to either. Though Foucault and Greenberg have been central to art history they have hardly, if ever, been mentioned in the same breath. It is my purpose, then, to draw out the shared structure of the surface gaze as it is articulated in their works. By doing so I hope in a more general way, through an albeit very specialized study, to broaden the range of subjects and approaches available to art historical study, and to demonstrate pace Foucault, the remarkable ways in which 'epistemological events' such as the surface gaze traverse disciplines and even periods. It is also my purpose, after Stafford and Cartwright, to further our understanding of the degree to which medical thought is engaged with the philosophical and artistic thought of modernity.[3]

[3]Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975), 198.

Chapter One

The Epoch of Space

In this chapter I offer a thematic description of the Kantian milieu followed by a retrospective reading of Kant's conception of the transcendental aesthetic through Foucault's conception of discursive space sketched out in the opening chapter of *The Order of Things.*

A crisis of representation emerges at the beginning of the classical age in Europe with the eruption of space into language. By the middle of the eighteenth century European philosophy had polarized into two camps made up of rationalists (Descartes, Wolff, Malebranche) on one hand and empiricists (LaMettrie, Hobbes, Hume) on the other. Philosophy has traditionally explained the difference between these schools in terms of method, one privileging reason and intuition, the other experience and observation. The rationalists claimed that the deductive methods of mathematics used so effectively by Galileo to challenge the old cosmology, could be clarified and applied to the discernment of innate conceptual structures which precede and order reality. The precedence of a rationalist order over the empirically observable realm of things is the central theme of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method.* According to Descartes empirical observation is necessary, but must ultimately subject itself to rationalist, ultimately theological ends:

> At the beginning it is best to make use of only what presents itself to our sense ... [yet we must not] seek after rarer and more recondite observations; for the latter often deceive us ... My general order of

> procedure on the other hand has been this. First, I have tried to discover in general the principles or first causes of all that exists or could exist in the world. To this end I consider only God, who created them, and I derive them merely from certain root-truths that occur naturally to our minds.[4]

The empiricists in reaction, led by British philosopher David Hume, held strictly to the anti-idealist position that the only knowledge worth salvaging is that which arrives to individuals through experience and sensation. Hume effectively called into question rationalism's claims for a necessary connection between reality and human thought. The assumption, which persists to this day in so many different and dubious ways, that nature bears some inherent rationale which is transformed through man into a comprehensive understanding is first undone by Hume who followed a scrupulous empirical skepticism to ground any of rationalism's further imaginative flights of reason.[5]

The polarities between empiricism and rationalism continue to shape thought across fields. 'Sensations' and 'concepts' still function as the readymade conceptual antipodes from which the general distinctions between 'realism' and 'abstraction' in art are made. Greenberg's thought, even in its most developed moments as it attempts to move beyond this supplemental binarism, still slips into its 'double blind'. In any case, these two philosophical outlooks, which in the 1760s seemed like opposed and irreconcilable ways of thinking, are understood today as

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[4]Rene Descartes, "Discourse on the Method," in *Descartes' Philosophical Writings*, trans. Elizabeth Anscombe and Thomas Geach (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 47.

[5]For a detailed explanation of the Hume's skeptical empiricism see: David Hume, "Skeptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding," *An Essay on Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford Philosophical Texts, I987), 108-118.

the double-sides of Enlightenment rationality and its Janus-faced transcendental viewpoint.[6]

These two styles of thought find their most compelling synthesis in the transcendental idealist philosophy of Immanuel Kant who beginning in the 1780's took the divide head-on and proposed the "apriority" of space.[7] For Kant the problem of representation was not to find more precise and adequate ways of assigning correct properties and concepts *to* things. Kant's formal philosophy will concede to Hume's skepticism in a significant way: "things-in-themselves"- which were for Hume the factitious stumbling blocks to any further knowledge, and ultimately the wedge that would be driven between reason and things - could be experienced but never in the rationalist sense truly known. But for Kant space and time would no longer be, in the Newtonian or Hobbesian sense, predicated by God as mysterious conditions into which the individual subject extends, but themselves the *a priori* formal properties *of* thought itself.[8]

The Kantian subject is not a unified or atomist substance, but a refractory site folded into and structurally imbricated in the very reality it perceives and seeks to understand. The seventeenth-century Cartesian *cogito*,[9] the single point which struggles toward *direct* perception through an elaborate conceptual contraption, is

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[6] *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 1999), 266, 399-403.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics,* trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001), 59.

[8] W. T. Jones, *Kant and the Nineteenth Century* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson, 1975), 30.

[9] Descartes, "Second Meditation," in *Descartes' Philosophical Writings*, 69-75.

replaced by a "sensibility"[10] which spreads through the very conditions of its awareness. Kant conceives the site or conditions of awareness as a "spatio-temporal manifold."[11] In Foucauldian or Deleuzean terms we might say that Kant is the first epistemologist to propose that the infinite exteriority which structures outer representations is identical to the infinite interiority that structures inner ones.[12]

The eighteenth-century philosophical ordeal that culminates in the magisterial emergence of the Kantian "transcendental aesthetic" marks the arrival of what we might coin the modern "epoch of space." Kant's aprioritisation of space will also radicalize the spatial structure of the subject. With space (and time) refigured as "neither things ... [nor] determinations belonging to things in themselves"[13] but "modes" of understanding, the subject's apprehension of itself loses its former substance and permanence.[14]

Foucault offers us an extraordinary description of this Kantian spatialisation. The dense first thirteen pages of *The Order of Things* are devoted to the careful analysis of a painting, Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (1656).[15] What is methodologically innovative about Foucault's intricate description of the work is that it is not, strictly speaking, wrapped within the internal economy of a single discipline (art history), or

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[10]For an excellent explanation of the relationship between sensibility and the apriority of space see: Charles Parsons, "The Transcendental Aesthetic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant,* ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 62-91.

[11]Kant, *Prolegomena*, 60-63.

[12]see: Maurice Blanchot and Michel Foucault, *Foucault/Blanchot,* trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

[13]Kant, *Prolegomena*, 32.

[14]Ibid., 69-73.

even developed out of an exchange that is set up when one discipline uses the objects of a related discipline as subjects of its own study.[16] In this introductory essay Foucault does not concern himself with the philosophical reflection on *art itself*, but with the epistemological implications of the elaborate dispersion of space this particular painting draws out.

The first chapter of *The Order of Things* contends that through the painting's multiple intersecting axes of perspective and doubling devices, its nod to both empirical and ideal space, the spectacle procured by the work displaces its focus outside the painting, and makes the viewer (together with the sovereign) the invisible focus -- the seeing and seen center -- of its illusion. According to Foucault the picture turns the successive forms of representation upon themselves (mirrors, portraits, reflections, chance arrivals, etc.) unlike any work before and allegorizes the process of visual consciousness through which visibility *itself* appears. Foucault's historical thesis is that *Las Meninas* is an exemplary model of the epistemological space that emerges during the early modern and classical age.

We recall the ancient Horatian doctrine of *ut pictura poesis* which presided over all manner of representation up to the early seventeenth century and which continued to function as the representational regime under which classical and neo-classical

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[15]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 1-13.

[16] For works by philosophers on the subject of art see: Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and: Gerard Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

painting was produced (Ingres' final rendition of *Virgil Reading the Anead to Augustus* might be its final significant manifestation, and symptomatic perhaps of France's ambivalent relation at the time to its *ancien regime*). Under this doctrine, the mimetic agreement of resemblance guaranteed the transparent and immediate adequation of representations, visual or textual, to the world. In this old order signs issued from an origin (God, the king) and bore the secret forms of that world. Theological and absolutist power eroded and this coincided with the absorption of signs into the great proliferation of modern systems of positive knowledge. In the classical age the sign, Foucault writes, is

> no longer (charged) with the task of keeping the world close to itself and inherent in its own forms, but, on the contrary, with that of spreading it out, of juxtaposing it over an indefinitely open surface, and of taking up from that point the endless deployment of the substitutes in which we conceive of it.[17]

Louis Marin contends that images of the king contemporaneous with Velazquez' work, de Compaigne's portraits of Louis XIV for example, guaranteed the viewer's instantaneous recognition of the painting's subject, and maintained and stabilized the ancient bond of legibility to visibility under the tight reigns of absolutism and resemblance.[18] For Foucault, the "spreading out"[19] which Velazquez's tableau introduces a new spatial and temporal lability into painting; the gothic antechamber studio of Spain's most illustrious court painter becomes the "fictitious recess"[20] from which all of these doubled representations are projected. Velazquez renders them

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[17]Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 61.

[18]see Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King,* trans. Martha M. Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, I988).

[19]Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 61.

as spectacle utterly loosened from any reliable composite or holistic relation to the real. Even the king and queen -- who are Velazquez's subjects -- function as the spectator's uncanny double and are further dispossessed by a space that renders them invisible if not for the regards of their courtier, the infanta, and the hazy Hapsbergian trace flickering from a mirror on the lower right center of the studio's back wall. The only subject whose identity remains unaffected by this eruption of space and difference is that of the beautiful dog who appears serenely composed in the picture's the lower right corner.

"There are many things here that seem to exist and have their being," wrote the Spanish court poet Quevedo, "and yet they are nothing more than a name and an appearance."[21] Foucault discerns in this dispersal of names and appearances not the actual cessation of Philip's reign but the de-valorization of the king as "transcendental signifier" and the absorption of monarchal power into a new, more encompassing form of sovereignty - the "suzerainty of the gaze" he calls it in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Dispatched to the outside of the canvas, to this invisible position of being portrayed that is simultaneous with the spectator, the displaced king sets into motion a relay system of multiple, insufficient, anxious gazes presided over by *space* itself. Foucault concludes the chapter:

> There in the midst of this dispersion...is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation -- of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject -- which is the same -- has been elided. And

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[20]Ibid.,16
[21]cited in: Dale Brown, *The World of Velazquez,* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), 185.

> representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.[22]

Again, the elision of the subject which Foucault describes is conceptually similar to that proposed by Kant in the *Prolegomena* which I discussed earlier. Kant confronts the necessary disappearance of the subject's traditional 'substance' and 'permanence' and proposes that the subject exists "in the internal sense" (or to itself) only through its "faculty of representation."[23]

Foucault discerns a larger historical pattern in the primary place that representation assumes over the subject. The modern effort to make man the object of his own positive science will produce an infinite stream of discursive doubles. In the next to last chapter of *The Order of Things*, titled "Man and his Doubles," Foucault expends a great deal of effort mapping out the progress of this epistemological shift. He analyses the modes of knowledge that characterize the Renaissance, Classical and Modern periods. 'Discourse' assumes its most developed and elaborate form with the full advancement of nineteenth-century positivist description. According to Foucault these modes of knowledge are structurally linked; hence, the space of pure visibility which encroaches upon and absorbs the 'episteme' of the Classical age, and of which *Las Meninas* is the index, and upon which classical knowledge will devise its tables, grids and taxonomies, continues to expand and preside over subsequent periods.[24]

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[22]Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 16.
[23]Kant, *Prolegomena*, 73.

The connections between Foucault's later concerns with an ethics of self and Kant's ethical project, summed up in "Was ist Aufklarung?"[25] (a short text in which the Enlightenment philosopher implored his readers to free themselves from all forms of "self-incurred tutelage") have been extensively elaborated upon.[26] But Foucault's earlier explication of the classical and early modern episteme, with its representational instrumentalisation of visibility, is, among other things, a radical response to, and reformulation of, Kant's own formulation of the apriority of space. In some sense, what Foucault offers us with his remarkable analysis of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* is an uncanny, or more precisely, a problematised and defamiliarised version of Kant's "transcendental aesthetic." By subtly shifting the horizon of consciousness to the discursive field which structurally determines it from the outside, he strips the subject's viewpoint, if you will, of its former viewpoint.

Following Foucault's cues through Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, perhaps the only surface which holds our attention for more than a moment in this "subtle system of feints,"[27] is the backside of the canvas on which the artist is working. For Foucault this surface functions as something of a double *blind*: it is situated at that border where the painter "can not at the same time be seen on the picture where he is represented and also see that upon which he is representing." The surface, which

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[24]Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 312.

[25]Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" trans. H.B. Nisbet, in H.Riess, *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970), 54-60.

[26]Christopher Norris, "'What is Enlightenment?' Kant according to Foucault," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault,* ed. Gary Cutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, l994), 159-196.

[27]Foucault, *The Order of Things,* 13.

is the backside of painterly illusion, functions as the "threshold of ... two incompatible visibilities."[28]

"The spectacle (the painter) is observing ," he writes, "is ... doubly invisible: first, because it is not represented within the space of the painting, and, second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking."[29] In his attempt to configure through this blind spot what the painter sees, Foucault concedes to what we as viewers see, in the midst of the spectacle a representation of a canvas's backside:

> [We see] its texture, the horizontal and vertical bars of the stretcher, and the obliquely rising foot of the easel. The tall, monotonous rectangle occupying the whole left portion of the real picture and representing the back of the canvas within the picture, reconstitutes in the form of a surface the invisibility in depth of what the artist is observing: that space in which we are, and which we are.[30]

Outside its fictive recess, Foucault seems to be saying through a marvelous rhetorical doubling, the painter who is depicted *in* this picture also painted *this* picture (not the one he is depicted working on); and it is a picture that represents the material conditions of painterly illusion, including the crossbars and supports of a canvas's backside:

> From the eyes of the painter to what he is observing there runs a compelling line that we, the onlookers, have no power of evading: it runs through the real picture and emerges from its surface to join the place from which we see the painter observing us; this dotted line

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[28]Ibid., 4.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.

reaches out to us ineluctably, and links us to the representation of the picture.[31]

This passage offers a compelling link to Greenberg. Foucault's explanation of Velazquez's work is in keeping with his own stated interest in a history of problematisations which calls into question anthropological categories and representational systems.[32] For Foucault, Velazquez offers us a labyrinthine obverse exposure of the very machinery of painterly illusion itself. We might state the same in Greenbergian terms: this work represents a proto-modernist moment in which painting calls attention to the illusional devices that the medium had formerly dissembled or concealed.

"The limitations that constitute the medium of painting," Greenberg writes in his seminal essay "Modernist Painting," "the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment, were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly."[33] Incorporating Foucault's observations into Greenberg's conception of artistic modernism, we might ask whence their agreement comes. I propose that it will only be with the epistemological developments of positivism, with the possibilities of positive "reduction" or the bracketing of the "medium of painting itself," that painting will be free, in the Greenbergian sense, of the representational demands specific to other mediums (literature). Positivism I am generally defining as that attitude which

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Maurice Florence (Michel Foucault), "Foucault, Michel, 1926 –," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault,* ed. Gary Cutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 315.

emerged from the epistemological space opened by Kant and crystallized in the scientific methods of the nineteenth century which emphasized empirical experience -- especially visual experience – in determinations of truth.[34] For Greenberg modernism's future begins where the illusion of painting ends, a process which is alluded to by Velazquez on the naked backside of the canvas on which he depicts himself working.

Before we explore further the ways that Greenberg's and Foucault's thought converge, or to proceed to read Greenberg's conception of visual consciousness retrospectively through Foucault's, it will first be necessary and useful to trace out their respective developments individually (viz. their conceptions of visuality), and to outline the historical urgencies that determined the progress of both, situated as they were on two sides of the modern divide.

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[33]Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* ed. John O'Brian (4 volumes; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, l993), IV, 86.

[34]For comprehensive nineteenth-century expression of positivism in a philosophical work see: Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy,* trans. Frederick Ferre (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988); see also: J.S. Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism,* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003).

Chapter Two

Greenberg

In this chapter I will examine the philosophical, aesthetic and political foundations of Greenberg's thought in Kantian philosophy, Marxism and nineteenth-century positivism.

For Foucault the dispersion of visual space into an array of multiple, uneven, and continuously differentiating aspects which Velazquez's *Las Meninas* draws out is a model of the emerging epistemological space of the early modern age. The crisis of representation -- the undoing of the old mimetic bond between vision and text -- will in time have the effect of sending a significant stream of modernist visual art on a course against representation toward medium-specificity. The undoing of imitative coherence boldly embraced by the most advanced visual art of the early twentieth century becomes, following World War I and the revolution in Russia, the subject of new critical concern. The characteristic feature of Clement Greenberg's thought is precisely its declaration of the historically necessary medium-specifity of painting. Before I examine Greenbergian facture I will first explore its philosophical and ideological roots.

Aesthetically, Greenberg's thought developed in a complex stylistic and ideologically driven field in which the populist concerns of Diego Rivera's realism jostled with the geometric abstraction of the American Artists Association and the surrealism of those European artists who had emigrated to the United States during World War II. His late writings, of course, argue for modernist medium-specificity on Kantian grounds, based on the philosopher's later writings on aesthetic experience and the faculty of taste.[35] But Greenberg's earliest essays, written when he was a young critic at the "Partisan Review" in New York during the 1930s, reflect the journal's Marxist outlook.

Founded in 1934 as "the literary arm of the John Reed Club" the political ideology of the journal was expressly that of the American Communist Party.[36] Its stated purpose was to support the production of an "anti-bourgeois proletarian" literature that would further facilitate the conditions for revolution by making known the life experiences of the working class. William Philips and Philip Rahv, the journal's founders, were simultaneously committed to radical politics while, with Greenberg, deeply engaged with the developments in the most vanguard spheres of modern painting, sculpture and literature. Hence, a distinctively 'high' form of modernist taste (elitism if you will) comes into conflict with, and must ideologically and theoretically amend itself to, the immediate political struggles and the class-critique formulated by Marx.

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[35]Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," IV, 85-90.
[36]Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life*, (New York: Scribners, 1998), 4.

In the wake of the Moscow Trials, the *Partisan Review* reformulated its revolutionary position in a fashion that freed it "from domination by the immediate strategy of a political party."[37] In 1937 the journal re-positioned itself under the banner of Trotskyism, shifting toward a new critical thinking that would (ostensibly) resolve the paradox that had locked out any exchange between vanguard revolutionary politics and modern art. Leon Trotsky, who was very much engaged with the latest developments of modern art, with Andre Breton and Diego Rivera wrote "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art." The essay argued that the struggle to bring forth an "independent creation" was itself, as dictated by the times in the Marxist sense, "revolutionary by its very nature."[38] The Trotsky/Breton manifesto was published in the *Review* in 1938.[39]

On the heels of that manifesto, in 1939, Greenberg's landmark "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" appeared in the *Review*. The essay is the first of its kind in this period of modernism to suggest the historical and philosophical conditions for the emergence of abstract art. In this essay Greenberg explains vanguard painting's privileged stature in relation to other cultural products in specifically Marxist terms. He concedes from the start that an adequate explanation will entail "more than an investigation in aesthetics. It appears to me," he continues "that it is necessary to examine more closely ... the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific -- not the generalized -- individual, and the social and historical

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[37]Ibid., 48.
[38] Andre Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky, "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," *Art in Theory*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 526.
[39]Rubenfeld, 56.

contexts in which that experience takes place."[40] This effort to move art criticism beyond aesthetics inaugurates a form of discourse that simultaneously proposes an aesthetic, locates this aesthetic in a body of contemporary works, and sets forth the historical conditions which have made this work necessary and important. His desire, in 1939, to attain a perspicacious overview of the range of cultural practices within an overall historical pattern is clear in his essay's opening words:

> One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T.S. Eliot and a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by Braque and a *Saturday Evening Post* cover. All four are on the order of culture, and ostensibly, parts of the same culture and products of the same society. Here, however, their connection seems to end. A poem by Eliot and a poem by Eddie Guest – what perspective of culture is large enough to situate them in an enlightening relation to each other? Does the fact that a disparity such as this exists within the frame of a single cultural tradition, which is and has been taken for granted – does this fact indicate that the disparity is part of the natural order of things? Or is it something entirely new, and particular to our age?[41]

Greenberg's Marxist base is also evident in those numerous passages in which he places vanguard culture within, and as a result of, European political class struggles from the late eighteenth-century forward.[42] In this Greenberg's thought bears some affinity to the contemporaneous Marxist theorists of the Frankfurt School, specifically Theodor Adorno.

Influenced by Walter Benjamin, Adorno shared with Greenberg the desire to place individual cultural practices within social and historical contexts; like Greenberg,

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[40]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," I, 6.
[41]Ibid., 5-6
[42]Ibid., 7, 10, 11-12, 17.

Adorno argued that autonomous works of art held a higher order of value because they were produced under the pressures of a higher order of historical consciousness. By 1966, however, with his magisterial *Negative Dialectics*, his vision of the historical progress of modern reason, and along with it modern art, had, in Weberian fashion, grown bleak. He held little hope for the future of what he determined high culture against the encroachments of mass (as opposed to popular) culture.[43] For Adorno the over-determination of plastic and visual attributes in the visual arts was, in the final instance, merely the reified high-end aesthetic remains of late capitalism's spectacle economy.

Greenberg, while he shares Adorno's dour assessment of mass culture to some degree, clearly held out hope for the future of art in industrial society, particularly in those instances where artists had detached themselves from the "welter of ideological struggle."[44] Against the generalized sense of eschatological disorder shared by many early-to-mid-twentieth-century Marxists, Greenberg's optimism peeks through:

> It is among the hopeful signs in the midst of the decay of our present society that we -- some of us -- have been unwilling to accept [the] last phase for own culture. In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, Bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore -- avant garde culture.[45]

Greenberg's re-casting of the avant-garde in terms of an historically determined resistant strain of the bourgeois class neatly parallels Marx's class of an

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[43]see: Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973).

[44] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch, " 7-8.

enlightened labor; it is also analogous to Lenin's characterization of the Bolsheviks as the 'professional revolutionaries' of the working class, the vanguard agents of economic and historical transformation. His reluctance to "accept (the) last phase" of culture and his desire to move beyond the stagnation of "Alexandrianism" is born of an active dialectical and materialist engagement with the immediate historical conditions. It is a "superior consciousness of history -- more precisely the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism – (which has) made (the avant-garde) possible." Greenberg continues:

> This criticism has not confronted our present society with timeless utopias, but has soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications, and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society. Thus our present bourgeois social order has shown to be, not an eternal, 'natural' condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders. New perspectives of this kind, becoming a part of the advanced intellectual conscience of the fifth and sixth decades of the nineteenth century, soon were absorbed by artists and poets, even if unconsciously for the most part. It was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically and geographically too – with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe.[46]

This passage is crucial for the manner in which it supplies an outline of Greenberg's philosophical heritage. He proposes a critical attitude that is clearly derived from Kant. This critical attitude facilitates and supports -- as it did for Marx -- a dialectical materialism which places all historical developments within an economically determined order. Again, keeping in mind the crisis of representation sketched out at the beginning of this thesis, Kant disrupted the old metaphysics of 'transparency' with his formulation of the "spatio-temporal manifold." In the midst of

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[45]Ibid., 6-7.
[46]Ibid., 6-7.

nineteenth-century industrialism and alienation, Marx's thought bears out further the philosophical implications of this manifold through his insistence on the scientifically and empirically demonstrable realm of immediate experience and labor.

Greenberg's early career was devoted, with other members of the *Partisan Review* editorial team, to a Marxist understanding of vanguard art. However, aside from an occasional gloss, Greenberg's more developed thinking on the value of Kant's philosophy to an understanding of modern art are found much later, in those exemplary essays "Modernist Painting" and "After Abstract Expressionism" of 1960 and 1962 respectively. Hence, we must follow the course of Greenberg's philosophical turn to Kant retrospectively through Marx. According to Greenberg Marx's dialectical finds its earliest "tendency" in Kant's model of philosophical critique, which Greenberg also links to medium-specificity in modern art:

> I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of (a) self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist. The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.[47]

Kant's philosophical critiques set out to clarify the procedures that were 'proper' to philosophy and hence carried out his *Critique of Pure Reason* not to "subvert" reason (for even Derrida concedes this is not possible) but to clarify it. According to Greenberg the Enlightenment philosopher used logic to determine logic's own

[47]Ibid., IV, 85.

limits, and "while (Kant) withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained of it."[48] Hence, for Greenberg Kant proposes a form of reason that is, in the truly modern sense, *specialized*.[49]

According to Greenberg, the effects of Kant's reflexive critique would through the course of the ensuing nineteenth century exceed the discourse of philosophy from which it developed to foster an attitude of immanent auto-critique that extends well into the practice of the arts. "Each art," he writes, "had to perform this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art."[50] For Greenberg the flat picture plane becomes, in the Kantian sense, painting's primary regulative principle:

> Flatness alone was unique and exclusive to (painting) ... Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.[51]

The dialectic progress of visuality as it is worked out through the plastic arts requires that all efforts be made to free painting from mimetic, imitative, or naturalist illusion. According to Greenberg modernist painting must break out of its "subservient" role to the other arts so that it would no longer be "susceptible to the temptation to emulate the effects ... of illusion, (and) of other arts."[52]

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[48]Ibid.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Greenberg, IV, 86.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Ibid., I, 24.

In his second seminal essay "Towards a Newer Laocoön" Greenberg offers a program for mid-twentieth-century avant garde visual art which recapitulates the major philosophical and scientific themes that have problematised the arts (and metaphysics) since the middle of the eighteenth century. The breadth of Greenberg's historical reasoning, together with his remarkable rhetorical abilities, allow him to reach back to Gotthold Lessing's seminal 1766 critical work *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, [53] and to address some of its questions in a dialectical materialist fashion.[54]

Lessing's text is among the first works of critical and theoretical writing which attempt to explain "the theoretical confusion of the arts" that had emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century. He examines each *métier* in something of an empirical manner, and discerns the distinctive formal and material properties of each. As he wrote from within the same historical and epistemological juncture as Kant, he is concerned with the media's particular relationships to space and time. This aspect of his formal analysis is prescient of the more general shift of modernism away from rhetoric and literary language, and from an ossified academicism in the visual arts, toward a new sense of non-textual medium-specificity.

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[53]see Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984).

[54]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laöcoon," I, 25.

Lessing is highly critical of those examples in which one medium is overcome by another; the poetry of his day has been dominated by a descriptive tendency which is, the aesthetician contends, proper to landscape painting (the verse of James Thomson for example). Titian's *Prodigal Son* is faulted for its portrayal of "two necessarily separate points of time in one and the same picture."[55]

Greenberg cites both examples, clearly attuned to the ordeal of representation in the visual arts in these nascent years of modernism. Lessing was the first to propose that representational allusions to space and time are proper to the literary and narrative arts. However, when visual artists submit themselves to the illustration of text, the text ultimately overpowers the plastic medium. The discursive regularities beneath Lessing's aesthetic formulations are those which also underwrite the antagonism between eighteenth-century rationalism and empiricism in philosophy and science. Greenberg updates and elaborates this antagonism; he restates the old philosophical ordeal in terms of a battle in the visual arts between subject matter and form. "[The] avant-garde saw the necessity of an escape from ideas," Greenberg writes, "which were *infecting* [italics mine] the arts with the ideological struggles of society. Ideas came to mean subject matter in general."[56]

The old antagonism between idealism and empiricism is also folded into Greenberg's critical mix and is transposed into the following terms: "Subject matter

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[55]Ibid., 26.
[56]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laöcoon," I, 28.

(is) distinguished from content ... in the sense that every work must have content, but that subject matter is something the artist does or does not have in mind when he is actually at work."[57] Hence, for Greenberg a certain Kantian indifference to subject matter is called for if the artist is to work freely within the proper field of painting. This indifference, according to Greenberg:

> meant a new and greater emphasis upon form, and it also involved the assertion of the arts as independent vocations, disciplines, and crafts, absolutely autonomous, and entitled to respect for their own sakes, and not merely as vessels of communication. It was the signal for a revolt against the dominance of literature, which was subject matter at its most oppressive.[58]

Or, again, under the totalitarianism of literature,

> everything depends on the anecdote or the message. The painted picture occurs in blank, indeterminate space; it just happens to be on a square of canvas and inside a frame. It might just as well have been breathed on air or formed out of plasma. It tries to be something you imagine rather than see – or else a bas-relief or a statue. Everything contributes to the denial of the medium, as if the artist were ashamed to admit that he had actually painted his picture instead of dreaming it forth.[59]

In passages such as these reason's troubled relationship to representation, which is as old as Western philosophy, is reduced to a simple perhaps even readymade opposition of real vs. dream, materiality vs. illusion, materialism vs. metaphysics, presence vs. absence, & so forth. On this conceptual system Greenberg builds his aesthetics, positing within it a subject (the modern painter, the modern observer) with access to immediate visual experience.

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[57]Ibid.
[58]Ibid.

"Nineteenth century painting made its first break with literature (or metaphysics) in the person of the Communard Courbet, it fled from spirit to matter."[60] Again, Greenberg's efforts to link a certain revolutionary politics, as well as the most important advancements in science to modern painting are evident:

> Courbet was the first real avant-garde painter [for he] tried to reduce his art to immediate sense data by painting only what the eye could see as a machine unaided by the mind .... Impressionism, reasoning beyond Courbet in its pursuit of materialist objectivity...sought to emulate the detachment of science, imagining that thereby it would get at the very essence of painting as well as of visual experience.[61]

Such an apparatus, "a machine unaided by the mind," could only be conceived within, and reflects I think, an historical relocation of vision to a plane paradoxically "severed from a human observer."[62] This apparatus and its "mindless" mode of seeing is a model for the new sort of observer which nineteenth-century scientific positivism sought to construct. There is something uncanny and heterological about the appearance of this machine in Greenberg's text, but it functions to rationalize the "new flatness [which] begins to appear in Courbet's painting," and the "new attention to every inch of the canvas, regardless of its relation to the 'centers of interest.'"[63]

Greenberg's disregard for "centers of interest" plays on both Kant's notion of disinterested interest and the bourgeois investment in naturalist painting, while the

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[59]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laöcoon," 28.
[60]Ibid., 29.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 1.
[63]Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoon," I, 29.

positivistic and scientific determination of vision as a medium of pure, unmediated data, situates modern painting upon a "more stable basis than the crumbling bourgeois œcumene."[64] The use of the term "œcumene" must be noted: Greenberg's deployment of it at this point in his text connects bourgeois ideology (universality) with catholicity in the religious sense, and etymologically links these world-unifying systems to something of an all-seeing œcumenicalism, that is to say, another more ideologically and metaphysically invested -- to Greenberg's mind -- system of "seeing" which presides over the expansive (albeit "crumbling") bourgeois enterprise.

This passage offers an outline of the themes that concerned Greenberg throughout his career. It is a clear synopsis of the issues that were central to his project; namely a methodological adherence to Kantian critique, Marxist historicity and the empirical methods of positive science.

[64]Ibid.

Chapter Three

Foucault

Before exploring the influence of Kantian philosophy, Marxism, and contemporaneous developments in phenomenology and literary criticism on Foucault's thought, I will begin this chapter by recapitulating in a cursory fashion the differences between Foucault's and Greenberg's approaches, their methodologies, and the very distinctive ways in which each is situated in relation to the objects of their analyses.

Greenberg's criticism maintains an entirely positive relationship to his interest in the avant-garde. Again, his position is evaluative and engaged: he consciously struggles to articulate and maintain his position within a narrative of modern historical artistic progression. As a modernist critic whose essential task was evaluative -- to judge the quality of works of art -- Greenberg held fundamental assumptions about the objects of analysis (i.e. what constitutes works of art in the strict sense) which he applied in a global fashion. His discourse weaves together aspects of the European philosophical and art historical tradition to demonstrate the way medium-specificity is worked out in the modern visual arts in an historically necessary fashion.

With recourse to Marx, Kant and Lessing he radicalized and expanded art criticism's expressive and discursive possibilities. His methodological approach

resembles that of a traditional science. He maintained a 'natural' attitude toward his objects of interest and followed a positive method which, while highly nuanced, emphasized the invariant empirical facticity of the modern picture plane, and through the perceiving eyes of the artist, the operation of a "seeing machine unaided by the mind."

Michel Foucault also assigned to visibility a privileged position in post-classical forms of knowledge. The concept of a "seeing machine" would certainly appeal to Foucault, and to some degree he will propose a similar instrument of perception in his formulation of the gaze of the modern clinician, in the panopticism of the emergent architectures of confinement, and in the "technologies of self" which will shape the experiences of the modern subject.[65] Unlike Greenberg however, Foucault's thought will struggle to disengage a "unitary" subject from the privileged view which Greenberg (and Kant) had assigned to it. He will instead focus on the epistemological structures which precede and order – indeed *subjectivise* - the subject from the outside.

For Foucault there will be no position of disinterested interest or immediate phenomenological or empirical experience from which to formulate an unproblematic positive knowledge or aesthetic experience. Greenberg claims to have arrived at such an encounter with the highly rarefied screen of the modernist

[65]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheriden (New York: Random House, 1992).

picture plane; but he can do so only by folding himself (retrospectively of course) into something of an eighteenth-century philosophical time warp.

In Foucauldean terms Kant's "transcendental subject" is the subjective "personification" of the Enlightenment philosophical enterprise, in the same manner that the "madman," the "hysteric," and the romantic "hero" function as personifications of respective regimes of knowledge that emerge in the nineteenth century. In a doctoral essay on Kant Foucault proposed this radical understanding of the *philosophical subject*: "Would not the archaeology of the text, if it were possible, allow us to see the birth of a *homo criticus*, whose structure would be essentially different to that of the man who preceded him?"[66]

Read retrospectively through Foucault, Greenberg's discourse on visuality marks the emergence of a "seeing subject"; archeologically this subject can be placed within a larger set of modern discursive formations which draw from an often disparate-seeming set of manifestations, including the Kantian *homo criticus*. We can also state quite accurately that Gottfried Lessing's eighteenth-century discourse on what was proper to each of the artistic mediums, with poetry as paragon, functioned as Greenberg's programmatic pattern.

Like Greenberg, Foucault's philosophical foundation is Kantian. His earliest philosophical tutelage was under Louis Girard who propounded, in his own words,

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[66] Michel Foucault, "Thèse complementaire" (Ph.D. diss., Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, 1961), 4.

"a vague sort of Kantism all laid out in a nineteenth-century style".[67] As a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the late forties and early fifties, Foucault attended the Sorbonne lectures of Jean Beaufret who was considered a foremost expert on Kant in France and lectured extensively on the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Crucial to both Greenberg and Foucault is Kant's radical postulation of the "apriority of space" which, as I discussed earlier, folded the very orders of space and time into the primary forms of thought. "Space," Kant wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "does not represent any property of things in themselves (as Hume and the empiricists insisted) nor does it represent them in their relation to one another (as in Cartesian perspective)."[68] Rather for Kant space (with time) is a form of "intuition" provided by the very structures of the mind in its apprehension of its world. As we have seen, Foucault's analysis of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* clearly reflects the influence of Kant's postulation.

The Order of Things was in fact born of Foucault's extended and intensive study of Kant under his first important mentor Jean Hyppolite at the Sorbonne.[69] For his doctorate Foucault was required to produce two theses; the elaborate *Madness and Civilisation* was followed by a smaller work which consisted of a translation of Kant's *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* and a 128-page commentary. This smaller thesis provided an outline for *The Order of Things*. Kant's text

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[67]Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault,* trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 9.

[68]Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, l929) 42.

elaborates an anthropology not in the modern ethnographic sense, but an empirical exploration of the affective life of 'man.' What is pleasing or not pleasing to the subject ('man'), the distinction between sensuous and intellectual pleasure, between gratification and taste, those issues which have been central to western aesthetics since ancient times (and particularly the subject of taste for Greenberg), are combined with odd bits of anecdote. Kant's anthropology consists of a collection of aphorisms such as "the greatest sensuous pleasure, which is not accompanied by any loathing at all, is found under healthy conditions in resting after work."[70] This literary aspect of Kant's lengthy project no doubt greatly appealed to Foucault; also, the emphasis on a "pragmatics" of living which relates to the "arts of self" of ancient philosophy; this subject will be of primary importance to Foucault's late unfinished work on the history of sexuality.[71] In any case, Foucault's immersion in neo-Kantianism was of primary importance to the themes of space, and to the spatialisation of the body, which are central to his most important works.

After the influence of neo-Kantianism, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological studies of space and perception had profound effect.[72] Foucault conceives the body as a fragile horizontal "datum" on which the "habitual dispositions" are

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[69]David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 103-104.
[70]Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View,* trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 100-101.
[71]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon, 1978.
[72]Macey, Ibid., 33.

inscribed or drawn.[73] This conception of the body as limit or surface was proposed earlier by Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception.* "The outline of my body" he writes "is a frontier ... (My) body is not in space like things, it inhabits or haunts space."[74] Merleau-Ponty proposes the role of positive science in the constitution of the human body as a "datum" surveyed by a detached, impersonal sovereign observer. This description holds in store something of Foucault's later formulation of the medical gaze. Positivist scientific thinking, Merleau-Ponty writes, is "a thinking which looks from above, and thinks of the object-in-general."[75] Merleau-Ponty contends that this body which the new positivism locates is "an information machine."[76]

Parallels can also be drawn between Merleau-Ponty's and Greenberg's thought, Greenberg proposed that early modern painters adopted the methods of "(seeing) machines unaided by the mind"[77] Merleau-Ponty insisted on a radical empiricism: "(Science's) agile and improvisatory thought will learn to ground itself upon things themselves and upon itself, and will once more become philosophy."[78] Greenberg proposes that modern painting attains its true philosophical status (its "medium specificity") only when the artist adheres to the empirical limits of artistic facture.

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[73] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 3.
[74]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans, Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 112.
[75]Ibid., 121.
[76]Ibid.
[77] Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 29.
[78]Ibid., 88.

It is important to note the return of those "things themselves" which Kant's philosophy, with its head still stuck in the clouds of an old theo-rationalism, and its effort to repress the aporetic standstill brought about by Hume's empiricism, would have to banish to a vast reserve of unknowable 'pneumena.' "Things themselves" return throughout the course of western philosophy and art (including Greenberg's "picture plane") in a variety of ways and are among the commonplace notions, especially, of twentieth-century phenomenology.

During the 1950s Foucault was also immersed in the most recent work in psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan's reformulation of Freud's familiar model of the human psyche was of particular importance to Foucault's conceptualization of the "gaze" in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish* and his later formulation of the "episteme" in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Foucault worked as a research assistant to Lacan's student Jacqueline Verdeaux and attended a number of Lacan's seminars at the Hopital Sainte-Anne beginning in 1953.[79] With these seminars Lacan applied the most recent developments in modern anthropology (of the ethnological rather than Kantian sort), Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, and linguistics to radically reformulate Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud, though his thought manifests a desire to move beyond medical reductions of mental illness, maintained strong ties to nineteenth-century constitutionalist models of the human personality; Freud maintained that all psychic

development issued from a "prediscursive reservoir of affects and drives."[80] Lacan moved the unconscious to the outside of the subject's body, into the shifting and treacherous network of language; his formulation of the gaze proposes an imaginary structure which determines the existence of the subject from the outside. Lacan reverses the former order of the Cartesian subject, which perceives the exterior world from a fixed and ontologically privileged position. According to Lacan's *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* the subject only comes into existence through an exchange of looks with the objects that compose its exterior field (or screen) of vision.[81] While Foucault does not cite Lacan, his analysis of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* bears a striking resemblance to the topography of Lacan's gaze, with the observer invisible to itself situated or suspended within a matrix of others' gazes. The differences between Lacan's and Foucault's formulations are intricate and nuanced, yet both represent specific examples of a general movement within Marxist-inflected strains of psychoanalytic theory to bring about the further de-centering of the subject and externalization of the unconscious.

In his foreward to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, Foucault outlines his conception of an external unconscious and its constitutive function; it is, he writes, "a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the

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[79]Macey, Ibid., 58-62.

[80]Slavoj Zizek, "The Cartesian Subject without the Cartesian Theatre," in *The Subject of Lacan: A Lacanian Reader for Psychologists,* ed. Kareen Ror Malone and Stephen R. Friedlander (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 36.

[81]Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheriden (New York: Pantheon, l977).

scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature."[82] Foucault discerns the trace of this positive unconscious in the various "rules of formation" which thread through a network of "wildly differing theories, concepts and objects of study."[83] In simplified Freudian models, by contrast, the unconscious is the counter-force of science; it is an aggressive inchoate assembly of drives which resists, deflects, and disturbs the composition and stability of positive knowledge. Rosalind Krauss posits an "optical unconscious," for example, which is a time-based pulse that rhythmically obliterates the "good-form" of optical modernism.[84]

For Foucault, rather, the positive unconscious provides the textile-like structure of epistemic regularities which cross over into different domains. It can be can be studied archeologically as it threads through a whole network of multiple "scientific 'representations'":

> What was common to the natural history, the economics, and the grammar [we might also include the arts] of the Classical period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist; or that part of it that was conscious was superficial, limited, and almost fanciful but unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists and grammarians employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories.[85]

The Archeology of Knowledge will elaborate more completely this "positive" unconscious as the vast and impersonal discursive plane, which he coins the *episteme*.

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[82]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things,* xi.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
[85]Ibid., xii.

Foucault's thought was also, like Greenberg's, profoundly affected by the latest developments in Marxism. Louis Althusser's rigorous effort to make Marxism theoretically useful in the midst of the ideological disarray brought about in part by the violence of Stalinism had an enormous impact on the developing post-war French intellectual class. Althusser was appointed *caiman* in philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1948 and was Foucault's tutor.[86] His most significant contribution to post-war philosophy was to incorporate the latest developments in the philosophy of science (notably that of Gaston Bachelard and his successor George Canghiullem) to an up-dated structuralist understanding of Marxism. It is important to note that for a materialist philosopher such as Althusser reality is identical to Kant's spatio-temporal manifold. Beyond this realm of immediate experience (of which space and time are thought's actual materials) there is no transcendental reality. For Althusser, and other Marxists, metaphysics and theology are merely the ideological effects of social forces and lack empirically demonstrable cognitive substance.[87]

Althusser's reformulation of Marxism first involved a radical critique of the autonomous and intentional humanist subject; influenced by the latest developments in linguistics and psychoanalysis, he proposed a model of individual subjectivity that emphasized the social forces which produce it. Althusser also expanded the traditional Marxist conception of dialectical materialism, which

[86]Eribon, 32-33.
[87]Jones, 178.

explains historical developments solely on the basis of economic struggles; he recuperated (somewhat like Gramsci) ideology as a primary positive force. In a similar turn, Foucault will envision power not in terms of an oppression bearing down hierarchically from the top, but as a set of forces which saturates and shapes the social field.[88] Most crucial to Foucault's development, Althusser adopts a radically intensified positivist approach that emphasizes the spatial or "topographical" aspect of Marx's conception of the social structure. The traditional Marxist models of infrastructure, or economic base, and superstructure, which contains the legal and ideological levels, are figured by Althusser as two stories of a Corbusian-like edifice: the structure is simultaneously an inhabitable building and a visible, analyzable cubist-like surface.[89]

Althusser's Marxist topography will have a profound impact on the methodological and conceptual structure of Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge.* Althusser is the only author credited with a footnote in the English translation of the elaborate text.[90] Like Althusser, Foucault calls into question the formerly sound anthropological categories on which traditional histories are built (the intentional subject, the seamless teleological progress of history). He devotes himself to a strictly positivist description of "statements in the field of discourse and the relations of which they are capable," and employs a topographical model to arrange the various groupings

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[88]see Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

[89]Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 134-157.

[90]Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge,* 5.

of knowledge (medicine, economics, grammar) as they emerge, coalesce, and disperse over historical time.[91] *The Archeology of Knowledge* treats concepts, discourses, and the statements out of which they are constructed, as empirical objects spread over a horizontally oriented epistemological ground; this ground he coins the *episteme*, and it formally resembles Greenberg's modernist tableau.

Following an approach he developed in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault pays particular attention to "superficial" or discontinuous aspects of discourse; *The Archeology of Knowledge* is not strictly concerned with the content or logic of statements made in a particular field (with their truth value or with the soundness of the methods through which truths were arrived) but with the formal features, with the compositional "laws of attraction and frequency" that bring about hybrid formations and discursive intensities. Hence, matters of literary ornament or style are emphasized as crucial constitutive features of even the most methodically rigorous knowledge:

> By *episteme*, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinated to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to neighboring, but distinct, discursive practices.[92]

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[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid., 191.

He goes on to assign the epistemological, hence the all-encompassing *spatial* apriority of this episteme:

> The episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities ... [The] episteme is not a motionless figure that appeared one day with the mission of effacing all that preceded it; it is a constantly moving set of articulations, shifts, and coincidences that are established only to give rise to others.[93]

Foucault often invokes the terms of cartography and geology in *The Archeology of Knowledge.* Describing the "formation of objects" in nineteenth-century psychopathology he writes of "(mapping) the first *surfaces* of their *emergence.*"[94] He describes "the *grids of specification*" which early psychiatrists used to classify various "kinds of madness."[95] The text makes continued reference to "strata," "surface effects," "horizon," to the "recurrent redistributions" of discourses and the "architectonic unities" formed by systems of thought as they "sediment" over time.[96] The positivist/structuralist attitude which emphasizes space and the "visibility" of the objects of discourse, which *The Archeology of Knowledge* epitomizes, is pervasive at the time of Foucault's writing.

Indeed this attitude at the time extended beyond the domain of philosophy and historical analysis to the fields of literary theory and criticism. Roland Barthes' and

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[93]Ibid., 191-192.
[94]Ibid., 41.
[95]Ibid., 42.
[96]Ibid., 5.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's essays on the "new fiction" proposed forms of writing, much like Greenberg's prescriptions for new painting, built entirely from the formal materials of writing itself.[97] Again, instrumentalised by the Kantian injunction to critique, vanguard literary writers of late modernism dispensed with what Robbe-Grillet isolated as the "obsolete notions" of traditional narrative writing (character, plot, etc.). "To tell a story has become strictly impossible" he wrote in his famous polemic *Toward a New Novel.*[98] New forms of writing were called for which would rescue writing from the "tragic" aspects of nineteenth-century humanist *depth,* forms which emphasized the pure textual surface of the writing plane. If, in Lessing's day, the metaphysical lineaments of literary narrative dominated the plastic arts, Robbe-Grillet devoted himself to a method of writing that privileged the sense of sight. He proposed that by the l950s -- roughly coincident with the apotheosis of vanguard American abstract painting delineated by Greenberg -- the task of the writer shifts quite significantly toward that of the painter:

> When he thinks of a future novel, it is always a *way of seeing* which first of all occupies his mind, and demands his hand. He has in mind certain rhythms of sentences, certain architectures, a vocabulary, certain grammatical constructions, exactly as a painter has in mind certain lines and colors.[99]

In the final chapter of *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault offers three subjects for possible archeological study: sexuality (a work which he commenced but never completed), political discourse, and painting. "In analyzing a painting," he writes:

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[97]see Allain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1965), and Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

[98]Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel,* 33.

[99]Ibid., 44.

> One can reconstitute the latent discourse of the painter; one can try to recapture the murmur of his intentions, which are not transcribed into words, but into lines, surfaces, and colours; one can try to uncover the implicit philosophy that is supposed to form his view of the world, it is also possible to question science, or at least the opinions of the period, and to try to recognize to what extent they appear in the painter's work. Archeological analysis would have another aim: it would try to discover whether space, distance, depth, colour, light, proportions, volumes and contours were not, at the period in question, considered, named enunciated, and conceptualized in a discursive practice; and whether the knowledge that this discursive practice gives rise to was not embodied perhaps in theories and speculations, in forms of teaching and codes of practice, but also in processes, techniques, and even in the very gesture of the painter ....It would try to show that, at least in one of its dimensions, it is discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effects. In this sense, the painting is not a pure vision that must be transcribed into the materiality of space; nor is it a naked gesture whose silent and eternally empty meanings must be freed from subsequent interpretations. It is shot through...with the positivity of a knowledge.[100]

Greenberg had, in the three decades which precede Foucault's 1969 text, performed his own "archeology" of modern painting; his stated effort from the late 1930s onward was to demonstrate in Marxist fashion the ways that artistic practices are shaped by "the social ... circumstances of the age," and to demonstrate "that there is nothing inside art itself, disconnected from history, which compels it to go in one direction or another."[101] As I have already discussed, Greenberg was especially attuned to the ways that scientific ideas and techniques factored into an artist's work.[102] Like Foucault, Greenberg "exteriorized" the intentions of the artist by positing the productive machinery of painting within the historically determined métier itself; he also shifted the emphasis away from the narrative or hermeneutical meaning of subject matter to emphasize the constitutive

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[100]Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge,* 193-194.
[101]Greenberg,"Towards a Newer Laocoon," I, 23.

function of the formal and material properties of the medium. For Greenberg the very materials of painterly facture - line, shape, pigment, surface -are, in Foucault's words, "shot through with the positivity of a knowledge."[103]

Foucault elaborated his own brief but brilliant "archeology" of modern painting in a collection of short essays developed from a series of letters exchanged with the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte in the l970s. *This is not a pipe*[104] develops some of the ideas he introduced in *The Order of Things,* particularly those concerning the spatial problematization of language, and the undoing of traditional discursive unities in metaphysical systems of naturalist representation (such as the doctrine of *ut picture et poesis*) with the emergence of the modern episteme. He proposes a formalism in the visual arts that is surprisingly similar to Greenberg's. Addressing traditional painting's "subordination" to a text, Foucault writes:

> Two principles, I believe, ruled Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. The first asserts the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes it). The two systems can neither merge nor intersect. In one way or another, subordination is required. Either a text is ruled by the image...or the image is ruled by the text.[105]

Foucault goes on to describe the ways that certain strains of modernist painting broke away from this subordination. The hierarchical order which formerly fixed visual representations to verbal signs is "the principle whose sovereignty Klee

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[102]Greenberg, "Seurat, Science, and Art: Review of *Seurat* by John Rewald," I, 167-168.
[103]Foucault, Ibid.
[104]Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe,* trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1983.
[105]Ibid., 32.

abolished."[106] For Foucault, Klee's work is the first to undo the metaphysical distinctions between writing and drawing. Klee accomplished this "by showing the juxtaposition of shapes and the syntax of lines in an uncertain, reversible, floating space (simultaneously page and canvas, plane and volume, map and chronicle). Boats, houses, persons are at the same time recognizable figures and elements of writing."[107]

The second principle that long ruled painting, and which modernism shattered, "posits equivalence between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond":

> The rupture of this principle can be ascribed to Kandinsky: a double effacement simultaneously of resemblance and of the representative bond, by the increasingly insistent affirmation of the lines and the colors that Kandinsky called 'things,' neither more nor less objects than the church, the bridge, or the knight with his bow. Kandinsky's is a naked affirmation clutching at no resemblance, and which ... [refers] itself to the gesture that formed it: an 'improvisation,' a 'composition'; or to what is found there: 'a red shape,' 'triangles,' 'purple orange'; or to tensions or internal relations: 'a determinant pink,' 'upwards,' 'a yellow milieu,' 'a rosy balance.'[108]

Foucault's conception of the shift from naturalist transparency to plastic "affirmation" is clearly related to Greenberg's own conception of the progress of modern painting. Foucault of course will take his brief archeology in a direction radically opposed to Greenberg's; in the end he will not, in Greenbergian fashion, assign to painting the status of a new artistic "unity." Rather he will problematise the future of modernism's emancipated surface with an entirely new and disturbing

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[106]Ibid., 33.
[107]Ibid.

swarm of "circulating similitudes." These similitudes will "multiply themselves ... born from their own vapor to rise endlessly into an ether where they refer to nothing more than themselves. "A day will come when," he continues in his prophetic tone "by means of similitude relayed indefinitely along the length of a series, the image itself along with the name it bears, will lose its identity. Campbell, Campbell, Campbell, Campbell."[109]

Here of course is where Foucault's thought drastically departs from Greenberg's. For Greenberg the goal of Kantian self-criticism was "to determine the irreducible working essence of art and the separate arts."[110] Painting's irreducible essence is, of course, "flatness and the delimination flatness."[111] Foucault, having moved in significant ways beyond modernism, dispensed with all manner of essence. His brief study of modernist painting concurs with Greenberg's central thesis to a point, but for Foucault there comes a day when Greenberg's flat picture plane is stripped bare of its modernist identity. Through the work of Andy Warhol, Duchamp's infamous epigone, it becomes another of postmodernism's allegorical objects

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[108]Ibid., 34-35.
[109]Ibid., 54.
[110]Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), IV, 131.
[111] Ibid.

Chapter Four

The Operating Table and the Picture Plane

In the preceding two chapter I have sought to demonstrate how Kantian philosophy, Marxism, and modern developments in positivism and science shaped the critical and analytical methods of Foucault and Greenberg, as well as the substance of their conclusions. Again, the historical, methodological and ideological approaches of the two are in so many ways incommensurable. Foucault offers us historiographies of scientific and philosophical concepts. These works are intended to archeologically decipher epistemological or discursive regularities that thread through sometimes disparate sets of texts, disciplines, even periods. *The Order of Things* for example deals with such a range of writings – from Kant to Paracelsus and Aldrovandi – in order to explicate unexpected common intellectual features. This approach has the effect of disrupting traditional modern intellectual histories which emphasize the originality of individual writers and the positive linear progress of historical developments, Greenberg remains true to the modernist master narrative of progress; this master narrative underwrites his entire body of criticism. He elaborates a very precise and continuous course of artistic development, with formal innovations of exceptional individual artists (Courbet, Manet, Cezanne, Matisse...) bringing about the further historical realization of "medium-specificity."[112]

In spite of these differences, however, it will be my purpose now to explore how the developments that they map -- the emergence of medical perception as demonstrated by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*, and the optical mode of painting that commences, according to Greenberg, with Courbet and Manet -- can be read as markers of the same changes that took place in certain fundamental structures of knowledge that began in the middle of the eighteenth century. Medical and aesthetic perception as formulated by Foucault and Greenberg, respectively, both emphasize the role of a "surface." This "surface" forms a plane of intersection through which we might examine the epistemological conditions whereby visual reduction becomes a predominate mode in two very different modern fields.

Foucault first introduced his conception of a modern visually instrumentalized consciousness in *The Birth of the Clinic* of 1963. We find out in its opening pages that the progress of modern medical consciousness involved first a radical re-spatialisation of the human body. The laws governing the distribution of illness in this new model of disease are not "to be found in a Euclidean anatomy."[113] Traditional Euclidean anatomy (Foucault cites Morgagni's *De sedibus et causis morborum* of 1760) defined the body as a volume made up of discrete and readily classifiable smaller volumes (organs); new forms of medical perception emerge at the beginning of the nineteenth century, transforming the body into a flat visible surface subject to the operations of the medical gaze. The image or figure of pathology which modern medical perception procures with this body, or "datum," is

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[112]Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," IV, 121.
[113]Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 3.

a structure "whose spatial requisites are not necessarily those of classical geometry."[114] I want to note the horizontal orientation which Foucault assigns to it. "For us," he writes, "the human body defines, by natural right, the space of origin and of distribution of disease: a space whose lines, volumes, surfaces, and routes are laid down, in accordance with a now familiar geometry."[115]

In addition, Foucault radically historicizes and inverts medical science's own positive sense of itself. This new order of the "visible body" is only the most recent site of illness:

> The space of *configuration* of the disease and the space of *localization* of the illness in the body have been superimposed, in medical experience, for only a relatively short period of time – the period that coincides with nineteenth-century medicine and the privileges accorded to pathological anatomy. This is the period that marks the suzerainty of the gaze, since in the same perceptual field, following the same continuities of the same breaks, experience reads at a glance the visible lesions of the organism and the coherence of pathological forms, the illness is articulated exactly on the body, and its logical distribution is carried out at once in terms of anatomical masses. The glance has simply to exercise its right of origin over truth.[116]

For Foucault the privilege accorded to the glance -- the ability to discern "at a glance" from a host of discreet figures and "pathological forms" the coherence of illness marks a radical break with the classical forms of medicine which were concerned with hidden or invisible causes. According to Foucault this new anatomical method brought to the surface of the body's immediate visibility (on the operating or dissection table) the individual features (lesions, swelling, pain, etc.)

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[114]Ibid.
[115]Ibid.

which make up the composition of disease. In bookish contrast to the new anatomical gestalt, classical medicine deciphered the meanings of symptoms by matching them to pre-designated nosological classification systems. Words, we recall, still had their 'revelatory' function as bearers of the world's secrets and truths.

As abrupt as this shift in medical knowledge seems, there is a formal feature of classical thought that, according to Foucault, will be crucial to the new "anatomo-clinical method"; it is the "mute ground" or table upon which classical forms of knowledge (natural science, medicine, grammar, etc.) arranged their taxonomies.[117] It is only upon this epistemological table, *The Order of Things* contends, that an ordering of things is possible.

Foucault emphasizes the structural necessity of this ground by reflecting on a humorous fabulation by Borges: that of the whimsical "Chinese Encyclopedia."[118] Foucault discerns in the "exotic charm" of Borges' taxonomy (animals divided into those belonging to the Emperor, embalmed, tame, suckling pigs, etc.) the limitations and "stark impossibility" of comprehending animals, as such. He notes that while the "precise meaning and ... demonstrable content" which distinguishes each of these animals is adequate to understanding, we are nevertheless unable to order these distinctions in a labile and coherent fashion. Borges has composed a

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[116]Ibid., 3-4.
[117]Foucault, *Order of Things*, xvii.
[118]Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952,* trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: Texas Pan American Series, 2003), 103.

list, Foucault contends, without the use of the most "familiar landmarks of our thought," namely the flat invisible plane "with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things."[119] Even the construction of LeBrunian monstrosities such as "amphibious maidens ... clawed wings ... disgusting, squamous epidermis ... modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination," is impossible precisely because a "common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible" he continues, "is not the propinquity (or closeness) of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible ... Though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space."[120]

In this passage, Foucault points to the existence of an invisible epistemological plane, a plane of composition and coherence which functions as the necessary basis upon which all forms of western order are composed. He describes this ground as the "table" or "grid of identities, similitudes, analogies" according to which "we have become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things."[121] Foucault details the absence of a "common locus" in Borges's heteroclite array using a splendidly clever reference to a notion which is certainly one of the most familiar to surrealism:

> What has been removed (by Borges)...is the famous 'operating table'...I use that word 'table' in two superimposed senses: the nickel-plated, rubbery table swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun *devouring all shadow* – the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing-machine; and also a table, a *tabula*

[119]Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.
[120] Ibid., xvi-xvii.
[121]Ibid., xix.

> that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences – the table upon which ... language has intersected space.[122]

The difference between Borges' "Chinese" taxonomy and Surrealism's *unheimlich* assemblage is of course this operating table. In any case, Foucault's very clever elaboration of Surrealism's operating table carries within its play of citations a reference to the very real operating tables which Foucault discussed in his earlier work *The Birth of the Clinic.* With this work Foucault describes how the "mute ground" of western thought assumes its most material status in the clinical spaces of the early nineteenth century under the "suzerainty of the gaze."[123] Much like the flat picture plane of modern painting which gradually abolished three-dimensional illusion, the examination/operating tables of early modern medicine brought the hidden volumes and diseases of the body into the bright horizontal plane of visibility. Foucault contends that the "anato-clinical method" developed by early modern surgeons and diagnosticians restructured the body as a visible surface coterminous with the very surface on which it is placed. Early clinicians called their new method "historical," which they opposed to the older "philosophical" method.[124]

For Foucault, the historical "embraces whatever, *de facto* or *de jure*, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, may be offered to the gaze."[125] The method, explains Foucault, constructs disease as an "event" of which symptoms are not the causes

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[122]Ibid,. xvii.
[123]Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 4.
[124]Ibid., 9.
[125]Ibid.

but visible signs. It will be the task of the clinician, as is implied by the term "gaze," to survey the "free field" and assemble from the array of "presentations" the visible composition of disease. The historical method is, Foucault writes:

> directed upon that which is visible in the disease...and as it moves forward, the gaze is really retreating, since it reaches the truth of the disease only by allowing it to win the struggle to fulfill, in all its phenomena, its true nature.[126]

The older philosophical approach did not seek out the visible traces of pathological processes in order to create a 'picture' or 'configuration' of its general organization; it did not throw disease into "the concrete space of perception" (the Kantian manifold) but rather lined up symptoms to their "doubles" written into the old nosologies.[127]

In the first part of the nineteenth century the great surgeon Bichat, Foucault contends, further "planarised" the structures of organs through a "tissular" model, making the interiority of the human body a sort of seamless surface which has been infinitely folded, forming a kind of variegated textile which forms a non-Euclidean medium through which disease literally is absorbed.[128] The major discovery of Bichat's *Treatise on Membranes*, Foucault writes:

> is a principle of deciphering corporal space that is at once intra-organic, inter-organic, and trans-organic. The anatomical element (a body defined by its organ volumes) has ceased to define the fundamental form of spatialization and to command, by a relation of proximity, the ways of physiological or pathological communication; it is now no more than a secondary form of primary space, which, by a process of winding

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[126]Ibid.
[127]Ibid.
[128]Ibid., 127.

> round, superposition, and thickening, constitutes it. This fundamental space is entirely defined by the thinness of tissue.[129]

Foucault further elaborates Bichat's re-spatialisation of the body, emphasizing its canvas-like elasticity; he also distinguishes it from traditional anatomical models (epitomized by Morgagni's *De sedibus)* in a manner that could be applied to the transformation which takes place from classical to modern forms of painting (from classical painting modeled on Poussin's volumetric compositions to the flatly stated plane and figures of Manet):

> Morgagni wished to perceive beneath the corporal surface the densities of organs whose varied forms specified the disease; Bichat wished to reduce the organic volumes to great, homogenous, tissual surfaces, to areas of identity in which secondary modifications would find their fundamental kinships ... Bichat is strictly an analyst ... [reducing] organic *volume* to tissular space...Bichat's eye is a clinician's eye, because he gives an absolute epistemological privilege to the *surface gaze.*[130]

It is important to note the privilege that Bichat assigns to the immediate visibility of tissues:

> Thanks to Bichat, superficiality now becomes embodied in the real surfaces of membranes. Tissual expanses form the perceptual correlative of the surface gaze that defined the clinic. By a realistic shift in which medical positivism was to find its origin, surface, hitherto a structure of the onlooker had become a figure of the one observed.[131]

There is an analogous modification of space in the shift from traditional or classical modes of painting to modern ones. According to Greenberg, the history of avant-garde painting consists of a "progressive surrender to the resistance of its

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[129]Ibid.
[130]Ibid., 128-129.
[131]Ibid., 129.

medium." This resistance, he continues, "consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perspective space."[132] Painting's pre-modern 'philosophical' attitude, like that of the classical physicians, was tethered to the metaphysics of narrative and to the principle of resemblance; painting, as Lessing understood but inadequately resolved, remained subordinated to literature. According to Lessing and, later, Greenberg, this parasitic status was fundamentally flawed; with literature as its host, painting's relation to the space-time axis was doubly 'inauthentic.' Once it surrendered to a more historical or operational approach, modern painting, Greenberg writes, "not only got rid of imitation – and with it 'literature' – but also of realistic imitation's corollary confusion between painting and sculpture...painting abandons chiaroscuro and shaded modeling." A space for painting emerges in which "brush strokes are often defined for their own sake."[133]

Greenberg describes a general "transmutation" of painting's representational regime, analogous to Foucault's distinction between philosophical and historical modes of medical knowledge, in the following terms: "The motto of the Renaissance artist, *Ars est artem celare*, is exchanged for *Ars est artem demonstrare*."[134] That is to say, Renaissance art, in order to procure its illusion, masked or concealed the very means through which it procured that illusion; modern art on the other hand will progress through the maximization of its means. Again, Renaissance art, bound to illusion and illustration, is replaced by a

[132]Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon," I, 34.
[133]Ibid.

"demonstrative" mode which flatly affirms the *shadowless* two-dimensional materiality of its support – the canvas.

In any case, modern medicine, as Foucault demonstrated, was taken over by an operational drive, and developed diagnostic methods and treatment plans which were fashioned out of similarly positive methods. At a crucial historical juncture in the first decades of the nineteenth-century modern medicine will experience its object (the body as site of disease) after it has lifted this body to a plane of visible composition. But it will only be able to do this by retaining and refurbishing the "first structure provided by classificatory medicine," by re-tooling the classical operating table into "the flat surface of perpetual simultaneity."[135]

Again, comparisons between Foucault's conception of this flat surface of medicine's operating table and Greenberg's fully realized modern picture plane are clear. Both posit the simultaneous historical "advance to the surface"[136] of two types of visually instrumentalized knowledge, and both types of knowledge have radically torn themselves from the old theatre of representations which were spaces of depth, shadow, and illusion.

Foucault continues:

> A cause that can be *seen*, a symptom that is gradually discovered, a principle that can be deciphered from its root do not belong to the order of 'philosophical' knowledge, but to a 'very simple knowledge,' which

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[134]Ibid.
[135]Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 5-6.
[136]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," I, 35.

'must precede all others' and which situates the original form of medical experience.[137]

And here Foucault describes the modern epistemological plane more explicitly:

> It is a question of defining a sort of fundamental area in which perspectives are leveled off, and in which shifts of level are aligned: an effect has the same status as its cause, the antecedent coincides with what follows it. In this homogenous space series are broken and time abolished: a local inflammation is merely the ideal juxtaposition of its historical elements (redness, tumour, heat, pain) without their network of reciprocal determinations or their temporal intersection being involved.[138]

Here of course we have a description of the new clinical mode, a diagnostic experience of illness in which redness, tumour, heat and pain are arranged like elements of a modernist collage on a "mute" surface.

In the following passage Foucault describes the emergence of something that clearly resembles the flat materiality of the Greenbergian modern picture plane:

> Disease is perceived fundamentally in a space of projection without depth, of coincidence without development. There is only one plane and one moment. The form in which truth is originally shown is the surface in which relief is both manifested and abolished ... [139]

This "moment" which the clinical gaze instantaneously apprehends seems to anticipate that form of perception defined by gestalt theorists and elaborated somewhat simultaneously by modernist painters and critics. The pertinent conceptual feature of gestalt theory proposes that compositional 'wholes' determine the manner in which the individual elements that compose them are perceived. Greenberg proposes a modernized painterly space that is also

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[137]Foucault, 6.
[138]Ibid.

"homogenized"; the relationship of painting to time is collapsed in a single moment that is simultaneous with the painting surface. This simple reduction resolves the "confusion" as to the status of space and time in the plastic arts, again a confusion recognized by Lessing, Greenberg writes, but inadequately settled "exclusively in terms of literature."[140] For Greenberg the most important feature of modern painting, its critical and material limit, is "the picture plane itself."

For both thinkers the process of reduction is conceived in terms of simplification. Foucault situates the gaze as that which opens the "simplest" and "original form of medical experience"; Greenberg proposes that the modern picture surface emerges out of an analogous "simplification."

"Simplification" Greenberg writes "is part of the instinctive accommodation to the medium." The picture plane, he continues "grows shallower and shallower, flattening out and pressing together the fictive planes of depth until they meet as on upon the real and material plane which is the actual surface of the canvas; where they lie side by side or interlocked or transparently imposed upon each other."[141]

For Greenberg the initial moment of truth for modern painting will be one in which relief is both, and I apply Foucault's words to my own hypothetical ends, *manifested and abolished.* And again we find in the following passage from

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[139]Ibid.
[140]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," I, 25.
[141]Ibid., 35.

Greenberg the emergence of a space shaped by epistemological regularities which fashion the planar space of clinical medicine delineated by Foucault:

> Where the painter still tries to indicate real objects their shapes flatten and spread in the dense, two-dimensional atmosphere. A vibrating tension is set up as the objects struggle to maintain their volume against the tendency of the real picture plane to re-assert its material flatness and crush them to silhouettes.[142]

As Modern painting progresses, Greenberg continues, "realistic space cracks and splinters into flat planes which come forward, parallel to the plane surface."[143] Through this process of 'morselisation' recognizable fragments of representation recombine with graphic elements so as to "destroy the partial illusion of depth by slamming the various planes together." This destructive *slamming* "emphasizes further the impenetrability of the plane surface" (that necessary "mute ground") and the spatial immediacy of time in modern abstract painting.[144]

For Foucault the planarisation of the body by the medical gaze represents only one moment in the exteriorization of the medical subject; this initial "simplification" will be followed by a multiplication of gazes. Greenberg will offer no comparable development for the progress of modern painting; he will insist not only on the empirical limit of the modern picture plane but also on its function, in his Kantian scheme, as painting's primary "regulative idea."

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[142]Ibid.
[143]Ibid.
[144]Ibid.

From the horizontal template which forms the first order of modern medical knowledge, Foucault elaborates the manner, through the ensuing conflagration of biopolitical force and medical technology beginning in the nineteenth century, in which this flat surface is further stratified and folded. Gilles Deleuze, in his remarkable examination of the subject of "space" in Foucault's thought, states that *The Birth of the Clinic* had "shown how the clinic brought the body up to the surface, and equally how pathological anatomy subsequently introduced into this body deep foldings which did not resuscitate the old notion of interiority but constituted instead the new inside of this outside."[145] Hence, even as nineteenth-century medical pathology probed and mapped out the interior recesses of organs, tissue systems, nerve fibers, and reformulated a conception of death which had, in Foucault's words, "left its old tragic heaven" to become a gradual progression of little, almost indistinguishable deaths (a sequence of small system failures), it did so through an exorbitant series of exteriorizations. In the process of this "long movement of spatialisation whose decisive instruments were a certain use of language and a difficult conceptualization of death," death is installed as "man's lyrical core...his invisible truth, his visible secret."[146]

The Birth of The Clinic elaborates further the medical methods born of the convergence "by which man obtained positive knowledge of himself" and places these developments within the historical emergence of positivism.[147] The formation

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[145]Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 97.
[146]Foucault, *Order of Things*, 195.
[147]Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 199.

of clinical medicine, he concludes "is merely one of the more visible witnesses to...changes in the fundamental structures of experience." In undertaking "a vertical investigation of this positivism," he continues, a general pattern of development can be discerned in the passage from the epistemological order of classicism, to scientific and medical thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

> The original powers of the perceived and its correlation with language in the original forms of experience, the organization of objectivity on the basis of sign values, the secretly linguistic structure of the datum, the constitutive character of corporal spatiality, the importance of finitude in the relation of man with truth...all this was involved in the genesis of positivism.[148]

Again, this same positivist awareness of the "constitutive character of corporal spatiality" guides the emergence of the Greenbergian picture plane. Greenberg's most assertive, inventive and lucid statements about modernist form inevitably entail a recapitulation of positivism from the late eighteenth century to the (his) present. The historical course of painting, whose former task "from Giotto to Courbet" had been to "hollow out an illusion of three-dimensional space,"[149] was, under the suzerainty of the gaze, gradually reduced to a shadowless, non-fictive surface, and delineated in its own specificity the empirical limits of vision. While Greenberg's insistent recounting of this empirical foregrounding of the picture surface is generally a critically positive movement, it is often suffused with melancholia and a sense of historical loss that is comparable to that mood which

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[148]Ibid.

saturates Foucault's entire archeology. "(Illusion) was conceived of more or less as a stage...and the surface of the picture as a window through which one looked at the stage," Greenberg wrote in an essay of 1954 titled "Abstract and Representational":

> But Manet began to pull the backdrop of this stage forward, and those who came after...kept on pulling it forward until today it has come smack up against the window...All the painter has left to work with now is, so to speak, a more or less opaque window pane. And no matter how richly he inscribes the pane, even if he traces the outlines of recognizable objects on it, we are left disconsolate because this does not compensate for the loss, to our traditionally, historically determined eyes, of the old play of incident in an illusion of depth.[150]

Again, the formation of clinical medicine and modern painting are both driven and held accountable to *themselves* by a critico-positivist injunction, one that had gained momentum and velocity as it issued from Kant, and which brings all forms of modern experience into direct contact with the "harsh law of limit."[151] Here, Foucault writes in the final moving pages of *The Birth of the Clinic*, "the destiny of individuality will be to appear always in the objectivity that manifests and conceals it, that denies and yet forms its basis: 'here,'" Foucault quotes the "mad" Holderlin, "'the subjective and the objective exchange faces.'"[152] And with Greenberg's account of the rise of a specialized, non-fictive, non-illusory painting, we find that our historically determined (bourgeois) eyes slam against their own "objective

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[149]Clement Greenberg, "Abstract and Representational," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), III, 190.
[150]Ibid.
[151]Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 198.
[152]Ibid.

basis." It is another of those instances in which finitude, albeit a little death in comparison to the one drawn out for us by modern medicalisation, asserts itself.

I quote further from the Greenberg passage to call attention first to the manner in which "finitude" reverberates through and even menaces his elegant, high-minded tone; and secondly to draw clear comparison to Foucault's conceptualization of "exteriorization" as it is worked out on the human body by a medical gaze which in its most extreme and dazzling manifestations expunges human form from its human subject:

> What saddens our eyes is not so much the absence or mutilation of the image, but the deprivation it has suffered of those spatial rights it used to enjoy back when the painter was obliged to create an illusion of the same kind of space as that in which our bodies move. It is this illusion and its space that we may miss even more than the things, as such, that filled it.[153]

And again, it is important to keep in mind Foucault's description, in the opening pages of *The Order of Things*, of the disturbance which erupts into Velazquez's famous tableau; the turn of events which Greenberg describes (the evacuation of illusion by modern painting) was, in Foucault's sense, the "possibility" which Las Meninas held in store.

> The picture has now become an object of literally the same spatial order as our bodies and no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. It has lost its 'inside' and become almost all 'outside,' all plane surface. The spectator can no longer escape into it from the space in which he himself stands.[154]

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[153]Greenberg, "Abstract and Representational," III, 190-191.
[154]Ibid., 191.

With this remarkable assertion, Greenberg carries out the complete expulsion of the figure from painting; re-entry into the re-assuring space of bourgeois naturalism is no longer possible. Greenberg continues:

> [For] the abstract or quasi-abstract picture returns him to that space in all its brute literalness, and if it deceives his eyes at all, it is by optical rather than pictorial means, by relations of color, shape, and line largely divorced from descriptive connotations, and by 'situations' in which foreground and background, up and down, are interchangeable. Not only does the abstract picture seem to offer a narrower more physical and less imaginative kind of experience than the representational picture, but the language itself of painting appears, as it were, to do without nouns and transitive verbs, so that often we cannot distinguish centers of interest within the abstract picture's field and have to take the whole of it as one single continuous center of interest ....It is the language, then, the space, of abstract painting that causes most of the dissatisfaction we feel with it – not the absence per se of recognizable images.[155]

With this full positive assertion of the modern picture plane, the sovereign subject of *Las Meninas* who was according to Foucault's analysis in the throws of being usurped by a space "where the king and his wife hold sway (but which) equally belongs to the artist and to the spectator,"[156] is finally and completely expelled. He, in Foucault's words, "does not belong to the picture." With the "necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance"[157] Velazquez's points (and the backside of the depicted canvas serves as its index) to a future order in which representation will "offer itself...in its pure form"[158] as the Greenbergian surface.

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[155]Greenberg, "Abstract and Representational," III, 91.
[156]Foucault, *The Order of Things,* 105.
[157]Ibid.
[158]Ibid.

Conclusion

The central purpose of my thesis has been to trace the emergence of two forms of modern visuality -- medical perception in the new clinics of the early nineteenth century, and formalist perception in modern art -- and to situate them as two instances of the same "event" occurring at the order of knowledge. Reading Foucault next to Greenberg, the larger project involves an effort to situate these developments historically within the formal and critical developments of post-Kantian thought.

Under the pseudonym of Maurice Florence, Michel Foucault wrote a philosophical self-portrait for a *Dictionary of Philosophers.* Originally written in another form early in 1984 as an introduction to his *History of Sexuality,* the remarkable text spells out in his own very clear terms his place in the Kantian tradition: "If Foucault is indeed perfectly at home in the philosophical tradition, it is within the *critical* tradition of Kant, and his undertaking could be called *A Critical History of Thought.*"[159]

With Kant as exemplar, Foucault devoted himself to an interrogation of epistemological regimes, to the critical understanding of the conditions under which "something can become an object of possible knowledge."[160] This interrogation involved an "archeological" determination as to how an "object" is "problematized

[159]Maurice Florence (Michel Foucault), "Michel Foucault, 1926-," 314.
[160]Ibid., 315.

as an object to be known, to what procedure of division it could be subjected, and what part of it is considered pertinent. It is thus a matter of determining its mode of objectivization, which varies, too, according to the type of knowledge involved."[161]

A dialectically inflected "Kantian self-criticism" also guided the thought of Clement Greenberg. He devoted himself to an historical and epistemological investigation of painting that by the mid 1950s and early 60s reduced painting's origin and "competence" to its historically fashioned material facture. We recall Greenberg's commitment to Kantian auto-critique and his conception of Kant "as the first real Modernist" followed by his assertion that Kant "was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism."[162]

Foucault and Greenberg, as I have demonstrated, were both also influenced by respectively recent developments in Marxist thought. Althusser's Marxist topography provided a primary model from which Foucault -- to very different ends than Althusser — erected his elaborate archaeologies. Greenberg was methodologically grounded in Marxism and, like Foucault, for a time deeply politically invested in it. While he advocated a form of vanguard painting that was, in the most extreme Kantian and formal sense, detached -- the term "post-painterly abstraction" which he coined in the 60s would seem to point toward a structuralist history -- his Marxism was fundamentally modernist and humanist. His Kantianism was clearly modified by dialectical materialism.

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[161]Ibid.
[162]Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", IV, 85.

Positivism, as I have also demonstrated, factors into the work of both in a multiplicity of ways. The ultra-empirical philosophical and scientific attitude which emerged in the early nineteenth century posited sensory observation -- visual observation in particular -- as the only basis on which to build knowledge. Greenberg continuously cited the influence of scientific method on the work of the early modernists; the flat picture plane which Greenberg establishes as the empirical limit of modern painting is itself a positivist structure.

Foucault was also concerned with mapping a history of positivism, with an "archeological" investigation of its structural dispersal throughout the fields of knowledge since the nineteenth century. He also absorbed its methods, treating discourses and objects not as creative products to be hermeneutically deciphered but as positive facts to be placed within historical assemblages. Foucault, unlike Greenberg, would never assign a referent to a positively determined structure. The objects of Foucault's positive analysis were not strictly determinable facts, or physical objects, but discourses and their objects. The difference in this relation to the referent, to objects which exist (or do not exist) outside of discourse, reflects Foucault's and Greenberg's different historical situations with respect to modernism. Greenberg occupies, of course, a very high-modernist position according to which the positively determined picture plane assumes the status of a historically acquired fact. For the post modern Foucault the picture plane would represent only another moment in a history of objects structured by discourse.

Despite these differences, which are considerable, I have proposed a complimentary reading which, I hope, while calling attention to their differences also establishes their shared philosophical and epistemological foundations. I have also highlighted the sometimes uncanny local similarities that incidentally appear in their methods and conclusions. For example, Foucault's short archeology of modern art (*This Is Not a Pipe)* proposes a set of developments (exemplified by the work of Klee, Kandinsky and Magritte) through which modern painting freed itself from its subordination to literature to engage in the medium-specific play of its own plastic elements. This emphasis on the materiality of the medium bears striking resemblance to Greenbergian formalism.

My larger purpose has been to investigate more than the similarities which emerge locally in their writings (medium-specificity in modern painting for example) but to place their developments within a common historical epoch, one which in the introduction to this project I have coined "the epoch of space." I have shown how both are concerned with the Kantian spatialisation of reason and the subject. For Greenberg the modern eruption of space into language takes precise shape in the flat, non-fictive surface of modern painting; for Foucault this epistemic development works itself out through in the "anato-clinical method" of the early nineteenth-century physicians who focused their gaze on to the flattened geography of the patient's body, to the surface of tissues and lesions.

My methodology, of course, has been Foucauldean. I have offered a history that is more archeological than chronological. Reading, at a certain glance, Foucault's conception of medical perception alongside Greenberg's conception of opticality in modern painting, I have shown them to be products of the same epistemic forces. Indeed, my central thesis has been that Greenberg's picture plane and Foucault's operating table can be understood — within a spatially conceived archeological image of history – as the discursive masks of the same historical event. In his conclusion to *The Birth of the Clinic,* Foucault offers a description of modern medical perception which could have been written by Greenberg in "Modernist Painting":

> What was fundamentally invisible is suddenly so simple, so immediate that it seems to be the natural consequence of a more highly developed experience. It is as if for the first time for thousands of years, doctors, free at least of theories and chimeras, agreed to approach the object of their experience with the purity of an unprejudiced gaze.[163]

Foucault, of course, will go on to problematize the positivist assumption of the neutrality of the gaze. Greenberg will remain fixed to the surface of flat painting, insisting on its ontological and historical primacy.

In any case, it has been, again, my effort to demonstrate in an archeological sense how the modern operating table and the flat picture plane are the nominal features of the same epistemic event. This alternative reading proposes that twentieth-century modern painting has more in common at the levels of epistemological formation with early nineteenth-century clinical medicine than with those "kindred"

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[163]Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 195.

art objects which make up a unified centuries long trajectory drawn by traditional art history.

What remains to be explored are the genealogical implications — again in the Foucauldean sense -- of this inversion. Does the archeological simultaneity of modern medical and artistic perception, with medical perception having historical (in the temporal sense) precedence, denote something more compelling? Following Bichat's method might we find unexpected folds of tissue where medical technology, political ideology and modern aesthetics form unexpected 'neoplasms,' if not entirely new anatomies? Or, like the umbrella and sewing machine, will their epistemological proximity prove to be merely another chance encounter? The implications of this intersection of medical and artistic perception on both the status of artistic subjectivity, as well as the status of the artist as subject, are also open to further historical exploration. As Michael Leja contends, the emergence of abstract art in New York during the 1940's was coterminous with the emergence of models of subjectivity exemplified especially by Jackson Pollock. According to Leja, the emergence of a "Modern Man discourse" built from neo-romantic conceptions of an autonomous self profoundly conflicted by internal psychic antagonisms of reason and "primitive" drives found perhaps its most ideological effective crystallizations in the figure of the Abstract Expressionist painter.[164] With the central thesis developed in my own work as my point of departure, I plan to take the groundbreaking work of Leja, T.J. Clark, and others, further and deal specifically

[164]Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940's* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 7-17.

with the emergence, beginning in the nineteenth century, of the artist as “case history”.

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