

FOUCAULT'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD: DISPERSING THE TEMPORAL UNITY
OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper reads Foucault's empirico-transcendental doublet from *The Order of Things* as his contribution to the tradition of transcendental critique. The motivations are twofold: (1) intervening in the scholarship on Foucault's method that has largely dismissed archaeology in favour of genealogy; (2) revealing his unique account of temporality. The result is an elevation of archaeology over genealogy due to the former's infamous yet often forgotten critique of phenomenology, out of which Foucault's view of temporality emerges. Establishing Foucault's philosophical lineage and his contemporaneous interlocutors is therefore of crucial importance, for it elucidates the conceptual armature that animates his methodology, helping us understand how it works and how it *ought* to work.

Foucault's archaeological method is productive of the concept of temporality which manifests in the discontinuity of history and the dispersion of subjects of experience. Moreover, discontinuous temporality is Foucault's ontological answer to the transcendental question of how conditions and the conditioned relate. Foucault's innovative reply is that their relation lacks unity but is tenuously held together by the strained efforts of 'historical man'. The substance of this account is what distinguishes archaeology from phenomenology, despite their shared modality as transcendental critique. But, most importantly, Foucault thoroughly historicizes the transcendental, and he does not stop there: Foucault further argues for the immanence of the transcendental to the empirical in discontinuous temporality's disintegration of experience. It is only through archaeology that this form of experience can be grasped, for it requires suspending the projective-retroactive synthesis of experience with the concepts of unity and continuity enacted by the constitutive subject of phenomenology.

“All that is solid melts into air,
all that is holy is profaned.”

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

“Time is out of joint,
time is unhinged.”

- Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*

“Objections, digressions, gay mistrust,
the delight in mockery are signs of health:
everything unconditional belongs in pathology.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper re-appraises the widespread dismissal of Foucault's archaeology in favour of genealogy. Prior to the project of genealogy, archaeology developed distinctive accounts of history, temporality, and experience in tandem with its elaboration of that Foucauldian concept *par excellence*, 'discourse'. This placed archaeology on phenomenological terrain – in its emphasis on temporality and experience – adjacent to structuralism – in its emphasis on history and discourse – but ultimately radicalized both traditions. I motivate a reassessment of archaeology by identifying its Kantian inheritance in terms of transcendental critique; reading archaeology thusly reveals its radical core. Namely, the traditional transcendental subject becomes a historical object that duplicates itself across the planes of conditions and conditioned. This object is *l'homme historique* (Foucault, 1966, 382).¹ It is archaeology's feat to have discovered that discourse attenuates the transcendental and empirical during its confluences and collapse in the modern *épistémè*. All this to say, discourses, peculiarly those of the nascent life sciences, present the conditions and conditioned of modern experience exhaustively through the

figure of ‘historical man’. Unique to him is a temporality erosive of experience’s unification. Temporality is discontinuous in that it lies in the gaps between discourses that subtend experience, and it is dispersed in that each discourse is home to a time of its own. This animates the discontinuity of history and disperses subjects of experience. Theorizing temporality in this fashion will be tentatively developed throughout the paper, in lockstep with my tendentious resurrection of Foucault’s oft-forgotten critique of phenomenology.

Section II poses the question of whether there is unity to Foucault’s method. I answer in the affirmative: conceptually, it appears in temporality, and methodologically, it is the fruit of Foucault’s archaeological labour. Archaeology must be read in dialogue with structuralism and phenomenology due to its shared concerns, respectively, with language and experience. Language, in Foucault’s thought, has an ontological dimension as discourse that mediates subject and world, i.e., discourse is the stuff of experience. In Foucault’s archaeology, discourse is not strictly linguistic, for the ground of everything is history. The experience of history accessible to the subject is manifested by a discontinuous temporality, that which tears asunder the seeming unity of experience.

Section III sketches the current debate on Foucault’s account of history and method as it pertains to his philosophical milieu. Against classical phenomenology, which attempted to make experience intelligible to the subject by unifying it in a sense of temporality, I claim that archaeology locates the intelligibility of experience in the *lack* of its unity: time does not simply pass for a subject in a privileged sense of interiority; time occurs exterior to a subject. The discordant and disruptive exteriority of time follows from the thorough historicization of conditions of possibility of experience in modernity, whereby discourses have proliferated a non-identity of the objects and subjects of reference and address. Rather than accepting subjective

meaning as the *a priori* organization of experience, Foucault evacuates subjectivity from the explanatory order. In its place goes discontinuous temporality, that which destabilizes and decomposes the givenness of experience, breaking apart its unities, concurrently neutralizing the normativity with which experience governs its subjects.

Section IV is an exegesis of the disintegrating effect of temporality on experience. This is carried out by reconstructing the empirico-transcendental doublet of *The Order of Things* in the figure of ‘historical man’ as that which conditions and constrains actual as opposed to possible experience. ‘Historical man’ is the subject processed by so many diverging discourses – the conduit between conditions and the conditioned of experience – that ‘historical man’ assumes at once the status of their objects. While responsible for rendering experience, no one discourse possesses an epistemic defeater with respect to the others, and all discourses are ontologically infeasible. Any discursive synthesis of experience in a unified object therefore fails in perpetuity, and likewise, the subject is repeatedly pluralized, as ‘historical man’ is continually duplicated across conditions and conditioned. Hence the empirico-transcendental *doublet*. Foucault is in this way distinguishing himself from orthodox phenomenology and structuralism. Namely, he stands with other philosophers of his generation, like Deleuze and Derrida, in attempting to give a new account of the transcendental – similar to their ‘transcendental empiricism’ and the ‘quasi-transcendental’² – but by recourse to historicity. This returns us to the problem motivating this paper: the dismissal of archaeology in favour of genealogy. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow arguably inaugurated this reading, one fatal to archaeology, when they claimed archaeology is caught in a vicious circle beyond retrieval (1984, 84-5, 90) on account of its incapacity to resolve the principal phenomenological problems motivating its

existence. But this view fails to take seriously that archaeology is not merely phenomenology's offspring; archaeology is phenomenology's *enfant terrible*.

Section V provisionally outlines the methodological principles that allow archaeology to radicalize the empirical and transcendental to the point of their transformation, such that its incipient phenomenological terrain is left behind. In brief, archaeology isolates, neutralizes, and decomposes 'historical man' as the object of reference and subject of address that conducts the philosophical interrogation of experience. It is not 'historical man' that speaks or writes, rather his discourses speak *qua* conditions of experience, and it is not 'historical man' who hears or records, but rather his discursive objects and artefacts *qua* constraints on experience. Archaeology, as an inheritor of transcendental critique, crucially transcribes the difference in historical experience into the present.

II. FOUCAULT'S MASKS: WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?

While the secondary literature on Foucault is enormous, many engagements with his work have aimed at its piecemeal application and extension. Slower to emerge is critical reflection on Foucault's philosophical systematicity (or lack thereof), including reflection on whether any one concept lends unity to Foucault's corpus. As to the identity of this conceptual *deus ex machina*, proposals from scholars include: governmentality (Lemke, 2019, 21), problematization (Koopman, 2013, 45, 53), and the subject (Allen, 2008, 29).³ In one interview, Foucault claims "experience" (1991, 70; 2000, 256-7).⁴

Questions regarding the periodization of Foucault's work ensue. For example, should we understand stages in rank-order, with some subordinate to others or all to one, especially if a concept we deem key is the product of a certain stage? If each stage features a distinct cast of

concepts, is it because they are premised on different problems and therefore star different solutions? The answers bear on Foucault's self-distinction from the reigning philosophical traditions of his time, phenomenology and structuralism.

These questions are important insofar as they subject a text to competing paradigms of evaluation, in this case research on Foucault's method and on his philosophical lineage. These research streams overlap to the extent that certain claims about Foucault's placement in the canon import particular problems in the history of philosophy, in response to which his work is then read. This placement gives rise to divergent criteria for assessing the efficacy of Foucault's work and its successes or failures. These successes or failures are then imputed to the method that various authors reconstruct within Foucault's larger work. For instance, the Anglo-American reception of Foucault was filtered through a series of paradigm clashes between philosophy and history, as commentators fought to assign the French foreigner his proper disciplinary designation. It is on this basis that historians were able to denounce Foucault for what they saw as his dearth of empirical demonstration (Megill, 1987, 130) while his American pragmatist interpreters pronounced him the paragon of empirical thinking (Koopman, 2013, 155). Clearly, Foucault's establishment in an intellectual milieu with its associated problems permits the evaluation of his (de)merits. That is why establishing Foucault's philosophical lineage is crucial. It elucidates the conceptual armature that animates his methodology, helping us understand how it works and how it further *ought* to work.

I contend that Foucault's account of historical experience as a discontinuous temporality confers unity to his critical social methodology. This discontinuity is the result of Foucault's archaeological method, which warrants archaeology's elevation with respect to his genealogy. Discontinuous temporality is Foucault's ontological answer to the question of how conditions

and the conditioned relate. His innovative answer is that their relation is without unity. The substance of this answer is what distinguishes archaeology from phenomenology, despite their shared modality as transcendental critique. And it is in this answer that Foucault ultimately retrieved discourse from the grips of French structuralism by reconceiving it. Discourse is no longer *parole* or *la langue*, neither a collection of speech acts nor its correlate in a metalanguage capable of universal translation via formalization. Discourse is the ontological dimension of language, that is, a contingent historical formation concerned not only with signifying structures but the logic of being for a particular discourse's constituent parts (the unique objects, subjects, concepts, and thematics). In this ontology, difference is fundamental, and relations of exteriority rather than essences of interiority are explanatorily primary.

Transcendental critique originally cut up a field of experience in order to ascertain what can and cannot be normatively stated of it. Archaeology is solely concerned with what has occurred in experience. Thus the difference between the former and latter lies in their respective focuses on possible and actual experience. Relatedly, there is no attempt in archaeology to justify its targets, as with traditional transcendental critique. Archaeology is instead driven by a countervailing force of delegitimation. Where transcendental critique looks to secure the grounds of experience by enshrining the conditions upon which valid claims may be made, archaeology attempts to dissolve those grounds by isolating the discourses that naturalize experience, since it is quintessentially our discourses that render experience intelligible. Genealogy, on the other hand, is concerned with the practices that are informed by their discursive conditions of intelligibility. What archaeology offers is a prying apart of discourses and practices so that the command for subjects to take up such discursive practices goes unheard (e.g. the knowledge of sex offered by psychiatric discourse practiced in social institutions, ethical communities, and

self-making). Their sedimentation into common-sense is that of which archaeology breaks free. To combat the given, one must cultivate a sensibility for what is lost. Archaeology is therefore a glancing back in order to see difference in the present whereas genealogy is the reconstructive synthesis of a future out of the ruins of archaeology.⁵ To be clear, this does not entail looking to the past for solutions to the present, nor superimposing the categories of the present on the past and vice versa. The point is to begin seeing with an eye toward difference by estranging oneself from the same.⁶

III. HISTORY HAS A HISTORY: POLEMICAL NOTES TOWARD METHOD

This section begins with a review of the debate on Foucault's account of history that schematizes two divergent appropriations of Foucault, namely, Gary Gutting and Colin Koopman in favour of pragmatism and Béatrice Han-Pile and Kevin Thompson in favour of phenomenology. This leads to an examination of Han-Pile's account, who criticizes Foucault as a (failed) phenomenologist. In handling these criticisms, we will take a brief detour through the work of Colin Koopman, whose American pragmatist reading of Foucault is diametrically opposed to that of Han-Pile. This throws into relief the critical differences between these readings of Foucault and their stakes. After rejecting Han-Pile's attempt to brand Foucault a Heideggerian, while accepting her diagnosis of the central role temporality plays for both, an engagement with Colin Koopman on the nature of Foucault's historiography will show how my reading of Foucault's temporality is distinct from Han-Pile (and thus Heidegger), as well as Koopman on the question of history.

On the one hand, Han-Pile correctly identifies the crucial role of the transcendental in Foucault, that which is denied altogether by Gutting and Koopman in order to assimilate him into the empiricist tradition. On the other hand, I concur with Koopman that identifying Foucault with phenomenology leads to perhaps insurmountable exegetical obstacles. But on the third hand, I

share with Thompson the conviction that Foucault is in serious intellectual debt to Cavailles, one of Husserl's most influential readers in twentieth century French epistemology of science.⁷ The bone of contention is that I read Foucault as proposing an account of temporality fundamentally at odds with phenomenology. This axis is largely absent from Thompson's discussion. Foucault strategically places himself on the terrain of phenomenology in developing his archaeology, if only to tactically outflank the former on its principal question of temporality. So, my reconstruction of Foucault's temporality distinguishes him from Han-Pile and Koopman's respective phenomenological and pragmatist readings while concurring with Thompson's assignment of Foucault in the phenomenological lineage, but quintessentially as the black sheep of the family. The eruptions of discontinuous temporality in experience degrades unity; this feature of Foucault's thought blocks his assimilation into classic phenomenology. The concurrent destabilization of forms and continuity of experience also bars identifying Foucault with pragmatist historiography. I will sketch the relevant differences with respect to phenomenology at the close of this section. To begin, I turn to Han-Pile's substantive account and establish Foucault's main problematic in the archaeology as one of experience and temporality. This dovetails with his distinctive and no less disruptive notion of history.

Han-Pile's confrontation with Gary Gutting (2003) leads her to revise her original thesis, that Foucault is a failed transcendental phenomenologist who lapses into confused empiricist historicism (2002, 65), into a reading of Foucault as a transcendental-historical phenomenologist (2005; 604). Han-Pile originally viewed Foucault as a clandestine Heideggerian grappling with the problems that followed from Husserl's attempts to grant phenomenology objective grounds (2002, 12-3; 55-6; 190). More recently, Han-Pile waded into the stormy debate on Foucault's disciplinary labelling: contrarian philosopher or renegade historian? "In my view, the Order of

Things attempts to re-interpret the Kantian critical project by providing what might be called a transcendental history of the condition of possibility of knowledge in the West” (2005, 586). Han-Pile positions Gutting as arguing that Foucault is interested only in “empirical objects” as a straightforward “historian in the French tradition of the history of the sciences” (2005; 586). I preliminarily agree with Han-Pile’s summary claim that Foucault historicizes the transcendental and in so doing severs its subjective anchoring (592). But this move needs to be taken even further. Foucault does not stop at historicizing the transcendental. He argues for its immanence to the empirical in the disintegration of experience affected by discontinuous temporality.

On Han-Pile’s account, Foucault argues that History substitutes Order as the principle of intelligibility for empirical objects in the shift from the Classical *épistémè* to the modern *épistémè*. Order, in the Classical *épistémè*, is the condition of possibility for empirical objects, due to the nature of language as a function of pure resemblance and immediacy; language is transparent and secures, without hindrance, a unity between words and things. Hence the Classical *épistémè* is known as the age of representation. But this power begins to crumble in modernity when History becomes, as Han-Pile puts it, both the epistemological and ontological condition of possibility for empirical objects (590). Epistemological, because the object of knowledge can only be known historically, and ontological, because this object must necessarily be grasped by us as being subject to a history. (More on this in Section IV.) For now, what is important to flag is that History as a proper noun is typically understood as a deeper historicization of Kant’s transcendental conditions than we find even in Hegel: “although Foucault’s anti-teleological, non-progressive, discontinuous conception of history is quite obviously opposed to Hegelian philosophy of history, it is perhaps best understood as an attempt to *historicize* that conception of history” (Aldea and Allen, 2016, 7). What this means is that

Hegelian History – the logic which subtended the progression of empirical events and conferred them intelligibility as part of the dialectical spiral movement that projects a future to come in which a past origin subject to fracture in the present is made whole again – is itself historicized. But in archaeologically suspending the categories of origin and unity, Foucault forecloses the strategy of automatically subsuming empirical events under a logic of progressively continuous historical development. This understanding of succession is History. By historicizing History, Foucault is drawing on the history that has spawned the logic of progress deployed by historical thinking to make sense of experience. So Foucault's historicity is a radicalization of (French) Hegel's.⁸ Everything has a history, including history; the history of history is 'historical man'. Which is to say, making sense of experience as fundamentally historical comes from human finitude. Thus in Foucault's analytic of finitude, the effort to think *per se* belongs to the empirico-transcendental doublet, namely, the discursive objectifications of human subjectivity. Accordingly, Historical Man, not History, is the principle of intelligibility in modernity.

To anticipate the elaboration of this point in Section IV, it is not just an abstract historicization of all experience that occurs in the modern *épistémè* but the historicization of experience correlative to man's specific form of finitude. In this respect, history, for Foucault, is the experience of temporality's dissolving, disintegrating, destabilizing, and delegitimizing effects — what I have deemed the discontinuity of temporality, temporality's dispersion. And it is only through archaeology – hence its privilege – that this form of experience can be grasped, for it requires abandoning faithful adherence to the projective-retroactive synthesis of experience with the concepts of unity and continuity enjoyed by the constitutive subject of phenomenology. While later Foucault was popularized for petitioning political theory to behead the king, he was much earlier calling to blacklist the first-person singular authority and its description of

experience. Recuperating archaeology is thus crucial for making sense of Foucault's foreignness to a reading like Han-Pile's (for the tearing asunder function of temporality), but also to a reading like Koopman's (for the critical model of history as an experience of discontinuity).

Koopman astutely recognizes that archaeology and genealogy hang together (2010, 106-9), but he does not concede the groundwork of this methodology to archaeology. He attributes its principal concept – a novel notion of time with which we may handle history and the subject – to the work of genealogy. Koopman's reconstruction of Foucault thus gives too much weight to Nietzsche. This results in his reliance on a time-model Foucault had already dispensed with in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault conceived of time pluralistically, therefore rendering temporal experience discontinuous for objects and subjects which are in turn discontinuous (lacking identity) between and within each other. They do not coincide with themselves, for they are the products of multiply competing discourses, and the subject-object correspondence relation itself is non-identical for positions within disparate discourses remained capable of establishing points of contact (e.g. the legal, psychological, and religious discourses that converged in the object 'madness'). These can be analytically isolated for the sake of exposing a multiplicity of time. This multiplicity *qua* difference is concealed when one imposes temporal succession on phenomenal events.

In my view, the purchase of the archaeological procedure is to identify the *co-construction* of subjects and objects of a discourse and practice. This methodological point is eclipsed by any foundationalist attempt to ground one unit of analysis in another by isolating, atomizing, these first. But this move begs the question of the atomic actuality of analytic units by theoretically presupposing the possibility of their isolation from one another. Foucault is anti-foundationalist in the sense that he does not believe in the sanctity of a final ground. His

methodological stress on discontinuous relations obtaining between and within analytic units is what furthermore demonstrates the fragility of the enabling conditions for experience and its tendency to break down. Koopman marginalizes this insight and replaces the time-model of discontinuity developed in archaeology with a continuous time-model borrowed from the Nietzschean historiographical concept of emergence (2010; Foucault 1971), in which the decomposed unity of experience is re-synthesized (even, perhaps, sublated) in order to trace the eventuation of the present. I contend that this contravenes Foucault's first archaeological principle: that the historian is to suspend the quotidian categories of experience, namely, unity, continuity, and teleology. This suspension is needed to explain the ontological relation of decomposition between the transcendental and empirical since, for Foucault, the classical deduction and the phenomenological reduction have failed. I therefore maintain that the fault with Koopman's reading is to have missed the point of archaeology, namely, breaking down experience *simpliciter*. In addition, my reading – unlike Koopman's, which ignores this altogether – identifies the tendency toward collapse of the transcendental and empirical that Foucault archaeologically diagnoses in *The Order of Things*. (In this way Foucault contributes to the project of rethinking transcendental critique, which was popular in his philosophical milieu, as indicated in my introductory comparison of Foucault to Deleuze and Derrida.)

If Koopman looks down on archaeology in disappointment, Han-Pile and Gutting view archaeology with hostility and suspicion: hostility, because they tend toward thinking it is philosophically bankrupt; suspicion, because they see genealogy as its necessary superior. It is notable that this reading is effectively the consensus in the Anglo-American reception of Foucault. For instance, Mark G.E. Kelly has deigned archaeology a “methodological straitjacket” (2018, 161). I hope to have launched its arduous vindication by situating archaeology in

Foucault's often elided concern with temporality and experience. Motivating this project called for problematizing the dominant readings of Foucault represented by Han-Pile and Koopman. Problematizing Han-Pile's view consisted in conceding that temporality is fundamental to Foucault's thought but that its *sui generis* status produces an ineluctable remainder in any attempt to identify him with phenomenology. Problematizing Koopman's view followed from accepting his reluctance to identify Foucault with phenomenology but complicating that position by allowing temporality – phenomenology's conceptual *raison d'être* – to assume an organizing role in our reading. Elaborating these critical positions is worthwhile but cannot be performed here due to the comprehensive nature of any such venture that could do justice to the aforementioned authors. That being said, it is necessary to perform this problematization in programmatic fashion so as to foreground archaeology. For it is in the archaeological method that Foucault tackles the question of experience in the tradition of transcendental critique. And it is rereading archaeology as a response to this problem that resists Foucault's inscription into Koopman's pragmatist empiricism and Han-Pile's phenomenological program. Having shown how archaeology's account of discontinuous history is distinguished from Koopman's genealogical historiography, I will now do the same with orthodox phenomenology, in comparing their respective first principles.

The problem confronting those who wish to place Foucault downstream from phenomenology is simple. Foucault most strenuously objects to Husserlian phenomenology by disagreeing with its account of three elementary concepts: subject, experience, and method. First, Foucault rejects the use of the transcendental subject as an explanatory foundation for philosophy. Second, Foucault understands experience as consisting of not just phenomena constituted by intentional acts but further calibrated by asubjective forces (so experience is not

just the conditioned but includes those conditions; experience includes the standardly imperceptible synthetic activities that produce phenomena). Foucault's understanding of experience therefore is an elaboration of his notion of the subject: the subject is not originary nor is it a unity; the subject is a contingent effect of multiple causes. Foucault's understanding of experience includes these causes anterior to the production of the subject as structures enabling the appearance of both experience and the subject. So Foucault's emphasis on the exteriority of the subject (with respect to its causes, specifically the anteriority of delayed action of circuitous cause-effect), and of experience critically differs from the phenomenological construal of experience being interior to mental acts. Third, Foucault's method of the archaeological suspension is a device made to overcome his perceived shortcomings of the phenomenological and eidetic reductions.

Allow me to outline three moments of this point about reductions. First, the archaeological suspension is more successful in bracketing the natural attitude because it annuls the explanatory categories pertaining to commonsensical thought that render everyday experience intelligible, naturally, as given. The categories and regulative ideals include origin, continuity, and development, or in layman's terms, unity of experience, linear cause-effect, and historical progression. Second, the eidetic reduction's attempt to grasp the ideal essences of objects fails to account for the historicity of objects of experience. The larger archaeological method evades this pitfall by investigating the subtending synthetic activity responsible for producing - what shows up in experience as - a unified object. So (unlike Hegel) synthesis is not ready-made in Foucault. All said and done, this general exposition should not be taken as ammunition against the validity of Husserlian phenomenology.⁹ These statements are simply

schematic and suggest that the assimilation of Foucault to phenomenology must account for significant conceptual antagonism.

I now draw to a conclusion the main findings of this section. A systematic reconstruction of temporality in Foucault elucidates the stakes of his methodological innovations and the work of critique as the disentanglement of the transcendental and empirical despite their mutual conditioning. It is within archaeology that temporality assumes the status of an organizing concept of Foucault's thought, and it is this undeveloped articulation of temporality that explains the ontological-differential relation holding between the transcendental and empirical. Issuing a satisfactory rejoinder to the arguments of Han-Pile and Thompson depends on accounting for this ontological enabling condition, for otherwise, it would be true that Foucault is a mere historical-transcendental phenomenologist, as the former has it, or a transcendental-historical phenomenologist according to the latter. Archaeology does play a critical and transcendental role in identifying and neutralizing the discourses that ontologically render experience. Temporality furnishes this ontological relation. But it is neither the temporality regulative of the imagination nor the temporal structure of care. These positions are respectively committed to a subject-centrism and philosophy of unity; Foucault is at pains to displace both. So Foucault is neither a transcendental idealist nor is he picking up where Heidegger left off in order to historicize Being. Discourse, the focal point of archaeology, is the ontological manifestation of experience, and it is in discourse that temporal discontinuity takes place.

IV. 'LOST IN TIME LIKE TEARS IN RAIN:' AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIS(SOLUTION) TO THE PROBLEM OF EXPERIENCE

Foucault's concern in *The Order of Things* (hereafter abbreviated as OT) is to give an account of what undergirds the classificatory systems that have proliferated as the recourse for making

sense of the world. His analysis is, if you will, a meta-philosophical classification of classification. But Foucault's level of investigation is suspended between pure transcendentalism and brute empiricism (OT: xix; 11).¹⁰ He will not take as his object everyday practices nor theoretical doctrines (OT: xx; 11-12). Rather it is the "intermediary" space of *discourse* in which the ordinary and commonsensical begins to break down, to lose its staying power, immediacy, and automatic hegemony. This intermediary discursive space is populated by the immanent knowledge-practices of the recent life sciences that are responsible for establishing the remit of experience. Foucault's analysis is thus of the successive forms of experience that engender actual reality and ground its claims to governance, i.e., the authority with which experience imposes conditions and constraints on its subjects, e.g. Classical Representation begins mid-1600s, modernity begins early 1800s. An exhaustive account of experience, where experience is subject to fundamental conditions and constraints that render experience intelligible, is what amounts to an *épistémè* in Foucault's technical vocabulary. An *épistémè* is governed by a principle of intelligibility for its correlative subjects that circumscribes the bounds of experience and legislates its claims not only to validity in the epistemological and ontological registers but also to self-evidence. So different *épistémès* are home to their own proper objects and logics. Most importantly, however, is that the principle of intelligibility cannot be captured by its own analytic; as such, Foucault repeatedly remarks that representation cannot be represented in the Classical *épistémè*, and likewise, in modernity, the impossibility of historicizing history.¹¹

Critical for our purposes is the necessity of experience only being legible to us following its refraction through whatever schematic prism is constructed by the reigning principle of intelligibility. Experience is thus not exhausted by what is given to the senses nor by its cognitive construction; what is most essential to experience is precisely that it is in excess of its immediate

appearance. The experience of history is delivered by the figure of man as subject and the temporality unique to him. ‘Historical man’ is thus the schematic that constructs experience as legible. Every ontological object has a history, and its epistemological access-point is through ‘historical man’, which is in turn the representation of representation. This is the genesis of the life sciences at the turn of modernity, where man as a subject of knowledge at once becomes its object: it is in this respect that man is an empirico-transcendental doublet, that is, the condition for all knowledge as well as its conditioned product *par excellence*. In the final analysis, this process will disintegrate ‘historical man’ himself, as he orbits ever closer to the event horizon of a future *épistémè*.

In order to understand the privileged place of the idea of History as what renders intelligible experience in modernity, we have to turn to Foucault’s analysis of its new regulative ideals in the knowledges of life, labour, and language. What follows is a close reading of Foucault’s notion of the empirico-transcendental doublet that constitutes ‘historical man’ as the condition of possibility and limit of the life sciences. Its discourses in modernity create and accelerate the objectification of ‘historical man’ in its decomposing tendency, functioning simultaneously as condition of and constraint for experience. The relevant material is found in “Man and his Doubles” from *the Order of Things*. This reconstruction – guided by the higher-order methodological revisions made in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* – is what I contend to be a key articulation of temporality original to Foucault’s work. More specifically, it demonstrates three characteristics: dispersion, pluralism, and the limit-case. Temporality is *dispersed* for the subject in that one’s sense of time does not consist in ideas privy to one’s own interiority but unfolds in the discursive practices and formations one takes part in and is made up of. It is moreover *pluralistic* in that the time of discourse is the time of the Outside; discursive time

cannot be collapsed into the progression of time *qua* consciousness and each discursive formation enjoys a unique form of temporality. Finally, the first-person experience of time for a subject is a founding *limit-case* of temporality: the formation of a subject is the condition for taking part in temporality but is also its conditioned product.

After becoming infected with new forms of knowledge – the study of life, labour, and language – language itself explodes at the end of the era of Classical Representation. Once a medium for ordering objects of knowledge, language assumes the status of one such object of knowledge. Henceforth, words are weighed down with a material history, and rather than operating as instruments of analysis, they must be analyzed in turn. Previously, discourse served an ordering function in constructing a series of grids whose transparency would allow the truth of being to shine through; this power is lost with the new opacity of the word as it becomes imbricated ever more closely with the things it once signified. The marriage of thought and being in Classical Representation, according to Foucault, guaranteed the success of representation as the mode of thinking in which thought could grasp being by the transparent hand of language. Representation was therefore the output of thought and being's link through language. Their bitter divorce reintroduced an "enigmatic density" (OT: 298/311; 304/315) to language that had hitherto been absent since the close of the Renaissance era (whence the study of language as an attempt to gain proximal access to the work of divine intellectual intuition). Language now has exegetical, formal, and self-referential dimensions that correspond to the new domains of knowledge that have spawned as a result of the assumption of 'historical man' as this *épistémè*'s principle of intelligibility. If, as Foucault wryly remarks, Mallarmé is right in his answer to Nietzsche's call to address that words themselves are speaking (OT: 305/316-17), it is because

language in modernity has doubly displaced God and man at being's ground-zero. This tendency reaches its climax in structuralism.

The medieval concept of human nature does not signal the emergence of man prior to modernity because, in Classical Representation, the notion of human nature fails to inject empirical content into the transcendental form of the subject (OT: 309-10/320-1). The human and nature remain dichotomously posed to another. The privileged transcendence of the human is related to the linguistic function of representation in Classicism. According to Foucault, representation and being are immediately and intimately linked by the transparency of language: Descartes could only say "I think, therefore, I am," as a demonstrative proof of existence because words are sovereign in Classical Representation. The subject is guaranteed by Descartes' proposition because being and knowledge are made one in language under representation (OT: 311/322). Kant aptly problematized the induction of empirical existence from transcendental certitude with his paralogisms of pure reason in the historical moment when the transcendental and the empirical were evermore interpenetrating.¹² Man as an epistemological subject only comes into existence at the close of Classical Representation, and for philosophy, as a discourse on method, it is Kant who sentences man to death in placing him on trial for veridiction. The Cartesian maxim of modernity would be "I think, therefore, what am I?" (OT: 324-5/334-5).

The transformation of language is concurrently key to the installation of 'historical man' for processing experience. Language is now an instrument as well as an object, and its objectification is evidenced in language no longer being used categorially in judgement (as in the general grammarian's analytical emphasis on "to be" (OT: 336/347). There is the loss of a metalanguage by which to organize language in general. There remains no privileged position of

the verb (the copula) in representation used to formally analyze language in general and its possibility; analytic focus turns inward to languages in particular (OT: 337/348).

By being cut off from what it represents, language was certainly made to emerge for the first time in its own particular legality, and at the same time it was doomed to be re-apprehensible only within history. (OT: 294/307).

Foucault's point is that order in the Classical era is lost is because representation is no longer able to function as such due to *the folding back of language on itself*, inducing an opacity that bars the previous capacity of language to immediately signal being in and of its own transparency. Language itself becomes historical, dispersed through time: divided by the past, and multiplied by the future. Once a medium for handling objects, language breaks down to become its own object. Modernity likewise debilitates metaphysics because of the analytic of finitude: no thought can grasp anything infinite, anything necessary, and universal, because all language – and therefore all knowledge – is now circumscribed by human mortality (OT: 317/327-8). The death of metaphysics is the birth of 'historical man'.

To restate: in the Classical age, the concern is with knowledge in general. The question of knowledge is what formal functions accompany or produce a thinking I such that the condition of possibility for knowledge, a unified representation, is secured. In the age of 'historical man', however, the concern is how to reveal "the conditions of knowledge on the basis of the empirical content given in it" (OT: 319/329). The new discourses of 'historical man' are iterations of the analytic of finitude in that the truth of his being can be fully explained if only his objectification is made all the more thorough. This is one of the main movements of the analytic of finitude: in the quest to find the ultimate condition, in seeking a transcendental answer by empirical means, the partition between condition and conditioned is put under devastating pressure.

We have returned once more to one of the main stakes of this paper, as to why it is right to raise archeology from its demeaned status relative to genealogy. Within the analytic of finitude man is biconditionally a transcendental subject and empirical object: “knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible” (OT: 318/329). Likewise, “the transcendentals are situated with the object” (OT: 244/257). Within the object = x lies its very possibility. The problem that Foucault draws to our attention is that the possibility of the object is furthermore found in the human as an epistemological figure. Objects of knowledge can only be grasped as existing for the human, and in this respect subjectivity is a transcendental condition for the appearance of this object. On the other hand, the object outstrips the existence of the human in every direction: past, present, and future. So not only are the conditions for the existence of the object doubled, appearing in itself and in the subject, but the space-time of the object further exercises a constraint on the existence of the subject. A tectonic shift is in process: the object is assuming the role of a condition of possibility for experience rather than a constraint on what the subject may know, and likewise, the subject in the form of ‘historical man’, the object of utterance, becomes a constraint on what is known rather than its older role as an exclusive condition.

To restate the philosophical weight of this position: the shift is not only in the sense that the human subject can only find itself in a field of objects, and by their placement situate itself. Rather, and more stringently, it can only know the object through itself (namely the discourse of a discipline as an object itself grants passage to knowledge of the object of the discipline, i.e., life can now only be grasped by the hands of biological discourse, no one can lay intelligible claim to knowledge of life without its sanction). Finally, a grafting occurs in which the subject becomes object: the human is no longer a practitioner of the science of biology but becomes the

biological matter itself. The ramifications are that, in modernity, the subject cannot partake in any activity without contagion, without coming to coincide with its shifting shadow (the remainder of the transcendental signified from which it draws its regulative ideals, norms). The subject contracts viral objects which then mutate into new modalities of being for the subject. E.g., in becoming-biological, the human subject is no longer intelligible simply as a self-willing rational being, but as an open-ended organic system subject to a biopolitical legislature not derivable from the demands of reason alone.

I will now step back and situate archeology with an eye to its intellectual milieu. Foucault regards the Hegelian Marxism and orthodox phenomenology of his time as emblematic of the tendency in modernity for thought to founder on the collapsing distinction between conditions and conditioned (OT: 319/330). These progressive discourses, for Foucault, claim to be strictly reflective analyses on their objects that have entirely localized their study in the empirical plane. But, these in fact presuppose a critique that has carved up its legitimate domain (e.g. for Marxism, the distinction between ideology and scientific theory). The problem is that any such analytic distinction must be satisfied by a truth condition that can warrant the investigation's territorial claims; but, precisely the satisfaction of such a truth condition in its austere form of transcendental critique is foreclosed because of the status of 'historical man' as the principle of intelligibility and the object of analysis. Knowledge and language, in modernity, exist in a new form of relation such that the truth cannot be guaranteed for the former by the work of the latter due to the two's recent triangulation in history. This is a warning against the fusion of empiricist and critical strains of philosophy and its ambition to lay claim to truth. For Foucault, any such method is structurally incapable of securing the grounds of its investigation because it is circumscribed by an object whose empirical immediacy cannot validate the method's claim to

the redemption of that very object in the future. There is no basis for countenancing the glorious return of what was lost when the analytic is trapped in a history that does not permit any such past or future beyond the confines of finitude. And yet, for the empirically-minded method, there is no solution to this deadlock – the question of what condition can legitimate its claims to know the conditioned objects it sees – other than diving more deeply into the waters of the empirical. The hope is that one will eventually reach a transcendental bedrock. But in chasing after this ground, one only sinks lower into the deep, gradually losing the light of day by which to see and subjecting the empirical object to increasing pressure in order to find its truth, fracturing and ultimately breaking down its coherence as a single unity presented in experience. In modernity, every object is doomed to disintegrate once it is caught in the analytic of finitude.

The decomposing tendency of modernity is further evinced in the analytic of finitude's increasingly genetic account of thinking's emergence from the murky waters of non-thought. In "Cogito and the unthought," Foucault argues that thought, once a sovereign seated upon a transcendental throne, has been usurped by the very inertia of matter it was heralded to impose laws of experience on in the Classical age. The thinking-I has thus succumbed to even worse a fate than the psychologism Kant guarded against in the first critique. Thought no longer has safe harbour in a theoretical domain kept separate from its practical exercises; modern thought is exterior to the traditional interiority of cognition, acting within the positivity of the new knowledges of life, labour, and language. Thought is active, practical, and empirical. Not only is thought's transcendental status duplicated in the empirical, as in man's empirico-transcendental doublet, but thought in modernity is found to depend on an "insuperable exteriority" of the objects it experiences (OT: 324/335). Thought's basis in non-thought displaces the

epistemological supremacy of cognition as the form of experience's guarantee. Thought becomes something that is always already action (OT: 328/339).

Consider early Husserlian phenomenology's claim to analyze phenomena, the objects of experience, but also to give ground to the transcendental project vis-à-vis the subject. Under the analytic of finitude, phenomenological investigation is deviously misled by 'historical man'. Conditions and conditioned are perpetually conflated in its attempt to grasp the transcendental when it has only succeeded in describing the empirical (OT: 326/337). Concretely, the epoché grants access only to the empirical ideality of the object, not its essential form, since the object is already captured by the analytic of finitude. The bracket of the natural attitude simply "short-circuits" the primacy of the 'I think' by trying to describe both I and the unthought of everyday experience upon which thinking rests without resolving the 'I think', and so the 'I think' reasserts itself in the epoché as the ideality of the object allegedly discovered in-itself. This movement is the oscillation between conditioned-conditions exemplary of the analytic of finitude. Moving beyond this deadlock requires a contestation of the "world-thought-truth" triad by suspending its anchor, "man" (OT: 322/332-3), the prism through which these forms shine forth with experiential content.

In summary, the analytic of finitude Foucault claims to find in modernity is focused not on the formal structure of apperceptive representation – how thought can represent its object to itself – but on the historicity of objects of experience. History itself becomes genetic of a notion of origin, rather than as in Classicism an originary prior to chronological time productively subtending history (OT: 329-30/340-1). More so, the very notion of origin now lands at a fundamental remove from 'historical man', for the objects of experience which compose him have as their own an origin older than him. While 'historical man' originates the objects, the

objects also condition him in excess of his finitude. And so the closer one gets to the object, the further one finds oneself from man. Such is the return and retreat of the origin endemic to the analytic of finitude characteristic of a temporality marked by discontinuity:

in this simple contact, from the moment the first object is manipulated, the simplest need expressed, the most neutral word emitted, what man is reviving, without knowing it, is all the intermediaries of a time that governs him almost to infinity. (OT: 331/342).

The fundamental framing of difference in the field of experience is what makes man intelligible to himself, that ‘historical man’ is assembled out of far-flung objects in spaces and times alien to him. The retreat of the origin is the object’s incessant outstripping of existent man. Its return is that the question of man always repeats because his history is the principle of intelligibility for modern experience. The experience of modernity is one in which ‘historical man’ finds himself torn asunder and scattered across history in the form of the objects that compose him and have permitted him knowledge of himself and the world. The discontinuity of his temporality manifests in the impossibility for him to experience himself or the world as a unity due to the analytic of finitude’s drive toward the molecular, the tendency for discourse to disintegrate its objects. The unity, for example, of the word in general grammar has been fractured and what remains are its shards in the form of studies of philology, semantics, pragmatics; likewise the living being has been subject to a division which is in principle infinite, rendering it a conglomerate of organs as well as a subsidiary of the environment. There is a fundamental will to the effacement of divisions that analytically preserve the integrity of a unity under analysis.

V. WHOSE METHOD IS IT ANYWAY?

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault showed that the discourses through which we are granted epistemological and ontological access to ourselves and the world have torn asunder the unity of experience. In the previous section I attempted to demonstrate how this corresponds to a temporal function of dispersion that accompanies the empirico-transcendental doublet's repetition as the condition and constraint on experience's intelligibility. For Foucault this conflation of conditions and the conditioned accounts for the necessarily ambiguous character of the recent life sciences, especially clinical psychology (OT: 355/366); hence, the replication crisis endemic to social psychology today. But for us, the import of the empirico-transcendental doublet is the multiplying objectification of its subjective status as the ground of experience and knowledge. Namely, as 'historical man' gives testimony for identifying experience – all objects pertain to him – and for making sense of experience – all claims to truth can only be verified by him – we see that both the *history* and the *man* give way to even deeper grounds. For *man* has been birthed only recently by these archaic discourses of life, labour, and language; and *history*, because each of these discourses recede into a time prior to that of man and find their origin elsewhere from one another. So, these discourses cannot be reduced down to a single form in the final analysis, and they form the grid which engenders experience in the age of 'historical man'. Thus, the temporal discontinuity of historical experience: discourses cannot be unified and produce antinomies, and it is so because of the dispersion of their proper objects and the temporalities unique to them. It is in this respect that temporality, for Foucault, disintegrates rather than unifies experience.

Having shown contrary to phenomenological orthodoxy that the temporal ground of experience is itself discontinuous and asubjective, we must now propaedeutically return to the first order principle unique to archaeology that: (1) places it as a successor to transcendental and

critical philosophy; (2) carries forward the phenomenological project on its own terrain; (3) overcomes the obstacles of the former that the latter foundered upon.

Approaching this first principle requires a question: how does the archaeological method allow Foucault to pierce through the fog of unity obscuring the uneven ground of experience? It does so by escaping the ontologico-epistemological imprisonment of experience by ‘historical man’. Phenomenology’s error, for Foucault, consists in claiming experience must be filtered through the first person. Its method is shackled when confronted with the experience of personhood itself posing a problem. Phenomenology surreptitiously installs the subject at the gravitational centre of experience; but archaeology wishes to see comets streaking across the cosmos, contingent lines of flight and flashes of light illuminating a time and space beyond our own. Since the unity conferred upon experience biconditionally depends on the unity of the subject, archaeology suspends the presupposition of a unified subject in order to unearth its decomposed material. A multiplicity is revealed to be the matter of which unity consists in upon applying the archaeological breakdown to the synthesis of the manifold of intuition that the post-Kantian tradition claims to constitute experience. The decomposition of experience as such into the manifold is achieved by suspending the categories of its synthesis and looking toward their constitutive rules of organization and application. Archaeology allows perceptual objects with predicable qualities to fall to the wayside such that the relations responsible for the generation and maintenance of said objects become clear in their discursive interstices. This methodological procedure is what allows Foucault the archaeologist to overcome the normativity of ‘historical man’.

VI. CONCLUSION

Our excavation into the archaeological method could go much deeper; it may in fact know no end. But for the purposes of this paper, I hope to have sufficiently motivated the value in such a project, one whose success or failure belongs to the future. In arguing for a reevaluation of archaeology, I wound together three problematics: that of reading Foucault's methodology, the question of transcendental critique, and Foucault's elusive struggle with phenomenology. I have only, slowly, begun to do justice to any of these. A full reckoning with Foucault and transcendental critique is not immediately possible since it requires developing the connective tissue between the archaeological method's handling of history and experience. In this paper I began showing how Foucault has a notion of history unique to the archaeology as the manifestation of discontinuous temporality. The disintegrating effect of this temporality is precisely the condition of actual experience, in which experience can only tendentiously appear in its robust unity as a frail contingency. Discourses in the names of the life, labour, and language are what subtends experience, and it is in these discourses that 'historical man' antinomically assumes the conditions and constraints of one's experience even as its most conditioned product. Thus is the analytic of finitude, in which thought must grasp experience only on the basis of the sensuous mortal life of 'historical man', even as all determinations of experience must arise within him and come from without. This paradoxical hunt for the unconditioned in the snares of the conditioned ultimately self-destructs the object and subject of the search. While archaeology too destroys its object, it is without reference to 'historical man'; meanwhile, the analytic of finitude clings with white knuckles to his corpse. What permits archaeology's even deeper penetration into experience, without falling into the analytic of finitude, is precisely its intent to dissolve objects of appearance without reference to a constituent subject. Archaeology's *coup de grâce* is the suspension of that subject while pursuing the

destabilization of experience contrary to genealogy's unwitting entrenchment of its grounds. For genealogy, the beach lies beneath the asphalt; for archaeology, beneath that, the quantum void.

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VIII. ENDNOTES

¹ 'Historical man' is the standard translation. It is often said that 'man' is gender neutral. On semantic and pragmatic accounts, this is dubious, for the strict meaning of 'man' refers to the masculine subject, and even if it is treated as a universal signifier – which must be done in order to secure its gender neutrality – this is surely paid for by the absence of the feminine subject and the consignment of 'woman' to particularity. Nevertheless, I will proceed with 'historical man' for two reasons. First, I am loathe to make Foucault a revisionist feminist. Nor do I have the space to motivate and support such a reading. Second, to the tune of boldly feminist philosophical speculation in the key of Luce Irigaray, historical *woman* may have yet to appear in herself, and to render Foucault's lexicon inclusive at the superficial level of the noun could be just another predatory loan in the patriarchal economy of representation that forecloses the possibility of another sex emerging in its proper singularity. Needless to say, the elaboration of these points of contention requires other papers altogether.

² Cf. Kevin Thompson, "Foucault and the 'Image Of Thought': Archaeology, Genealogy, and the Impetus of Transcendental Empiricism," *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, 2016 and Thomas

Khurana, “The Common Root of Meaning and Nonmeaning”: Derrida, Foucault, and the Transformation of the Transcendental Question,” in *Foucault/Derrida: Fifty Years Later*, 2016.

³ Foucault was loquacious enough to be ventriloquized in favour of every one of these commentators’ claims. The question then becomes which of Foucault’s many interviews to prioritize.

⁴ Experience is notoriously ambiguous in either case of the translation. The earlier from Semiotext(e) construes experience as the mediation for determining and knowing objects, whereas the latter from New Press renders experience as the very activity of determination and knowledge. At least one of Foucault’s central tasks throughout his work was to problematize the unidirectional causal framing of experience being subservient to practices and discourses or vice versa. This thorny conceptual issue – the epistemological and ontological dimensions of experience – ought to be cast in brighter light by the close of this paper.

⁵ One scholar whose work draws connections between Foucault, phenomenology, and Kant is Leonard Lawlor, who has been among the few to prize the philosophical position of archaeology. His chapter “The Chiasm and the Fold: An Introduction to the Philosophical Concept of Archeology” (24-46) in *Thinking Through French Philosophy* is especially relevant, since Lawlor’s aim is comparing Foucault’s usage of archaeology with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s. However, Lawlor’s move is to show what is nevertheless distinctive of their respective concepts of archaeology, while my tactic is to situate Foucault’s archaeology as disrupting the temporality of the classic phenomenological subject through a methodological mutation of the classical reduction. Second, my central strategy in this paper is on refiguring the archaeology v.s. genealogy distinction in Foucault’s larger method and its reception by bringing to the fore archaeology’s phenomenological background. Lawlor’s keen scholarship would be indispensable support for subsequent work that goes further into that background. But this lies beyond the remit of my effort here, which is directed to and intervenes in Foucault scholarship.

⁶ I would stake the claim that it is precisely in this way that one must read the latter three quarters of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* series, as opposed to the vulgar reading that would have us (post)moderns take up the practices of the self germane to Ancient Greeks and medieval Christians.

⁷ This is a rich connection, the spelling out of whose details would lead one on a robust research path. Pathbreaking work in accessibly reattaching Foucault to this flank has already begun with David Webb’s *Foucault’s Archaeology*.

⁸ Reckoning with Hegel would require consulting Foucault’s original 1949 thesis on Hegel and the *historical a priori*, supervised by none other than the true French Hegelian *cause célèbre*, Jean Hyppolite. For now, it remains untranslated, although a portion of Stuart Elden’s forthcoming *The Early Foucault* (2021) with Polity Press will be dedicated to an analysis of this surely formative text.

⁹ For instance, it could be objected that the transition from static to genetic phenomenology evades entirely the critique at hand. I must perform once more the sublime gesture of relegating these questions (whether Foucault’s critique stands and if it has a target today) to future inquiry.

¹⁰ For all OT in-text citations, the first number corresponds to the English translation, the second number to the original French.

¹¹ At work here is a peculiar doubling movement characteristic of archaeological products: namely, that an object can reappear “traversed” (OT: 300/313) with what were its main operative characteristics only now intelligible following its displacement.

¹² It is ironically Kant who commits this crime by fusing the transcendental and the empirical in the discourse of anthropology. So for Foucault it is Kant who has blundered by taking I think therefore I am as proof of existence; just as this can only be apodictic truth in Classicism, it can only be seen as fundamental error in the age of Man. (The principle of intelligibility rendering certain proofs egregious and esoteric and others commonsensical and concise goes both ways.)