

Rebuilding Radical Politics: A Critique of Michel Foucault's Ontology

by

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BCom, University of Victoria, 2001

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis argues, through two immanent critiques, that Michel Foucault's work is constrained by the use of a 'flat' ontology, which limits the effectiveness of his politics.

This thesis also argues, through transcendental critique, that Foucault's analysis of power relations appears to presuppose Roy Bhaskar's 'depth' ontology, which entails that Foucault's individual and subjective form of politics must be complemented with a social dimension.

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Dedication

Para Ana – Con Amor

Chapter One: Introduction

The genesis for this thesis lies in what I would call, modifying a concept developed by Dorothy Smith for a different context (1987: 82), a bifurcation in my consciousness produced by reading the work of Michel Foucault. Specifically, my consciousness was bifurcated between my reading of Foucault's analysis of power in *Discipline and Punish* (1976) and the politics Foucault develops to counteract power in his final, ethical phase.

I was first acquainted with the former. In *Discipline and Punish*, power appeared to me as all-perforating and all-encompassing. Foucault's account of the Panopticon captured my imagination as a conceptualization of the logic of contemporary society that felt correct – and pessimistic. I was acquainted with the latter through a recent thesis that attempted to rethink radical politics by drawing on Foucault's ethical phase (Simpson, 2006). I was excited to learn about the framework Foucault would offer to counteract a conception of power that could shape individuals and be responsible for their innermost thoughts. To my surprise, the Panoptic logic of power mounted little resistance against Foucault's political subject. Foucault appeared to offer a form of politics wherein the individual, by conducting an intense questioning of the categories and practices through which she formed her relationship to herself, could get free of the logic of the Panopticon and by acting differently create herself as a work of art.

I could not reconcile the pessimism I felt reading Foucault's analysis of power with the optimism I felt reading an application of Foucault's politics. How could Foucault turn the tables so dramatically on his own analysis? This thesis can be read as my attempt

to answer that question and account for the difference between Foucault's analysis of power and the politics Foucault develops to subvert it.

The argument that Foucault's work separates chronologically into archaeological, genealogical and ethical phases that should be read separately from each other provides the easiest way to account for the difference I perceived between Foucault's analysis of power in his genealogical phase and the politics he advocates to subvert power in his ethical phase. In this argument, in the archaeologies Foucault is a structuralist who sees social life as determined by very deeply rooted conditions of discourse. In the genealogies, Foucault radically changes his mind about discourse and instead argues that social life is highly contingent and ordered, if one can speak of ordering, around a micro-physics of power rooted in social practices. In the ethical phase, Foucault drops the social tableau of his genealogical analyses and focuses on understanding the historical modes by which people have formed their self-conception. Interpreting Foucault this way may accord with his life philosophy. Foucault feels the "main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (Foucault, 1982, quoted in Martin, 1988: 9). Under this reading, the attempt to attribute internal coherence to Foucault's oeuvre already leads one to mischaracterize it.

Foucault's work undoubtedly changes from one phase to another. However, an argument of this thesis will be that although Foucault's work changes, it does so in developmentally consistent ways. Rather than there being three Foucaults to correspond to epistemologically broken up phases of his thought, I will read Foucault as operating with an essentially consistent ontology and methodology that he applies in novel ways from one phase to another. Foucault can also be quoted to support this reading. In one of

his final essays, he explicitly links archaeology, genealogy and ethics together. He argues for a form of criticism that “is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method” (Foucault, 1997 [1984]: 315). Furthermore, the results of this criticism should “give a new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom” (ibid: 316), which represents the focus of Foucault’s ethical phase.

Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, colleagues of Foucault at Berkeley and authors of possibly the most authoritative interpretation of Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical work, also argue against the strict separation of Foucault into three phases: “There is no pre- and post-archaeology or genealogy in Foucault” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983 [1982]: 104). Instead, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that Foucault comes to see archaeology as a “methodological failure” (ibid, 79-100) and that he develops the genealogical method as a way to rectify archaeology’s intractable problems. For Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault’s archaeologies succeed in demonstrating that social life is subject “to rules which determine the production of objects, subjects and so forth” (ibid, 98). The archaeologies fail, however, by not explaining what gives rise to the rules. Dreyfus and Rabinow feel that Foucault resolves the problem in the genealogies through “the inversion of the priority of theory to that of practice” (ibid, 102). In this “reversal” (ibid, 102), the organization of social practices explains the rules that archaeology uncovers.

Dreyfus and Rabinow feel that power, the core concept in the genealogical phase, “is not meant to function as a metaphysical ground” (ibid, 207), as that would replicate the problematic status of Foucault’s archaeological concepts before the development of genealogy. Moreover, if Foucault was to constitute his concepts as metaphysical or

transcendent, that would run against the grain of his intellectual project. As Stuart Elden comments (2003), Foucault wants to show that “what we take to be the conditions of possibility of the foundation of knowledge is actually a historical question” (ibid, 190). For Elden, Foucault’s “life work” is to “develop a historical ontology” (ibid, 201).

The interpretation that genealogy resolves the tension of archaeology revolves around Foucault’s increased emphasis on the contingency of social life. Although Foucault’s inquiry into practices, rather than discourses, still reveals regularities that traverse subjects, the regularities that give evidence of the workings of power do not have the same rule-like status as the regularities of discourse. Instead, Foucault emphasizes the arbitrary or inessential character to these regularities in practice by counterposing them to “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges” (Foucault, 1980 [1976]: 83). James Faubion, too, stresses how genealogy allows Foucault to emphasize “discontinuities ... [and] ruptures” (Faubion, 1998: xxxiii); to prioritize “events over systems” (ibid, xxxiv).

Unlike these leading interpreters of Foucault, I will argue that Foucault’s emphasis on practices as the key to understanding social life does not resolve the issue of archaeology so much as displace it to genealogy. The first of two, internally related immanent critiques of Foucault in this thesis will be that his use of power indeed functions as a metaphysical ground, despite the historicizing intentions of his project. My position may not be so far from Dreyfus and Rabinow. Although they insist that Foucault does not intend for power to take on a transcendent status, they conclude their book by asking:

What is power? It cannot be a merely external force organizing social interactions; nor can it be reduced to the totality of individual interactions, since in an important way it produces

interaction and individuals. And yet, if it is to be a useful notion, something specific has to be said about its status” (ibid, 207).

Answering Dreyfus and Rabinow’s question is of paramount importance for actors who frame their political activity using Foucault’s conceptualization of power. Because setting a political course requires an understanding of the properties of what is to be transformed, the efficacy of a radical political framework inspired by Foucault will depend on the adequacy of his philosophical and scientific inquiry into the properties, form and content of society. To the extent that the status of power in Foucault’s analyses remains ambiguous, his template to subvert power must also be thrown into some doubt.

Dreyfus and Rabinow point out that in Foucault’s analyses power produces interactions and individuals. Moreover, Foucault stresses the ubiquity of power in his genealogical phase and its connection to knowledge. To the extent Foucault holds to this position, the properties he assigns to power seem to undermine the conditions of possibility of subjugated, local knowledges that are in some manner outside power’s influence. In this vein, Faubion asks: “What...of genealogy itself? ... Is it alone liberated from the scrutiny to which it subjects other informal knowledges?” (Faubion, 1998: xxxv).

And yet, in Foucault’s ethical phase, wherein he switches his analytic stance to the side of individuals and develops a political toolkit to subvert power, individuals appear capable of autonomously bringing about a liberating change in their circumstances. Christopher Norris also comments on Foucault’s “shift” between a stance that “excludes all notions...of effective political agency” (Norris, 1994: 159) to one that centres on “‘reflective and voluntary practices’ that seemingly take rise within a ‘singular being’ whose selfhood is integral” (ibid, 183). Beatrice Han, in her conclusion to a book that

analyses Foucault's attempt to steer between "the historical and the transcendental" (Han, 2002 [1998]: v), also comments on "the tension that...arises from the idea that problematization [a key political activity for Foucault] would above all be an autonomous and reflective activity" (ibid, 189).

My second immanent critique reflects Norris and Han's concerns and explores the tension between Foucault's aim to historicize the subject and the apparent autonomy Foucault implicitly accords to subjugated knowledge in the genealogies and explicitly restores to the subject in his ethical phase. This tension relates dialectically to the tension that Foucault possibly constitutes power as transcendent. Insofar as Foucault sees power shaping individuals, individuals cannot consciously shape power in return. However, insofar as the individual can escape the disciplinary logic of power, he or she appears to do so through recourse to inalienable creative faculties. But Foucault does not explain why these faculties lay dormant while he was showing individuals to be the docile, productive subjects of power. Conversely, I do not think Foucault convincingly shows how individuals can subvert power through a series of operations on themselves when in his social analyses power appears to be irreducible to individuals.

Some readers of this thesis may feel that to conduct its arguments I erect a straw man of Foucault. In the final analysis, it is up to the reader to decide how judiciously I have engaged with Foucault's brilliant, complex and heterogeneous oeuvre; but, I will state from the outset that I have tried to apply the *charity principle* of critique, which is to cast the position one critiques in its strongest light (Hartwig, 2007: 106). To the extent my ability allows, I have tried to construct a hermeneutically adequate picture of Foucault's work and to assess it in a constructive spirit. I cite widely to support my

critiques and also centrally to address material considered important to understanding Foucault.

But I have no pretensions to provide anything approaching a definitive reading of Foucault. Although the scope of this thesis extends across much of Foucault's oeuvre, its analytic thrust will be to account for the internal tensions I adduce to him. I take up Foucault's concepts not in-themselves but for their salience in helping me account for the internal tensions in his work; tensions that must ultimately be resolved before Foucault's very important insights on power relations can fulfill their emancipatory potential.

For every claim my thesis makes, I am sure that diligent readers of Foucault may offer counterfactual evidence. However, I do feel I make warrantable assertions and that they cumulatively add up to a plausible reading with implications for how we think of Foucault's work. My best hope for the thesis is to stimulate the reader to engage it with some of the enjoyment with which I have read Foucault in the last year.

Thesis Statement and Definition of Key Terms

This thesis argues that Foucault's work is constrained by the use of a flat ontology and that it limits the effectiveness of his politics. Rather than producing a politics with a social and individual dimension, as Foucault's analysis of power relations appears to presuppose, Foucault's politics reduces to an individualistic and subjective focus that may not offer a basis to adequately conceptualize and transform power relations.

This thesis has two parts. In the first part, which corresponds to chapters two and three, I will argue my thesis through two immanent critiques. I will try to show how flat

ontology best accounts for the internal tensions between what Foucault sets out to achieve and what he actually does. I will also argue that Foucault's methodological search for regularities that traverse subjects and objects exacerbates the internal tensions of his work – without being directly responsible for them. In the second part, which corresponds to chapters four and five, I will examine Foucault's work from the perspective of Roy Bhaskar's 'depth' ontology. I will try to show that by removing the constraints imposed by flat ontology and applying Bhaskar's depth ontology, the tensions I identify through the immanent analysis of Foucault's work may decompress, and the limits of Foucault's politics may come into sharper focus.

By flat ontology I mean to refer to a body of thought that restricts the domain of the real to the perceivable. Historically, empiricism is the ontological doctrine most associated with this position. However, to side-step the heterogeneous significations that empiricism has accumulated in its long history, I will instead refer to Foucault's ontology as flat. Using the term flat ontology also allows me to emphasize the contrast I see between Foucault's ontology and Bhaskar's, which Bhaskar calls transcendental realism, but which I will refer to as depth ontology throughout the thesis. I re-label Bhaskar's ontology to highlight the feature that bears most significantly on my argument; in depth ontology, the domain of the observable does not exhaust the domain of the real. Instead, what can be observed is a subset of the real.

Methodologically, the central principle I will ascribe to Foucault is the search for regularities that traverse subjects and objects but which subjects and objects cannot account for. I will go into much greater detail on this point in chapter two, but schematically, Foucault uses the regularities he discovers as the basis with which to

critique subject-centred and object-centred epistemologies whose modes of explanation take the subject or object, respectively, as the prime mover in human affairs. In his archaeologies, Foucault discovers regularities in his textual objects of inquiry, which he argues neither the authors of texts nor the objects about which texts are written can account for. In his genealogies, Foucault discovers regularities in a new object of inquiry, the movement of bodies in their social practices, which he also uses as the basis to critique forms of explanation that base the ordering of human affairs around the nucleating figure of an intentional subject, like the sovereign or the state.

Foucault's discovery of regularities that are opaque to the consciousness of individuals constitutes the insight - and burden - of his work. When Foucault demonstrates that the character of social life includes aspects that are not present in the intentions of subjects, he strikes a blow against subject-centred epistemologies whose mode of explanation centres around a figure transcendent to history. But the blow would lose its force if Foucault failed to show his own concepts are equally capable of being shaped by history. Also, failing to historicize his own concepts would debilitate Foucault's politics. If power relations were transcendent to people and in a one-way relationship of causality with them, developing a political template for people to subvert power would make little sense. Thus the key requirement for Foucault is to provide an ontological basis to show that social objects and subjects are shaped by conditions or forces that are equally capable of being shaped by subjects.

As I hope to demonstrate, Foucault does not successfully find a way to accomplish this requirement, which points to an ontological hindrance that restricts the potential of his work, and opens a door to experimenting with a different ontological

arrangement that can resolve the tension. My attribution of a flat ontology to Foucault represents my characterization of his ontological hindrance, and my examination of Foucault's work through Bhaskar's depth ontology represents my attempt to find an ontology that can provide a basis for Foucault to ground his regularities in relations that shape subjects but are also capable of being shaped.

Method of Analysis and Presentation of the Argument

This thesis begins from the premise that people engage in radical political activity to transform the conditions under which they live. This entails a relationship between radical political activity and the conditions political activity seeks to transform. Thus, to adequately assess the effectiveness of Foucault's conceptualizing framework for radical political activity, my thesis will use two analytic methods. First, I will analyse the internal consistency between Foucault's analysis of power and the political framework he advocates to subvert power. In this immanent form of analysis, I will compare the properties Foucault adduces to power to the politics he advocates to transform power. This form of analysis allows me to examine whether Foucault makes a coherent case for why his political framework can transform power. Second, I will transcendently analyse Foucault's social analyses to test whether his analyses presuppose conditions that he does not adequately account for either in his analyses or political framework. The necessity for the second form of analysis arises because a system of thought may be coherent internally but it may presuppose conditions that have no resemblance to reality or apprehend some but not all the features of social life.

Analysis of the first locus of inquiry can issue in an immanent critique. If the body of work under analysis seeks to achieve A and B but actually allows for Y and Z then the body of work must be repaired before it can serve as an effective mediator for radical political actors. When the analysis issues in an immanent critique, to be effective the critique must convincingly demonstrate (1) what the body of work aims to produce; (2) the inconsistencies produced through the body of work that prevent the achievement of its aims; and, (3) how the body of work goes against its own aims (Bhaskar, 1979: 120-123; Hartwig, 2007:105-108).

In chapter two, to fulfill the first criterion, I immanently analyse the development of Foucault's work chronologically from his first archaeology through genealogy and on to the end of his ethical phase. This chapter provides the evidentiary basis to support my attribution of two overarching aims to Foucault: (1) to historicize ontology and (2) to do away with the autonomous subject as a basis from which to erect philosophical foundations. In this chapter, I emphasize the continuity of Foucault's thought, the mode of inquiry by which Foucault develops his analyses, and the philosophical context in and through which Foucault stakes out his philosophical ground. The immanent analysis of chapter one lays the ground for the two immanent critiques in chapter three.

In chapter three, to fulfill the second criterion, I argue that Foucault's work is troubled by two internal inconsistencies. First, Foucault does not quite succeed in his project to historicize ontology. Instead, in Foucault's archaeologies and genealogies, central concepts like the episteme or power appear to have a transcendent status; they shape individuals but are not themselves capable of being intentionally shaped. Second and internally related to the first inconsistency, during Foucault's ethical phase, in which

he develops a politics, he assigns the individual powers of autonomous self-creation that bring his political subject back into close resemblance with the modern subject he seeks to ‘decapitate’.

As a result of my two immanent critiques, and to fulfill the third criterion, I adduce a flat ontology to Foucault and argue that this best explains why he cannot achieve his aims. Because a flat ontology restricts the domain of the real to perceivable entities, to the extent Foucault works with a flat ontology he must provide an analysis that accounts for two entities (power relations and individuals) with one perceivable entity (individuals). This dilemma helps explain Foucault’s difficulty in grounding an analysis of power relations and individuals without de-historicizing one or the other. When Foucault analyses individuals from the standpoint of power relations, individuals appear to have no agency; they are shaped by power but they cannot in turn shape power. Foucault historicizes individuals but only by constituting power as transcendent and individuals as marionettes wholly determined by power. Conversely, when Foucault analyses power from the standpoint of individuals, the marionette strings disappear and individuals’ agency appears to proliferate. Through Foucault’s care of the self template for political activity, individuals can autonomously “create [themselves] as a work of art” (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 262) and either enact an anti-power logic or hold power at bay. Foucault seems to make power transformable but only by constituting individuals as autonomous.

Foucault’s methodological search for regularities helps explain his tendency to identify power with regularities of movement, utterance or disposition that traverse individuals. *Heuristically*, Foucault tends to constitute power as a covering law in

Hempel's deductive-nomological model. In this model, any event to be explained must make reference to a general law whose operation accounts for the event (Keat and Urry, 1982 [1975]: 10). In Foucault's mode of sociological explanation, he appears to subsume the disposition of particular individuals to the workings of power. Foucault modifies the logic of this model in that one regime of power can succeed another; however, because "the endlessly repeated play of dominations" is the "single drama" (Foucault, 1998[1971]: 377) staged in history, power nevertheless seems to take on a transhistorical, law-like status in Foucault's framework.

Foucault's methodological approach may also help explain the individual and subjective focus of the political activity he advocates. If Foucault identifies power with regularities that traverse individuals then it follows that to subvert power individuals should problematise the practices and subjectivities through which they manifest power, and think and act otherwise. In the logic of this position, if a regularity of practices gives evidence of the workings of power, a plurality of practices must point to the opposite condition, a social formation whose individuals are more autonomous.

Returning to the summary of the method of analysis and argument of my thesis, immanent critique has limited usefulness on its own. An immanent critique tells us what needs to be repaired, but it cannot tell us how. Neither can it tell us if, once repaired, Foucault's body of work provides the right tools to conceptualize the transformation of conditions under which people act. Nonetheless, immanent critique tells us something is wrong and may point to the conclusion that the body of work produces inconsistencies that are insuperable on its own terms.

My thesis complements the immanent form of analysis of Foucault's work with the second, transcendental form of analysis. I look at the relationship of adequacy between Foucault's social analyses and the ontological conditions his analyses presuppose. A transcendental analysis attempts to capture whether a body of work presupposes the existence of ontological properties that it does not account for. The characteristic movement of a transcendental analysis goes from generally accepted premises in the body of work to the conditions those premises presuppose. If the work cannot house those conditions on its own, the analysis issues in a transcendental critique (Bhaskar, 1979: 120-123; Hartwig, 2007:105-108).

Unlike the immanent critique, in which I necessarily adduce no evidence extraneous to Foucault's work to argue my claims, I do not conduct my transcendental analysis and critique in a vacuum. I intend to argue not only against the adequacy of Foucault's flat ontology but also for the claim that Foucault's analyses may presuppose Bhaskar's depth ontology.

In chapter four, I describe the development of Bhaskar's depth ontology chronologically from his first phase in philosophy of natural science to his second phase in philosophy of social science. I emphasize the transcendental mode of inquiry by which Bhaskar develops his ontology and the tenets of stratification, differentiation, openness and structure that Bhaskar adduces to ontology. My emphasis on Bhaskar's mode of inquiry and ontological tenets prepares the reader for my own transcendental analysis and critique of Foucault in chapter five.

Drawing on the transcendental critique, in chapter five I re-cover the material from chapters two and three and examine Foucault's work from the perspective of

Bhaskar's depth ontology. I argue that when looked at through the lens of Bhaskar's depth ontology, the internal tensions in Foucault's work can decompress. I also highlight a constellation of ancillary issues that relate to Foucault's ontology that Bhaskar's philosophy may offer a way to resolve, like Foucault's difficulty in differentiating his objects of inquiry, his possible conflation of development with progress and the false dichotomy he appears to set up between the general and local.

In the final section of chapter five I argue from a transcendental analysis of Foucault's examination of the logic of the Panopticon that Foucault's analysis may presuppose depth ontology instead of the flat ontology he actually employs. If so, Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon calls for a distinction to be made between the properties of people and the relations in which they stand, and for causal powers to be extended to each (and not just one or the other depending on one's analytic standpoint). The result of this transcendental analysis makes power relations a transformable referent with individual *and* social dimensions for transformative political activity.

Foucault and Bhaskar's Epistemology in Context

One way to cut into the hermeneutic circle Foucault builds around his work is to frame Foucault's development of an epistemology against the subject-centred and object-centred epistemological approaches he feels are inadequate for grounding the production of knowledge about social life.

Foucault argues that object-centred epistemologies, like positivism, incorrectly import underlying assumptions about objects of inquiry in the natural world into the

study of social objects. For example, object-centred epistemologies tacitly assume their objects are unchanging. They presume social objects exist in an “atemporal solidity...shielded from history...where [they] slumber until facts, in their positivity, reach awareness” (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 79). Instead, Foucault holds that social objects are historical, or subject to change. The consequence of social objects’ historicity should be to direct inquiry into how social objects come into existence and how they are ‘held’ in existence. Foucault shifts his object of inquiry from the object in-itself to understand the practices and discourses that produce objects of investigation. In Foucault’s sense, this is what historicizing ontology means.

In other ways, Foucault’s epistemology carries traces of the ways of knowing developed for the study of the natural world. For example, Foucault still seems to base the discovery and character of his objects around regularities in the appearance of phenomena, which resembles Hume’s position that the route to knowledge is to discern regularly conjoined phenomena. Also, like Hume, who rejects the notion of a stable self, or ‘I’, behind the disparate ideas he experiences, Foucault objects to the way subject-centred epistemologies presume some essential, enduring continuity in the subject despite the subject’s changing forms of appearance.

Foucault’s critique of subject-centred epistemologies indicates he does not wish to fall back on the meaning-giving subject as the basis to understand the construction of social objects. Despite seeing objects as constructed rather than natural, Foucault does not view objects in the sense advocated by social constructionists like Berger and Luckmann (1966). Instead of objects taking their form through the inter-subjective negotiation and agreement of meaning-giving subjects, Foucault intends that representation and meaning

are conditioned by the regularities he describes at a level of practices and events that precede interpretation. In other words, practices explain both the emergence of objects and the interpretation that subjects give to objects.

Foucault's epistemology seeks to avoid the dichotomy between the natural and social sciences encapsulated by the nomothetic-idiographic debate in late 19th Century German thought¹. Foucault consciously adjusts the nomothetic position to acknowledge that although social life appears to be rule-following, the rules themselves are historical and subject to change. Foucault also consciously adjusts the idiographic position. Foucault acknowledges, with the idiographic camp, that social life does not have entirely the same properties as the natural world. However, Foucault does not aim to locate his form of historical and sociological explanation at the level of the subject. The subject, like the object, is equally formed by the regularities Foucault's historical scholarship uncovers. Therefore, Foucault aims to explain individual consciousness and the preoccupation of individuals, like attaining perfection or preoccupying themselves with their souls, to the distribution of practicing bodies in space; the configuration and logic of which in the last instance owes to power relations.

Foucault's attempt to form an escape route out of the stand-off between naturalism and anti-naturalism enters into my attribution of the two overarching aims of Foucault's work. I attribute to Foucault the aim to historicize ontology based in part on his critique of positivism's tacit eternalization of its objects of knowledge. I attribute to

¹ Briefly, the nomothetic position argues that social life is essentially rule-following and that the work of social scientists is to discover the rules that individuals must obey. The idiographic position argues that the nomothetic position may obtain in the natural sciences but it cannot hold in the social world where the unique character of individuals warrants that social scientists should search for the basis of social life in its unique features – be that language, consciousness or meaning.

Foucault the aim to dispense with the subject as a foundation for philosophy based in part on his refusal to centre historical and sociological explanation on the subject.

Bhaskar also seeks an escape route out of the naturalist vs. anti-naturalist standoff “that has dominated...the last hundred years or so...in philosophy of social science” (Bhaskar, 1998: 17). As a general affinity, one might even attribute Foucault’s aims to Bhaskar. Bhaskar also seeks to build a philosophy for the social sciences that recognizes the historical nature of its objects of inquiry², and he aims to ‘de-centre’ the subject as a single, fixed point from which to erect an account of social life³.

The mode by which Bhaskar seeks to achieve these aims differs from Foucault. Foucault primarily critiques how positivists import a logic developed to study the natural world to study social objects. But he does not question whether positivism provides an adequate account of the natural world. Bhaskar, on the other hand, begins there. Bhaskar argues that the practice of science, in particular its emphasis on experiment, presupposes an ontology with depth, unlike the ‘flat’ ontology of empiricism that limits the domain of the real to the perceivable - which the epistemology of positivism presupposes (Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]). Bhaskar argues that the constantly conjoined phenomena that scientists discover in experiments allow them to identify the workings of some entity that *differs*

² “Social structures, unlike natural structures, may be only relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of space-time invariant)” (Bhaskar, 1998: 38).

³ “...if Copernicus showed that the earth was not the centre of the universe and Darwin demonstrated that humanity is not its *telos* or goal, Marx removed man (the individual tacitly gendered human subject) from the centre stage of history and Freud displaced consciousness from its nodal position as the unifying source of the individual’s activity. The significance of this fourfold decentring is profound. Henceforth human beings appear, like any other empirically given object, as phenomena, complex productions of structures they have not produced and of which they have no automatically privileged knowledge” (Bhaskar, 1998: 113). Unlike Foucault (as I will try to show), Bhaskar still wishes to insist that “a human being is still an agent, possessing powers, whose acquisition, development and exercise is a necessary condition for any scientific enterprise” (ibid).

from the phenomena. For Bhaskar this entails that the domain of the empirical does not exhaust the domain of what is real.

Modifying the empiricist ontology that underpins positivism in favour of Bhaskar's depth ontology has consequences for how we think of the empirical regularities that positivists seek to identify. In the social world, Bhaskar argues that "the positivist tradition is correct to stress that there are causal laws, generalities, at work in social life" (Bhaskar, 1998 [1979]: 21). However, where positivism "errs is in the reduction of these laws to empirical regularities" (ibid). Instead, as in the natural sciences, regularities allow social scientists to detect the operation of social relations that differ from their particular, conjoined instantiations.

In relation to subject-centred epistemologies, Bhaskar credits them for pointing out "that the social sciences deal with a pre-interpreted reality, a reality already brought under concepts by social actors" (ibid). This means "the human sciences stand, at least in part, to their subject-matter in a subject-subject relationship rather than simply a subject-object one" (ibid). However, Bhaskar critiques the subject-centred philosophical tradition for its "reduction of social science to the modalities of this relationship" (ibid).

The different epistemological approach Foucault and Bhaskar take to the subject, or individual, also turns on the ontology Foucault and Bhaskar work with. For Bhaskar, power relations and individuals are distinct but connected entities. Thus when Bhaskar discusses power relations, he does not de-centre the individual to the point where the individual is wholly determined by power relations. Instead, the individual, traversed as she or he may be by the regularities of discourses or disciplinary regimes, still has an agentive role to play in reproducing or transforming the relations detected by empirical

regularities. Epistemologically, this means the individual's conception of her activity still contributes to understanding the character of social life. Bhaskar sees the subject as possessing agency but of a form constrained (and enabled) by the relations that form the necessary preconditions for the agent's activity. Ontologically, this commits Bhaskar to a stratified position. Power relations are distinct from but not independent of human actors. Epistemologically, producing knowledge of social life entails inquiry into the character of the relations in which individuals stand, and the conceptions individuals have of their activity in reproducing or transforming their relations.

The argument of this thesis is that Foucault, on the other hand, seems to identify power relations with the evidence of their exercise in the perceivable practices of individuals. Foucault's ontological position de-stratifies ontology and accounts for the paradoxical difference between the pessimistic determinism I read in *Discipline and Punish* and the optimistic freedom of his political writing. Epistemologically, when Foucault analyses individuals from the standpoint of power, the individual's self-conception does not contribute its ingredients to understanding social life. Rather, self-conception is shaped through forms whose ultimate basis lies in power relations. But when Foucault switches his analytic standpoint to analyse power from the perspective of individuals, the epistemological importance of understanding regularities that traverse individuals disappears. Instead, the self-conception of the individual becomes the basis from which to understand – and change – social life. This epistemological about-face, to me, gives evidence of a singular, flat ontology behind each analytic standpoint. Thus, in response to Foucault's enigmatic taunt to his critics in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, I do not believe that a "labyrinth" of Foucault's own

construction accounts for his ability to “change yet again...spring up somewhere else...and declare...: no, no, no I’m not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 19). Instead, at the centre of Foucault’s labyrinthine oeuvre, a flat ontology may unify its twists and tensions, help account for the contrast in epistemology from archaeology and genealogy to ethics, and ultimately constrain Foucault’s many insights from fully contributing their emancipatory potential.

The Changing Political, Social and Philosophical Context for This Thesis

Depending on how one frames radical politics, the date of the demise of Marxism as the central theoretical mediator for radical politics differs. Some sociologists put the date as late as the collapse of Soviet authoritarian state socialism while others as early as the emergence of New Social Movements across the industrialized world⁴ (Carroll and Ratner, 1994: 3).

I might offer a concrete date in the life of Michel Foucault for his decisive (though very frail to begin with⁵) break with Marx: the 27th of September, 1975. On the occasion of a demonstration in Paris to protest the execution of five Basque militants by the fascist Franco government, Foucault was approached by a young man who asked Foucault to speak on Marx to his political group. Foucault responded:

Don’t talk to me about Marx any more. I never want to hear about that gentleman again. Go and talk to the professionals. The ones who are paid to do that. The ones who are his civil servants. For my part, I’m completely through with Marx (quoted in Macey, 1993: 348).

⁴ Marxism was never the *only* mediator for radical politics and many broke with it (and newly came to it) over historical events of the preceding century.

⁵ At the urging of Althusser, Foucault joined the Parti Communiste Francais in 1950 for two years. He describes his political stance at the time as “Nietzschean Communist” (Foucault, 2000 [1978]: 249-50). Although Foucault formally broke off with the political form of Marxism over the fabrication of the Jewish Doctors’ Plot on Stalin’s life, it would be inaccurate to say Foucault was ever a Marxist.

The event highlights more than a symbolic final rejection of Marx in Foucault's politics; it also highlights the widening scope of radical politics and Foucault's influence on French radicalism. The demonstration was outside the purview of orthodox Marxist politics. Demonstrating against capital punishment and authoritarianism were not primary items on the agenda of Marxists. Furthermore, the execution protest was one in a series of organized social movement actions outside the foci of capital and class. Prior to this event, social movements arose politicizing prison conditions and the ill treatment of those considered mad.

The execution event also highlights that Foucault and not Sartre (the leading Marxist intellectual of the period) was at the centre of organizing mass opposition to social injustice. Foucault flew to Madrid with six other activists to publicly denounce the execution sentences. Prior to this event, Foucault was at the centre of the social movements politicizing prison conditions and 'insanity'. Furthermore, Foucault helped establish the radical, multi-disciplinary university at Vincennes.

Although the executions event highlights changes in the radical political landscape of France, and Foucault's contribution to shaping it, the political backdrop to the event was in a process of deep transformation whose scope extended beyond France. The late 1960's and early 1970's represents a period of struggle and crisis in capitalism. As in France, social movements emerged articulating claims outside the Marxist political framework. For example, new social movements in the 1950's and 1960's, like civil rights in the United States, green and feminist activism across the industrial world and de-colonization in the global South, brought previously neglected or subjugated social positions and frameworks of mobilization into public discourse and practice. Alongside

traditional union-based politics, this proliferation of socially transformative action challenged the relatively straightforward reproduction of capitalism in the industrial world and the process of modernization in the global South. While these struggles managed to institutionalize some rights for previously excluded groups, the larger crisis in capitalism was (temporarily) resolved through the counterattack of a newly cohesive array of capitalist, political and intellectual actors organized under the hegemonic project of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005).

The decisiveness of the defeat of the left in the 1970's, and the continued retrenchment since of political gains made in the post-War period, provide the context for this thesis. My thesis work began with the even deeper consolidation of the neoliberal class project with the \$700 billion social subsidization of finance capital in the U.S. in 2008 and continues under the generational cloud of developing catastrophic climate change. As an overarching stimulus, I am animated by a concern with the multi-decade incapacity of radical social movements to cohere, respond to, and reverse the totalizing onslaught of capitalism and its related, though distinct, ills of racism, patriarchy and others.

Fully comprehending why the left has not cohered in the same manner as 'master' actors in the many master-slave relations that shape our contemporary conjuncture requires inquiry at many levels. At the social level of analysis, the changing organization of the globalized world exerts a powerful, fissuring strain on the left. For instance, the western capitalist class' escape from the Fordist, nation-state-based regime of accumulation has put it in the ascendant (Robinson, 2004). The development of productive forces like containerization and the microchip has entrained wholesale

reorganization of the relations of production – and therefore the “very groupings into which society is divided” (Marx, 1977: 645) - in the image of capital. On the imperial front, repression of anti-colonial democratic movements in the Middle East in the 1950’s and 1960’s has spawned new racialized discourses that introduce originally unwanted markers of difference among people (McNally, 2008). Ecologically, the accelerating treadmill of capitalist production, intensification of the second contradiction of capitalism, and the growing metabolic rift between society and nature (Foster, 2000) has quite reasonably produced localization movements that also erect obstacles to knitting struggles together.

But changes in the makeup of society do not fully explain the fragmentation of the left. At the philosophical level of analysis, the historical period that saw the end of Marxism as the central mediator for radical politics also began a process of change in the epistemologies informing radical politics. Rather than going back to Marx, many orientations to radical change today draw philosophical sustenance from Nietzsche, Heidegger or Wittgenstein. In France, beyond Foucault, Baudrillard, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari have influenced or developed approaches to radical politics.

Foucault, Marx and the Political Imaginary of Radical Politics

In France, Foucault’s generation came of age in a political climate that offered a choice between “the America of Truman and the USSR of Stalin” (Foucault, 2000 [1978]: 247) – more aptly, no choice at all! Philosophically, Foucault’s generation was steeped in a history that put the subject squarely at the centre of reflection. At the elite

Ecole Normale Supérieure, where Foucault received his training in the late 1940's and early 1950's, the humanist reading of Hegel through Hyppolite and Kojève (Bhaskar, 1993: 177), the prevalence of the constituting subject of phenomenology through Merleau-Ponty, and the pervasive influence of Sartre outside the academy (Foucault, 2000 [1978]: 247), set up a climate of reaction to the sovereignty of the subject in epistemology and Marx in politics.

Without a place to turn to politically, or philosophically, as putting the subject at the centre of a history of fascism, authoritarianism and empire only tarnishes it irreparably, Foucault and his generation “wanted a world and a society that were not only different but that would be an alternative version of ourselves: we wanted to be completely other in a completely different world” (Foucault, 2000: 248).⁶ For me, this quote crystallizes the aim of Foucault's political work and allows for an overarching distinction to be made between the political imaginary of Foucault and Marx.

Analytically, Foucault seems to advocate social *and* individual transformation. He seeks to enunciate a new line of political thought to “liberate us *both* from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state” (Foucault, 1983: 216 – emphasis mine). Marx's project, on the other hand, foregrounds the revolutionary transformation of social relations of production, and the state forms that attend and support them, but remains relatively mute on individual transformation. While Marx clearly distinguishes between the ontology of the individual and the social (Marx, 1973 [1857]: 265), he does not assert a distinct political value to individual transformation.

⁶ Bhaskar puts it similarly: “We need to produce a different conception of ourselves in the world. The revolution will be nothing less than this: the transformation of our understanding of ourselves and of the whole world in which we live” (Bhaskar, 2003: 200).

In the context of the theoretical transition away from Marx in radical politics, two missing bodies of thought complicate an understanding of the validity and ramifications of Foucault's elaboration of a new political framework. First, Marx's thought never forms a direct object of analysis for Foucault. As a result, it is difficult to make explicit the basis for Foucault's rejection of Marx or how Foucault's framework differs. Second, at the time Foucault wrote, the philosophical premises of Marx's thought had not been decisively teased out and developed.

On the first body of thought, Foucault's scattered comments on Marx suggest a possible misreading of Marx's core tenets. In *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault treats Marx as an epiphenomenal figure of the modern episteme, arguing that Marxism "exists in the nineteenth century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else" (ibid, 262). In this context, Foucault's comments may reflect a humanist, Hegelian reading of Marx. Foucault attributes to Marx the characteristics of the modern episteme: anthropocentrism that resolves in the last instance to a core of individual consciousness and a teleological view of history. On anthropocentrism, Marx could be read otherwise. The first premise of historical materialism – the existence of living human individuals - introduces the irreducible relation of human activity to nature (Marx, 1932 [1848]: 37). Moreover, in contrast to Kant, who Foucault takes to be the paradigmatic figure of the modern episteme, and the first philosopher to articulate its principles, Marx socially decentres the individual when he argues that "social being and social consciousness" is the essence of the materialist conception of history (ibid, 41).

Foucault notes when discussing the teleology of Marx that his "great dream of an end to History is the utopia of causal systems of thought" (ibid, 263). Foucault argues

that Marx sees a straightforward progression from feudalism to capitalism and finally communism, at which point history ends. This is one of the most repeated and damning attacks against Marx by postmodern authors. In Foucault's rendition of the argument, he subsumes Marx's teleology under an overarching category of 'causal systems of thought'. This suggests that Foucault may conceptualize Marx as a positivist searching for invariant laws that give predictive knowledge of the course of History.

The persistent argument that Marx posits a teleological course to the succession of modes of production, either as a Hegelian or a positivist, whether correctly attributed to him or not, points to the weakness of Marxism's development without a comprehensively elaborated philosophy. Although this body of philosophical thought was absent during Foucault's formative period, or developed in contradictory directions (Edgley, 1983: 246), Bhaskar's philosophy negates the absence and now allows for a more explicit assessment of Marx's work against his critics and for radical politics. As I emphasize in my discussion of Bhaskar, Marx's philosophy of social science differs from the philosophy Foucault attributes to Marx.

Foucault and Bhaskar

In my thesis, from the many possible approaches informing radical politics, I investigate Foucault's for three reasons. First, I inquire into Foucault's work for its influence on radical politics. Not only can Foucault be read as a, if not the, central theoretical mediator for contemporary radical politics; but also, Foucault's framework for radical politics could be said to licence the profusion of approaches to it. John

Sanbonmatsu, in his book *The Postmodern Prince*, also treats Foucault as kind of condensation of political approaches that have consciously spurned the revolutionary, collective mode of political struggle best embodied by thinkers like Gramsci (Sanbonmatsu, 2004: 125-155). Second, Foucault's thought contrasts sharply with Marx. Although radical political theorists like Holloway and Hardt and Negri, who have a wide readership, implicitly or explicitly draw on Foucault, each also constructs his theory through references to Marx. Focussing on Foucault alone allows me to distil changes to the framework informing radical politics.

I draw on Bhaskar's work for three reasons as well. First, Bhaskar can be read as the most robust developer of Marx's philosophical thought – in fact, going *beyond* Marx in developmentally consistent ways - since Marx. If Marx can be rehabilitated for radical politics today, Bhaskar provides the medium to do so. Second, Bhaskar's thought has yet to realize its potential for radical politics. Although critical realism has a growing academic footprint, authors with a wide readership in radical circles, like Holloway or Hardt and Negri, have not assessed Bhaskar. Third, and most importantly, I think Bhaskar provides an immensely rich philosophical framework with promise to resolve persistent dichotomies in many fields of inquiry. For radical politics, Bhaskar can resolve the dichotomy between collective action and individual action.

Foucault and Bhaskar share attributes of inquiry, impetus and chronology. Foucault and Bhaskar contribute to a very active dialogue in the philosophy of science and each develops his thought by framing it against dominant object- and subject-centred epistemologies. Foucault and Bhaskar also began their intellectual activity in the post-War period that provides the context for my thesis. Foucault published his first book in

1961 and Bhaskar in 1975. Finally, Foucault and Bhaskar also maintain an enduring and progressively central concern with the role of science in human emancipation.

Admittedly, the similarities may end there. Bhaskar explicitly sees himself as a “Lockean underlabourer” for science (Bhaskar, 1975: 10) while it would not be unfair, in contrast, to describe Foucault as a ‘Nietzschean underminer’ of the human sciences. This highlights sharp differences that also structure the approach of each to the question of radical politics, which will be my goal to bring out and explain in the second half of the thesis.

Although similarities exist between Foucault and Bhaskar, Bhaskar scarcely references Foucault. Among the tier of critical realists who have elaborated Bhaskar’s philosophy in the social sciences, only Jonathan Joseph has engaged Foucault directly (2004).

Consistent with argument of this thesis, Joseph contends that “Foucault’s work offers a lot. But its emancipatory potential will only be realised within a critical realist ontology” (ibid, 164). On the whole, Joseph positions his review as a rescue operation against post-modern readings of Foucault. Joseph tries to counter positions attributed to Foucault that put him on postmodern ground. For example, Joseph argues “there is no evidence that Foucault rejected the idea of social science” (ibid, 148) or that he “reduces reality to discourse” (ibid, 147). Joseph highlights aspects of Foucault’s work that are most amenable to a critical realist position, like his archaeologies (ibid), and acknowledges that even Foucault’s emphasis on the ‘how’ of power, in his genealogies, can complement Marx’s explanation of its ‘why’ (ibid, 160).

The argumentative tools of immanent and transcendental critique that I employ in my thesis are not designed to stage a comparison between Foucault and other approaches to social inquiry. Instead, Foucault's work will provide the minor premises for both forms of critique. Even when I explicitly draw on Bhaskar (and use Marx to illustrate a tenet of Bhaskar's ontology), the emphasis will primarily be to denote the productive use to which depth ontology can be put to resolve tensions in Foucault's work rather than to score a point for Bhaskar (or Marx).

My choice of tools to argue the thesis somewhat shears its relationship to other critiques of Foucault. Although I have positioned this thesis in relation to leading interpretations of Foucault's work, I do not relate the more concrete characterization of Foucault to the vast (and overwhelming!) critical literature on him. However, what I lose by not interlacing my thesis with other positions that come from all manner of perspectives, I hope to gain in coherence and clarity by focussing squarely on Foucault's already sufficiently complex oeuvre.

To that end, I conclude chapter one and move to chapter two, in which I describe the development of the archaeological, genealogical and ethical phases of Foucault's work.

Chapter Two: Foucault and the Philosophy of Science

In this chapter I describe the development of Foucault's archaeological, genealogical and ethical phases with an eye to teasing out the implicit philosophical and methodological premises of Foucault's work. I attribute two aims to Foucault: (1) to historicize ontology and (2) to do away with the autonomous subject as a basis from which to erect philosophical foundations. I emphasize the continuity of Foucault's thought, the mode of inquiry by which Foucault develops his thought, and the philosophical context in and against which Foucault stakes out his philosophical ground. For the thesis, this chapter provides a base from which to argue my immanent critiques in chapter three and a contrast for my account of the development of Bhaskar's thought in chapter four.

Foucault's development of a coherent body of thought resembles following a pinball in its erratic course. I do not mean this characterization pejoratively. The analogy may have some adequacy because if one only follows the pinball's movement, the viewer is left feeling disoriented about the consistency of its trajectory. This accords with many readers' initial response to Foucault (including my own), who are faced with the additional difficulty of having the time for only studying one of his phases, or more narrowly, books or essays. But if the viewer of the pinball zooms out to take in the machine, or philosophies to which Foucault responds, and follows Foucault's development in its historical progression, the image that emerges makes much more sense. Finally, to stretch the analogy more, and recall Foucault's analysis of Velazquez' *Las Meninas* (Foucault, 1994 [1966]: 3-16), by zooming out even further the viewer takes

in Foucault, the pinball operator, playing his philosophy into a much more coherent, skilful development than the chaotic movement of the pinball suggests.

Detailed historical scholarship guides the development of Foucault's thought and goes some way to accounting for its pinball character. Now, already my interpretation invites controversy, for how can I adduce to someone who has "never written anything but fictions" (Foucault, 1980 [1977]: 193) the central characteristic of detailed historical inquiry? My characterization arises from the *mode* by which Foucault critiques philosophy. Whereas Bhaskar, as I will show, critiques philosophy primarily through transcendental analysis, a concept I hope to thoroughly unpack and apply to Foucault's work, Foucault's critique of philosophy goes the long route, first marshalling historical evidence to counter the claims of dominant theories and only then making an argument for how the world must differ from the way dominant epistemologies make it seem in their theoretical or historiographic manifestations. Foucault's movement from historical data to theory/historiography and the epistemologies that underpin theory/historiography mimics the traditional development of science. In contrast, Bhaskar, rather than collecting evidence extraneous to dominant bodies of thought (a perfectly acceptable strategy), takes positions widely held and shows how fully accounting for what these positions presuppose has consequences that undermine the implicit ontology of dominant epistemologies.

Archaeology

Consistent with his historical emphasis, Foucault primarily critiques object-centred epistemologies for the 'calm narrative' of their historiography. In this narrative,

science evolves through the accumulation of facts about its unchanging object in a process that gives science a steady progression from ignorance to absolute knowledge. In *History of Madness*, Foucault's first book and PhD dissertation, Foucault critiques two aspects of this position. First, Foucault shows that a telos underpins the positivist evolutionary narrative and that its evolutionary construction depends on judging the past according to the dictates of the present. Second, Foucault challenges the idea of an unchanging object that positivism also depends on for its view of progress: "Mental medicine finds the guarantee of its eternity here, and if doctors ever suffered from their conscience, they would doubtless be reassured to find that the object of their quest was there all the while, shining out through different times" (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 116).

To undermine the evolutionary narrative, Foucault, somewhat anticipating Kuhn (1962), makes visible the changing paradigms or 'grids' that structure the production of science's knowledge of its object of inquiry and disrupt the continuity of the supposed linear evolution of science. In *History of Madness* Foucault gives these grids a phenomenological gloss by accentuating experience as a category through which to problematize progress: "What matters here is to remove all chronology and historical succession from the perspective of a 'progress', to reveal in the history of an experience, a movement in its own right, uncluttered by teleology of knowledge or the orthogenesis of learning" (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 122).

Foucault's work differs from Kuhn's because Foucault emphasizes the permanent instability of interpretive frameworks, such that no periods of 'normal science' apply: "The consciousness of madness has never formed an obvious and monolithic fact, undergoing metamorphosis as a homogenous ensemble. For the Western consciousness,

madness has always welled up *simultaneously at multiple points*” (ibid: 163 – italics mine). This quote adumbrates a theme that becomes central to Foucault’s work. Although Foucault argues that the medical consciousness of madness does not dictate its evolution, nonetheless madness ‘wells up’ with regularity at multiple points. The picture Foucault sketches to replace the evolutionary narrative is not of a random, inchoate succession of forms but instead of some kind of regular force at work that does not owe its existence to the object or the subject, the standard loci for historical narratives.

Also relative to Kuhn, Foucault extends the socialization of knowledge production beyond the community of investigators and into the wider social world. Foucault does this by emphasizing that events heralded by positivist historiography as emblematic of medicine’s evolution occurred independently of medical consciousness (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 78-107). For example, the advent of confinement for the mad was spurred by popular fears of mysterious contagion rather than a proto-medicalization of madness (ibid: 353-380). Similarly, Foucault shows that the conceptualization of madness by doctors owed less to a relationship to their object of knowledge and more to the importation of understanding from extra-medical discourses like morality (ibid: 307-326).

Foucault’s second, and possibly more novel, critique of positivism shows how the positivist evolutionary narrative depends on tacitly eternalizing its object: “The object of knowledge, to that way of thinking, pre-exists the investigation, since that is what was apprehended before being rigorously circumscribed by positive science: in its atemporal solidity it is shielded from history, locked into its own truth, where it slumbers until facts, in their positivity, reach awareness” (ibid: 79). To counter the presumed atemporality of

positivism's object, Foucault shows that "madness could only become an object of knowledge after it had been subjected to a process of social excommunication" (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 104). Foucault's historicization of madness foreshadows the development of genealogy by showing that madness cannot be extricated from its conditions of emergence; it must be perceived against the "horizon...of a social reality" (ibid: 102).

Three explicit themes and one implicit one emerge from a reading of *History of Madness*. First, Foucault distances knowledge from corresponding to its object by showing how the object of knowledge changes in ways positivist historiography does not acknowledge. Second, Foucault emphasizes the instability of interpretive frameworks and discontinuity in the development of knowledge. Third, Foucault shows that the "non-coherence" of knowledge does not link up to any "divergence inscribed in the structures [of madness]" (ibid: 164); in other words, he anticipates a positivist counterattack by arguing that madness is not a special object whose very 'incoherence' explains the corresponding 'non-coherence' of knowledge about it. These three explicit themes that distance knowledge from its object and subject are underpinned by a fourth theme of convergence. Foucault brings knowledge closer to the social background that houses subjects, objects and knowledge.

Already Foucault has almost set the table for the development of genealogy where he explicitly knits knowledge together with the practices in which knowledge production occurs. What is missing in *History of Madness*, or at least not made central, is Foucault's effort to distance knowledge from the consciousness of those who produce it. In *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault's second work, he switches from a critique of object-centred historiography to take on the subject-centred approach to philosophy of science.

By 1963, the date of publication of *The Birth of the Clinic*, in the philosophy of science the subject's consciousness had been built up as an anchor from which to critique positivism's account of knowledge accumulation. In France the leading figure of the consciousness-centred movement was Koyré, who Kuhn acknowledged as influential to the development of his work (Kuhn, 1966 [1962]: 3), and who was widely read when Foucault wrote *Birth of the Clinic* (Macey, 1993: 186).⁷ Koyré critiqued the positivist evolutionary narrative particularly for its retrospective re-organization of knowledge accumulation around the object of knowledge. Koyré argued that the march of science owed its progress not to a steady perception of its objects but to the minds of its subjects (Koyré, 1968 [1957]: 5). Koyré looked at figures like Galileo not for their value to modern science but from the perspective of maximizing the internal coherence of Galileo's worldview to his historical moment. Doing so showed that "the Galilean project is unintelligible unless seen as an attempted revindication or posthumous revenge of Platonism...over Aristotle" (Bhaskar, 1986: 239). Contrary to Koyré and Kuhn, Foucault's development of an exit strategy out of object-centred epistemologies took no refuge in the consciousness of human being – either as a knowing subject of knowledge or as a qualitatively different object of knowledge endowed with transcendental properties.⁸

⁷ Strictly speaking, Koyré taught at Princeton during his most influential period. However, he taught in France earlier in his career, kept strong ties to France and his work was translated into French.

⁸ In Britain an influential critique of positivism, led by Peter Winch (*The Idea of a Social Science*, 1958), revolved around the qualitatively different properties of human beings as objects of inquiry compared to objects of inquiry in the natural sciences.

In *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault analyzes the perspective of scholars like Kuhn and Koyré,⁹ that roots the nature of an account about an object in the mind of its (variably inter-subjectivized) author, and puts it to historical scrutiny in the field of medicine. Instead of affirming the subject-centred view of knowledge development, Foucault finds that the content of medical knowledge escapes the intentions of its author(s): “what counts in the things said by men [sic] is not so much what they may have thought or the extent to which these things represent their thoughts, as that which systematizes them from the outset” (Foucault, 1994 [1963]: xix). To account for the difference between what authors intend and what they say, Foucault introduces the distinction between *connaissance* and *savoir* (Foucault, 1994: 137). *Connaissance* refers to “the relation between the subject [author] and the object” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 16) and *savoir* refers to “the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance*” (ibid, 17).

Whereas in *History of Madness* Foucault is only in a position to say that madness ‘wells up simultaneously at multiple points’ in consciousness, he can now sharpen his position by adducing a systematic character to this welling up, and furthermore locate this system as conditioning of and anterior to consciousness. *History of Madness* shows the influence of Heidegger in the way Foucault posits historical forms to consciousness.¹⁰ In

⁹ Foucault does not explicitly analyze Kuhn or Koyré. As a rule, Foucault does not acknowledge that he responds to a debate going on around him, which in a sense is consistent with the decentering of consciousness he was aiming at in his archaeologies and genealogies. For Foucault, the author espousing the position pales in comparison to the grid which organizes that author’s expression. Re-inserting Foucault into a historical, and very active, debate with real proponents does not mean I devalue the conditions that ‘de-centre’ thought. Rather, I seek to add the irreducible agentive dimension to the process of knowledge production.

¹⁰ See especially the chapter “Experiences of Madness” (108-131) and the Introduction to Part II (163-174) in *History of Madness*, both omitted from the original English language edition of *History of Madness*, published as *Madness and Civilization*. The omission of the more Heideggerian chapters of *History of Madness* is an interesting case, I think, of Foucault attempting to manipulate the arc of his intellectual

The Birth of the Clinic Foucault employs a Kantian-like strategy of searching for the conditions that organize consciousness, but not in a way that locates those conditions in fundamental, transhistorical features of the mind. Rather, as Foucault makes clear in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the *a priori* he is uncovering in his scholarship are not formal but *historical* (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 142-148); Foucault is building not a transcendental ideal ontology but a historical ontology.

Continuing with Foucault's attack on consciousness as the organizing principle of history, he holds that the subject's *connaissance* plays a very small part in the formation of a body of knowledge. In medicine, the transition from a pathological anatomy to a nosology adjusts not only the "surface of contact between the knowing subject and the known object" (Foucault, 1994: 137). Instead, "a more precise historical analysis reveals a quite different principle of adjustment" (ibid, 137). Foucault argues that the principle of adjustment traverses the subject and places conditions on, among others, the position the subject must occupy, the modalities of registration and memory the subject must use and the forms of conceptualization the subject has to employ. Instead of "the same game, somewhat improved" (ibid, 137) posited by a subject-centred account of medicine's evolution, Foucault argues that the transition from pathology to nosology heralds a "different game" (ibid, 137) or discontinuity in knowledge.

At this point Foucault arrives at a key juncture in the development of his thought. He has separated knowledge from its object in *History of Madness*, and in *The Birth of the Clinic* shown that the subject also may not be accorded privilege as a centre for understanding its object. In the process, however, Foucault's historical inquiries have

development towards greater internal coherence (a somewhat ironic project for someone out to show the way all other thinkers are traversed by discontinuities!).

produced a new task. Foucault must now account for what explains the ‘regularities’ of the ‘different game’ he has posited; what links the subject, knowledge and object together, and appears in all three (as *savoir*, discourse, and discourse-effect, respectively¹¹), but in a way that appeals neither to the subject, nor knowledge, nor the object? Foucault has ‘decentred’ the subject and object but must now fill out the features of his developing historical ontology.

In *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault attempts to positively describe the regularities he has discovered and how those regularities correspond to specific periods. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault generalizes from the discovery of regularities setting conditions on subjects, knowledge and objects at the level of a specific field like medicine to posit that starting from the Renaissance all of western thought has passed through three epistemes: renaissance, classical and modern. Even more ambitiously, Foucault generalizes from the argument that subjects in specific fields must obey certain rules to produce statements that count as knowledge, to the position that the emergence and development of the human sciences in their entirety are epiphenomenal to the modern episteme. In other words, Foucault argues that the human sciences are carried along by the wave of the modern episteme. At work in the minds of its scientists is as a “positive unconscious” (Foucault, 1994 [1966]: xi) that creates the epistemological space for the positing of ‘Man’ as an object of knowledge. And, recalling Foucault’s famous phrase at the end of the book (Foucault, 1966: 387), we can expect that just as the Classical episteme gave way to the modern one, so too the

¹¹ *Savoir* and discourse refer to the same thing (a regularity Foucault discovers in the production of knowledge), but discourse refers to that regularity as it appears in language, while *savoir* refers to how the regularity traverses the subject’s consciousness. As for the object, Foucault wants to “substitute for the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse” (Foucault, 2006: 52-3).

modern episteme will withdraw, causing the figure of man to be erased along with it, only for the character of a new regularity to inscribe *its* face in the sand.

Despite the brilliance of *The Order of Things*, it also marks something of an intellectual cul-de-sac for Foucault in the search for ways to explain the span and character of the new object he describes.¹² In Foucault's foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, written in 1970 in the midst of his politicization and shortly before his genealogical manifesto "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), he reflects on three tensions he courts by following the path of his archaeological discoveries. As I will analyze and attempt to explain in the transcendental critique of chapter five, these three tensions show how the results of Foucault's archaeological inquiries may slip the grasp of his genealogical mode of explanation rooted in practices.

First, Foucault asks that the reader view *The Order of Things* as a "strictly regional study" (Foucault, 1996: x), ignoring the *very* general claims that periodize 600 years of western thought into three spans of time that "uncover the deepest strata of Western culture" (ibid, xxiv), spans which replicate his earlier periodization of madness and later periodization of disciplinary regimes. This tension speaks to Foucault's difficulty in moving between his broadest spatial and temporal regularities, epistemes, to his most basic unit of analysis, the statement, which Foucault calls the "atom of discourse" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 90) and forms the "undecomposable element" (ibid, 90) of his analyses.

¹² Foucault commented on this a decade after the publication of the book: "In seeking in *The Order of Things* to write a history of the episteme, I was still caught in an impasse. What I would like to do now is to try and show...that the episteme is a specifically discursive apparatus, whereas the apparatus in its general form is both discursive and non-discursive" (Foucault, 1980 [1977]: 196-7).

Second, Foucault recognizes what he calls “the problem of causality” (Foucault, 1996: xii), which is that he offers no reasons for how “empirical knowledge...possesses a well-defined regularity” (ibid) nor why this regularity gives way to another in a short period. Similarly, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the methodological book that follows *The Order of Things*, Foucault sees that he is courting an analysis that dispossesses all the traditional founts of causation of their explanatory power and replaces them with “the strange notion of regularities which regulate themselves” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 84). Foucault gives the notion of self-regulating regularities its most overarching expression in the concept of the *archive*, which he calls “the first law of what can be said...the general system that governs the appearance of statements” (ibid, 146). Although Foucault does not expand on the significance of the archive in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, we will see below how power occupies a similar explanatory position in Foucault’s genealogical phase.

Third, and closely connected to the second tension, Foucault recognizes that the regularities he describes at the archaeological level imply a science and history ordered “without reference to the scientist himself [sic]” (ibid, xiii). As Foucault showed in *Birth of the Clinic*, the scientist, far from being at the reins of an evolving consciousness of understanding, must fulfill conditions of discourse for producing the statements through which knowledge passes. The archaeological level of regularities between statements operates through the scientist (in the sense that someone must utter, write or gaze) but not consciously in the scientist. Of course, Foucault is being somewhat coy when he articulates a concern with the subject. His very project is to “operate a decentring that leaves no privilege to any centre” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 226). But perhaps Foucault

anticipates, without being able to answer, the question that if discourses pass through subjects, by what conjuring act does Foucault extricate his own inquiries from the conditions of enunciation of the modern episteme?

Genealogy

The same logic, now amplified further, works through subjects when Foucault shifts from the archaeological analysis of knowledge to the genealogical analysis of the practices through which knowledge production occurs. Foucault frames the development of genealogy much as he does archaeology – against the object- and subject-centred epistemologies he perceives as dominant. But while in his archaeologies Foucault is content to leave no privilege to any centre, in genealogy Foucault seems to want to get rid of the notion of a centre altogether: “One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework” (Foucault, 1980: 117). This quote shows the internal relation between Foucault’s project to get rid of the subject and his project to historicize ontology. To the extent Foucault succeeds in dispensing with the subject, he approaches a historical ontology.

Foucault transposes his critique of the subject-centred view in philosophy of science, which relates knowledge to the ‘all-knowing subject’, to political philosophy. He argues that “what we need is a political philosophy that isn’t erected around the problem of sovereignty...We need to cut off the King’s head” (Foucault, 1980: 121). In other words, like scientists, the king, capitalist or master does not dictate the historical

unfolding of a disciplinary regime. For instance, in the modern disciplinary regime that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, while the ideal type of the Panopticon gives power “a ‘head’, it is the apparatus as a whole that produces ‘power’ and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field” (Foucault, 1996 [1976]: 177). The apparatus itself is nothing other than “automatic and anonymous power” (ibid, 176). Reinforcing the ‘de-centring’ of the sovereign, Foucault finds the disciplinary logic of the modern regime far from its ‘beating heart’ and at work in social ‘capillaries’ of barracks, factories, schools, and, prisons. Because Foucault sees power operating without a centre, he argues against the Marxist revolutionary political project that he sees playing into the sovereign conception of power in its “law of all or nothing” (ibid, 27). The notion of power Foucault has in mind cannot be “acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions” (ibid). Foucault rhetorically asks an interviewer: “Do you think it would be much better to have the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?” (Foucault, 1980 [1976]: 164-5)

Against object-centred philosophy, Foucault transposes his critique of how “The object of knowledge, to that way of thinking, pre-exists the investigation...: in its atemporal solidity it is shielded from history” (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 79) to a critique of the way political philosophy treats the sub-altern as merely repressed by power and not produced through its effects. Foucault argues that “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasures” (Foucault, 1980: 119). Foucault argues that Marxist thought also follows the logic of political philosophy. For

Foucault, in Marxist thought the working class appears as exploited but ultimately untouched in its essential constitution. Instead, Foucault argues that the techniques of power do not simply operate from the outside but also on the internal constitution of the working class, which means the working class cannot simply ‘overthrow’ a power that’s always been extraneous to it.

As the previous quotes indicate, power occupies a central place in Foucault’s genealogies. Moreover, power binds genealogy and archaeology. As Foucault notes in a 1977 interview: “When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilization* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power? Yet I’m perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word” (Foucault, 1980: 115). Foucault also explains that “What was missing from my work was...the effects of power proper...I confused it too much with systematicity, the theoretical form, or something like a paradigm” (Foucault, 1980: 113).

Power seems to take over from the earlier concept of ‘archive’ (which only receives a two-page, schematic overview in *Archaeology of Knowledge*: 145-6) as the ‘first law’ that organizes “a whole order of levels of different types of events differing in amplitude, chronological breadth, and capacity to produce effects” (Foucault, 1980 [1976]:113-4). In the genealogies, power “ultimately presides over all these mechanisms” and imposes “the necessity of combat” (Foucault, 1995 [1975]: 308).

Power binds archaeology and genealogy together, but archaeology and genealogy do not connect as equivalents. In the relationship between archaeology and genealogy, genealogy takes pride of place. Genealogy is “a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, and domains of objects etc” (Foucault, 1980:

117). Instead of the difficult relationship between epistemes and epistemologies in archaeology,¹³ in genealogy the regulation of bodies and practices now explains the progress and teleological schools of history Foucault critiques in his archaeological phase:

“The disciplinary methods reveal a linear time whose moments are integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal, stable point; in short, ‘evolutive’ time...the two great ‘discoveries’ of the eighteenth century – the progress of societies and the geneses of individuals – were perhaps correlative with the new techniques of power” (Foucault, 1995 [1975]: 160)¹⁴.

The human sciences, earlier swept along by the wave of the modern episteme, are now “conveyed by a specific and new modality of power” (ibid, 305). To understand the birth of the “sciences of man [sic]” Foucault argues we must look to the “ignoble...modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour” (ibid, 191).

As for Foucault’s object of inquiry, he switches from an analysis of statements as the ‘atom of discourse’ to an analysis of the event as the basic unit for uncovering the logic of a disciplinary technique. Also, rather than examining the utterances of speakers, or claims about knowledge, Foucault now examines the distribution of bodies in space. The shift in objects of inquiry indicates the greater relative weight that Foucault gives to understanding the organization of practices into disciplinary regimes rather than the organization of knowledge into discourses.

Foucault also reverses the direction of explanation from archaeology to genealogy. In his archaeologies, Foucault seeks to explain the statement by reference to

¹³ See the ‘analytic of finitude’ and the three epistemological permutations that arise in the modern episteme in *The Order of Things*: 312-335, and for a cogent interpretation see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 26-43.

¹⁴ Foucault does not mention it, but he must have in mind the legend that Kant followed a routine so metronomic that the villagers of Königsberg set their watch by his daily constitutions. Genealogically, it is inviting to believe that Kant’s premise that Mind contributes the categories that organize perception arises from Kant’s highly structured daily practices.

increasingly general objects like discourse, epistemes and ultimately the archive. In his genealogies, Foucault seeks to explain the general by reference to the local:

in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking of its capillary forms of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes...it was the instituting of this new local, capillary form of power which *impelled* society to eliminate certain elements such as the court and king (Foucault, 1980 [1975]: 39 – italics mine).

Although Foucault changes the direction of explanation, he still seems to use one overarching concept as the basis to explain the rest.

Foucault's choice of objects of inquiry can be better understood by comparing it with the object of inquiry Weber uses. Weber, working within Kant's problem field, focuses on individual meaning as the relevant object to explain or make sense of social composition. For Foucault, this would require granting some privilege to the intentional activity of individuals. By contrast, studying the movement of bodies evacuates meaning from the sociological picture that emerges. Similarly, emphasizing events, rather than the experience of events, allows Foucault to keep the conceptualization of events, and the possible re-emergence of the subject that could entail, at bay. Of course, Foucault does not wish to leave the individual's inner space out of the picture altogether. Foucault wishes to explain the contents of psychic make-up by referring to the regularities visible at the level of events.

The shift in object of inquiry from statements to the events that individuals experience also touches on Foucault's critique of positivism. In *History of Madness* Foucault shows the complicity of positivism with the category of experience. Foucault argues that the continuity and progression of knowledge depends on the backward-looking gaze of present historians; and, that knowledge about the object has experience of the object as its anchor. Foucault's move to studying events distances his own inquiry

from the ‘contamination’ of the subject. Although Foucault distinguishes statements, discourses and epistemes from consciousness and experience in the archaeological phase, events and the movement of bodies produce an even sharper contrast.

What does not seem to change from archaeology to genealogy is the importance Foucault places in grounding concepts in the discovery of regularities that traverse individuals. Although the location of regularities changes - from texts to practices - the methodological principle remains the same.

Anchoring Foucault’s methodology in the search for regularities seems to fit the conventional reading that he operates as a quasi-structuralist in the archaeological phase, but runs counter to his emphasis on contingency in the genealogical phase. Foucault certainly valorizes the fragmentary and discontinuous. He wants to show that behind the appearance of discipline he maps in schools, prisons and factories lies “the exteriority of accidents” (Foucault, 1998 [1971]: 374) and “the luck of battle” (ibid, 381). Or, against “global, totalitarian theories” (Foucault, 1980 [1976]: 80) that suppress difference, Foucault wishes to “entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges” (ibid, 80). In this sense, Foucault sees his genealogies as “anti-sciences” (ibid, 83).

The valorization of discontinuity, however, seems to arise precisely on account of the regularities his inquiries continue to uncover; regularities in practice and disposition that cut across most individuals. For Foucault these regularities give evidence of the effects of a “power which is constantly exercised” (ibid, 104) to produce a “society of normalisation” (ibid, 107). This is the sense in which I read Foucault’s complementary use of archaeology and genealogy. Archaeology, as a search for regularities that traverse

individuals, provides “the appropriate methodology” (ibid, 85), and genealogy, as the recuperation of “subjugated knowledges” (ibid, 81), provides the “tactics” (ibid) to demonstrate all that is contingent or inessential in the existence of regularities.

Undoubtedly, the world’s differentiation into heterogeneous entities suggests that a closer investigation of the disciplinary regime of power may reveal discontinuities and cracks in its monolithic sameness. However, it is not clear how he can make room for subjugated knowledges or local practices if “power is everywhere” (Foucault, 1990 [1978]: 93). What would be the status of relations that give rise to some other logic than power? As we will see in the next section, and in more critical detail in chapter three, the same tension runs through Foucault’s ethics.

Ethics

A shift in analytic standpoint marks the move from genealogy to ethics. Foucault still conducts genealogies in his ethical phase, most prominently of the modes by which human beings are turned into desiring subjects (Foucault, 1990 [1984]: 5) and moral subjects (ibid: 29); however, the difference between the genealogies he conducts in his ethical phase and the genealogies of his earlier work is that in the ethical genealogies Foucault switches from documenting the discourses and practices through which individuals are made subjects, to searching for ways by which the individual can “get free of oneself” (ibid, 8) and think and perceive differently. In other words, linking up with Foucault’s concern to highlight contingency in the genealogical phase, Foucault now

locates his analysis from the contingent space that he had earlier counterposed to the regularities of power.

The project of Foucault's ethics arises directly from his analysis of power relations. As Foucault puts it: "we would do well to ask ourselves, 'What is today?'" (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 450). And our answer "should seek to grasp why and how that which is might no longer be what it is...[For] since these things have been made, they can be unmade, *as long as we know how it was that they were made*" (ibid – emphasis mine). Archaeology and genealogy provides the analysis of how today was constructed and ethics provides a political toolkit for how to unmake our contemporary condition.

I interpret 'governmentality' as providing the linking concept between Foucault's social analysis and his political ethos. The 'govern' moment of the concept refers to the modes by which individuals are objectified through power relations; the 'mentality' moment of the concept refers to the modes by which individuals internalize and reproduce their own objectification as productive subjects of power. When Foucault inquires into the first part of the concept, he studies the "technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectifying of the subject" (Foucault, 1997: 224). *Discipline and Punish* is the paradigmatic form of this kind of inquiry. When Foucault inquires into the 'mentality' part of the concept, he studies the "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and thoughts" (ibid). The three volumes of the *History of Sexuality* are the paradigmatic form of this kind of inquiry.

Foucault's project to unmake the present begins with his Nietzschean injunction to "refuse what we are" (Foucault, 1983: 216). To become something else we must first refuse what we are because the 'mentality' through which we form our relationship to self bears the stamp of the 'governing' disciplinary regime of power. In conjunction with the moment of refusal, Foucault advocates a problematisation of the modes by which the individual enacts his or her subjectivity. Foucault argues that the task of philosophical activity today is "the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself...the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" (Foucault, 1990: 9).

Foucault then states that having problematised the 'mentality' through which individuals reproduce the 'govern' moment, individuals must create a new "relationship to self" (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 263) through an *askesis* or practice of creative elaboration (ibid, 263-265; Foucault, 1990: 9). Employing this relationship to self compels the individual to "face the task of producing himself" (Foucault, 1997: 312).¹⁵ As an aesthetic limit to this project, Foucault wonders if "everyone's life [could] become a work of art" (ibid, 261).

When taken together, the moments of refusal, problematisation and practice of creative elaboration, comprise Foucault's notion of 'care of the self' and may form a counterpoint to governmentality: "I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, put itself to a test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this

¹⁵ For an excellent example of Foucault using this logic, see the short essay "Friendship as a Way of Life" (Foucault, 1997 [1981]: 135-40). Although Foucault does not mention it, the idea that the individual produces him or herself has a similar logic to Marx, but Marx stresses that production, even of the individual, must be understood as a social activity.

change should take” (Foucault, 1997: 316) Foucault’s politics seems to offer a logic that reverses the causal relation between power and the individual. Instead of reproducing the normalisation and limitation of power relations, the ethical actor takes “what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory” and conducts “a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over” from the limits of some regime of power to “work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (ibid).

What’s not entirely clear, and will be scrutinized more closely in chapter three, is whether Foucault’s politics offers a template by which to negate power, or more circumspectly hold power at bay or simply direct it consciously. My preceding description of Foucault’s ethics emphasizes a logic chain by which to enact an ‘anti-power’ mode of practice. However, I leave out of that reckoning Foucault’s concept of “agonism” (Foucault, 1983: 222), which refers to the interface in “the complicated interplay” (ibid) between power and freedom, and the necessity of adopting a stance of “permanent critique” (Foucault, 1997 [1984]: 312). Both these concepts indicate a politics that does not “offer an essential freedom” but rather a set of tools to navigate the “permanent provocation” of power relations (Foucault, 1983: 222).

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized the development of Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical phases. I have emphasized the continuity of Foucault’s thought, his long-running critique of subject- and object- centred epistemologies, and the mode of inquiry by which he develops his critiques and stakes out a philosophical position. In the next

chapter, Foucault's politics, methodology and ontological assumptions will take centre stage. Whereas this chapter has tried to contextualize the development of Foucault's work, the next chapter's primary inflection will be to understand what Foucault's thought entails for radical politics.

Chapter Three: Immanent Critique of Foucault's Work

In this chapter, I argue, through two immanent critiques, that the way Foucault sets up archaeology and genealogy makes it impossible for him to historicize ontology *and* get rid of the autonomous subject. First, I argue that in Foucault's archaeological and genealogical phases power falls out of Foucault's historical ontology and enters a transcendent space to act as the unmoved mover in Foucault's system. Second, I argue that internally related to, and compensating for, the first internal inconsistency, the form of politics Foucault develops to counter power reproduces many of the features of the subject-centred epistemologies he goes to such lengths to decapitate.

I also argue that a flat ontology best characterizes Foucault's work and accounts for the two internal inconsistencies I identify through immanent critique. Flat ontology helps account for how Foucault cannot simultaneously historicize the individual *and* power relations. Attributing being only to perceivable entities forces Foucault to account for two entities – society and the individual – with only one perceivable entity, the individual. To the extent Foucault historicizes the subject, power relations enter a transcendent space. This forms the primary emphasis of Foucault's archaeological phase and especially his genealogical phase. On the other hand, in his later, ethical phase, to the extent Foucault seeks to historicize power, he constitutes the individual as capable of an autonomous self-creation.

Foucault complements flat ontology with a methodological search for regularities. This methodology reinforces the transcendent logic of power in his archaeological and genealogical phase and the individualistic and subjective logic of Foucault's ethical

phase. When Foucault analyses individuals from the standpoint of society, he emphasizes regularities that cross individuals, lock them in common subjectivities and deny their agency. When Foucault analyses society from the standpoint of individuals, he develops a politics that attempts to disrupt the systematicity of power's regularities of appearance by advocating an individualistic and subjective centrifugal form of activity. Demonstrating how Foucault's flat ontology introduces inconsistencies in his project will be the aim of this chapter; demonstrating how Foucault's inquiries may presuppose the depth ontology of critical realism will be the aim of chapter five.

With respect to radical politics, Foucault's ontology and methodology produces a conception of society that identifies society with the regularities of power practices. From the position that society consists of the regularities that traverse and productively shape the subject, the project of radical politics becomes to individually problematize those regularities, think and act differently, and "create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 262). Doing so could have two outcomes, both of which give Foucault's politics a resemblance to the autonomous subject. On the one hand, Foucault's 'care of the self' template for political activity could allow individuals to convert their activity from a mode that unconsciously reproduces the regularities of a regime of power to a mode that enacts an 'anti-power' logic; on the other hand, Foucault's 'care of the self' can be read as a strategy for 'agonistically' confronting the 'play of forces' and consciously 'acting on other's actions'. As I argue in chapter five, however, both readings depend on a view of power relations that may ultimately not uncover their basis in real, and at least potentially transformable, social relations.

First Immanent Critique - Inconsistencies in the Project to Historicize Ontology

As I stated in chapter two, Foucault shows, through detailed historical scholarship, that the subject and the object cannot account for the development of knowledge because they are traversed by, and are not themselves the basis of, regularities in the appearance of phenomena. Foucault intends for his historical scholarship to have philosophical repercussions for epistemologies that erect foundations around the categories of the object and subject. Because Foucault sees that object-centred epistemologies tacitly eternalize their objects of knowledge as a foundation from which to erect a progressive view of the march of science, his historicization of the objects of human science renders the evolutionary narrative of positivist historiography null and void in the human sphere.

Foucault reserves his strongest criticism, however, for subject-centred epistemologies that organize their foundation around a figure transcendent to history, like Husserl's intending subject, Hegel's knowing subject or Kant's abstract universal subject. In *The Order of Things*, for example, Foucault shows that subject-centred epistemologies all share conditions of emergence that are historical and posits that "if those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear as they appeared...then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault, 1994: 387). This well-known passage also recalls Foucault's first use of the metaphor of the end of 'Man' in the closing paragraph to his thesis on Kant, where he invokes Nietzsche: "The Nietzschean enterprise can be understood as at last bringing that proliferation of the

questioning of Man to an end. For is not the death of God in effect manifested in a doubly murderous gesture which, by putting an end to the absolute, is at the same time the cause of the death of Man himself?” (Foucault, 2008 [1961]: 124). Foucault critiques Kant for allowing human being to fill the space of the absolute evacuated by the Enlightenment questioning of God.¹⁶ The parallel use of metaphor has consequences for our reading of Foucault; it shows that what Foucault is out to ‘kill’ or ‘decapitate’ is transcendental man and that he wishes to replace transcendental ontology with a historical ontology. As Foucault sees it, Nietzsche killed God, and Foucault will kill ‘Man’ to finish off the job Nietzsche started.

In his archaeologies, Foucault uses the regularities of discourses and statements as the basis to historicize objects and subjects; but, it’s not clear on what the regularities depend. First, Foucault argues for the “the strange notion of regularities which regulate themselves” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 84). Second, Foucault grants his regularities causal power: “The whole enunciative field is both regular and alerted: it never sleeps; the least statement...puts into operation a whole set of rules” (ibid: 163).

In his genealogies, Foucault abandons the idea that regularities are self-governing and instead subordinates the regularities of discourse to power. Whereas archaeology lays out the discursive conditions for utterances to be “in the true” (Foucault, 1972 [1969]: 224) or count as ‘knowledge’, genealogy shows that what counts as truth or knowledge is

¹⁶ Marx’s critique of Feuerbach resembles Foucault’s critique of Kant. Marx argues in the sixth thesis: “Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man [sic]. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (Marx, 1932: 616). Just as Foucault objects to Kant transferring the abstraction of God to the abstraction of ‘Man’, Marx objects to Feuerbach transferring an essence of religion to an essence of ‘Man’. Both Foucault and Marx, I think, want to emphasize the historicity of human being, but do so through different ontologies - which produce very different politics!

“linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it”
(Foucault, 1980: 133).

Foucault only seems to displace the problem of grounding regularities to grounding power. As with the regularities of archaeology, Foucault also ascribes causal efficacy to his concept of power. In *The Order of Things*, the roar of the sea stands for Foucault’s epistemes and is responsible for ‘erasing the face of man’ or historicizing the subject. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault also ends with a metaphor that seems to invoke the sense of the earlier one. Now, “the distant roar of battle” (Foucault, 1996: 308), which stands for power, accounts for the constitution of subjects.

The most plausible conclusion to me is that Foucault is not able to ground the concepts he uses to historicize the subject and the object. Although in the archaeologies Foucault is able to defer “the problem of causality” (Foucault, 1996: xii) to his genealogies, his genealogies do not offer a resolution to the problem. The causal powers Foucault grants to his concept of power relations are transcendent to history. Stated in Foucault’s more provocative prose, if Nietzsche killed God and pinned it on the malign will of ‘Man’, Foucault’s decapitation of ‘Man’ leaves nothing but “anonymous power” (Foucault, 1996: 176) to operate the guillotine.

I think the best argument for the plausibility of this reading comes from following the logic of Foucault’s critique of the progress narrative of object- and subject-centred historiography to its logical conclusion. Looked at from the perspective of his polemic against progress, Foucault counterposes a history without development to a history of progress: “Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species [the object-centred school] and does not map the destiny of a people [the teleological, subject-centred

school]” (Foucault, 1997: 374). Instead, “humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination” (ibid, 378).

Despite Foucault’s project to “reject the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations” (ibid, 370) he ends up doing just that to the concept of power. In *History of Madness*, for example, Foucault shows the inadequacy of a history of madness that judges the past according to the dictates of the present. Foucault turns upside-down the event most heralded by historians of madness “to illustrate that happy age when madness was at last recognised and treated according to a truth to which everyone had been blind for too long” (Foucault, 2006 [1961]: 463). Instead of Pinel bravely liberating the mad of Bicêtre from their chains as a healing gesture, Foucault argues Pinel went to Bicêtre to “install a recognised social type that was morally recognised and approved” (ibid, 479).

By laying bare the ‘treatment’ of madness under its historical conditions of emergence, Foucault simultaneously rebukes the linear view of history as wrong and is able to expose a real will operating behind its ‘objective’ narrative – a will to make itself the measure of history: “This demagoguery, of course, must be masked. It must hide its singular malice under the cloak of universals. As the demagogue is obliged to invoke truth, laws of essences, and eternal necessity, the historian must invoke objectivity, the accuracy of facts, and the permanence of the past” (Foucault, 1997: 383) By training his eye on the emergence of ‘madness’, Foucault can show how the various discourses about madness show no increasing proximity to their object but rather successions of an unchanging “will to knowledge” (Foucault, 1972 [1970]: 218).

Foucault seems to use historical scholarship against progress schools of history to posit a singular essence behind the changing phenomena of history. In this, Foucault

resembles Nietzsche. Nietzsche attributes the twisting of history to the historians who twist it. From this premise, Nietzsche posits an essential malign will to consciousness, “to the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred and their spirit of competition” (Foucault, 1997: 371). For Foucault, on the other hand, the ‘will’ behind history cannot be a property of consciousness, as it was for Nietzsche; Foucault has decentred the subject from dictating history and historicized the subject’s content. Instead, Foucault deposits this will in a transcendent space that infects everything and which Foucault simply calls power. In this view, history goes nowhere; archaeologically, historical regularities express successive regimes of the power to name; genealogically, historical regularities express successive regimes of the “play of forces”, of strategies of domination without a strategist.

With the backdrop to history eternalized and essentialized as malign, Foucault has no recourse but to emphasize the expression of the play of forces in the form of power practices. From the side of individual activity, the power aspect of practices cannot be negated. We can change our practices but that does not lead to a negation of the power backdrop in which those practices occur; the logic of the Panopticon or some other technique of ruling will always form a deterministic condition to our activity. This puts the individual in a vice that in Foucault’s ethical phase he calls agonism [which mirrors Foucault’s metaphor of society as a field of “battle” (Foucault, 1997: 381)] and helps explain why, when Foucault comes to theorize individual activity explicitly, the logic he stumps for is one of permanent critique (Foucault, 1997 [1984]: 317) and self-crafting of a strategy of agonistic play through which we may rule our own conduct and modify that of others.

I think the reason why Foucault cannot historicize power *and* the subject lies in his use of flat ontology. In part, his use of flat ontology arises from a similarity he shares with object-centred epistemologies that import a philosophy from the natural sciences to the study of social objects. Foucault's critique of object-centred historiography questions the epistemological assumptions of positivism but not the flat, empiricist ontology with which positivism is conjoined in philosophy of natural science. I will first address the possibility that Foucault may work with a flat ontology like the empiricist one that underpins positivism and then show how Foucault's methodological search for regularities bears a resemblance to the epistemology of positivism.

Foucault does not question the flat, empiricist ontology that underpins positivism's way of knowing. Although in his genealogical phase Foucault inquires into events, rather than the experience of events as Hume would¹⁷, events are nevertheless empirically manifest¹⁸. Foucault drives his analytic wedge between events and subjects' experience of events by accentuating the difference between the logic of events seen as the movement of bodies (that express the regularities of a regime of power), and the consciousness of individuals who search for explanations for their activity in deep meaning¹⁹.

¹⁷ Hume states: "knowledge...arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other" (Hume, 1995 [1748]: 42).

¹⁸ Foucault does not provide a clear definition of 'events'. My interpretation of its use is that it designates a form of inquiry into social life without recourse to consciousness. Or, it takes as its object of inquiry the 'actual' perceivable material that also forms the basis for experience. Foucault observes the distribution of bodies in space and from that distribution uses concepts like "dividing practices" (Foucault, 1995: 36) to understand the distribution of bodies in prisons, barracks, schools and factories.

¹⁹ Foucault evacuates the epistemological space that subject-centred philosophy produces to warrant the search for deep meaning because he shows that the subject-centred epistemological space owes its existence to the superficial arrangements of objectified bodies. Foucault can argue that the subject-centred assumption of "immobile forms that precede the external world" (Foucault, 1998 [1971]: 371) is based on an "anthropological illusion" (Foucault, 2008 [1961]: 122). Instead, "the genealogist...finds that there is something altogether different behind [subjects]: not a timeless and essential secret but the secret that they

Foucault is not able to ground the regularities he discovers at the level of events because the flat ontology he uses prevents it. The quandary of a flat ontology in the social sphere is that to apply it consistently one must ultimately rely on perceivable entities to ground explanation. As the only perceivable entities are individuals (and the material results of their actions), Foucault is stuck with a dilemma. He can see that the movement of individuals, their utterances, and modes of subjectivity exhibit a systematicity that is entirely opaque to individuals' consciousness. However, he has no other entity to account for the systematicity than the individuals themselves. This untenable position accounts for why Foucault tries to ground regularities "in the strange notion of regularities which regulate themselves" (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 84), which he himself acknowledges as a problem. He is not able to resolve this problem in the shift to genealogy because flat ontology underpins both phases (and the ethical phase, as I will examine later in this chapter).

Foucault's difficulty in explaining why the form of power's appearance *changes* also supports the argument that flat ontology restricts Foucault's capacity to historicize the subject *and* power. On the few occasions Foucault offers an explanation for why the spectacular form of power associated with the sovereign gives way to the disciplinary regime of power, Foucault seems to fall back on a subject-centred mode of explanation that contravenes his aims. For example, he says that "the moment where it became *understood* that it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance" (Foucault, 1980: 38 – italics mine) the form of power changed from inflecting penalties to imposing surveillance. Or, in *Discipline and Punish*,

have no essence, or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (Foucault, 1998: 371).

Foucault seems to counter the notion that the prison arose from a “process of humanization” (Foucault, 1996: 8) with the notion that prison reformers had malign intentions in arguing for incarceration rather than corporal punishment: “the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed...and it was the breaking up of this solidarity that was becoming the aim of penal and police repression” (ibid, 63). Rather than rooting changes in social form in ‘anonymous power’, these examples seem to autonomize (ruling) subjects and give them some ability to consciously direct social organization. If that’s the case, then power relations become historical but only because ruling subjects become the driving engine of history.

Arguably, Foucault’s use of power does not suggest flat ontology. Foucault claims to see power as a relation, which would accord with Marx’s view of power. Social relations are not empirically manifest; we can only perceive the effects of social relations through the activity of individuals that stand in relations but not the relations themselves. But just because Foucault and Marx use the same words does not mean they intend the same referent.

At the very least, Foucault’s use of the concept of power has to be understood against the background of how he tries to differentiate his analysis of power from the subject-centred theories that see power as a property of individuals. As he does in so many instances, Foucault may refer to power as a relation more to avoid giving his reader the impression that individuals can possess power than to positively declare that power is a relation. In a late essay, Foucault addresses the question of power and distinguishes his

view of “power as a relation” from “power which stems from aptitudes directly inherent in the body” (Foucault, 1983: 217).

Leaving Foucault’s polemic against Kant, Hegel and phenomenology aside, Foucault may see power as a relation, but qualitatively the relation may not be like the relations of production Marx inquires into. An important difference between Marx’s conception of power and Foucault’s is that in Marx’s system power relations can be transformed. For Marx, the purpose is to study relations of capitalist production to arrive at a real definition of them, and therefore inform collective practice aimed at their transformation. Second, Marx does not use power as a concept, preferring instead to latch on to his object of inquiry less abstractly by referring to relations of production; moreover, Marx develops a very highly differentiated, though internally related, group of concepts to refer to more and more concrete levels of analysis. By comparison, Foucault’s portmanteau use of the term power may point to its abstract nature regardless of the specificity of Foucault’s analysis.

Contrary to Marx’s transformable relations of production referent, Foucault’s use of power appears to refer to an immutable backdrop; power enters a transcendent space that lies beyond the capacity of individual agency to effect but nonetheless affects individuals. In Foucault’s genealogies all events “are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations” (Foucault, 1998[1971]: 376). Furthermore, he argues that “only a single drama is ever staged in this ‘nonplace’, the endlessly repeated play of dominations” (ibid, 377). From the standpoint of individual activity, relations of power are set beyond the capacity of individuals to direct. As Foucault puts it: “Consequently,

no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice” (ibid, 377).

This brings me to how Foucault’s methodology reinforces the de-historicization of either power or the subject. Before explicating this relationship, however, I would stress that Foucault’s methodology on its own does *not* produce the logic that dehistoricizes power in his archaeologies and genealogies. Flat ontology is the primary culprit. However, as long as Foucault does operate with flat ontology, Foucault’s methodology exacerbates the internal tensions in his work.

Foucault’s methodological critique of object-centred epistemology in the social sphere centres first on its object of inquiry, and second on the space-time invariance it posits to social phenomena. On the first critique, Foucault argues that object-centred epistemologies are mistaken in arranging their inquiries around the object in-itself. Instead, inquiry should focus on the discourse-practices that give rise to objects. This move allows Foucault to discover a *social* logic to the ordering of the human sphere that is separate from the logic of individual activity. However, flat ontology bars the door to ascribing reality to social relations as something distinct from (but not independent of) individuals. Instead, under flat ontology, the basis for the regularities must ultimately lie with the individuals themselves. Below I will show how Foucault explores this possibility in his ethical phase.

On the second critique, Foucault questions the criterion that to posit the workings of a law requires a *space-time invariant* constant conjunction of phenomena. Foucault’s temporal scholarship in the archaeologies allows him to demonstrate that while knowledge does exhibit regularities in its form of appearance, the regularities have

temporal origins and termini; the renaissance gives way to the classical episteme and the classical to the modern one. Foucault's spatial analysis in the genealogies allows him to demonstrate that the movement of bodies also exhibits regularities but that the regularities also have temporal boundaries of operation; the coercive regime of power gives way to the disciplinary one.

Again, under flat ontology, to the extent that Foucault describes regularities that traverse individuals, these regularities must appear coercive and agency-robbing. In this sense, Foucault's methodology reinforces the logic that rids the subject of a constituting role in history and makes the concept of power heuristically resemble a covering law in the deductive nomological model of positivism. In the logic of this model, for any explanandum, or phenomenon to be explained, the explanans, or statements that explain the phenomenon, must include a covering law (Hartwig, 2007: 193), which is power in Foucault's case. Foucault cannot ascribe causal powers to the subject because the subject is shot through with the *savoir* or technologies of self that Foucault's scholarship uncovers; to cause something is to be the X that produces Y. In Foucault's system, a subject's *intention* to utter or practice never produces a consistent Y; regularities in the form of events are anterior to and constitutive of consciousness.

Under the conception that Foucault's attribution of power rests in the discovery of regularities, what remains to be analyzed is whether Foucault allows for any conditions under which power may not be manifest; in other words, can individuals disrupt the regularities of a disciplinary regime through a pluralisation of political practices and negate or subvert the exercise of power? Activists inspired by Foucault's politics may

side with this interpretation and take Foucault's injunction "to create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 262) as simultaneously being an 'anti-power' move.

In this interpretation, Foucault's politics could be read as a path to restore agency to the individual occupying subject positions and would respond to the unsettling, almost taunting, tone with which Foucault concludes *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. There Foucault reflects how:

unbearable it is, in view of how much of himself everyone wishes to put, thinks he is putting of 'himself' into his own discourse, when he speaks, how unbearable it is to cut up, analyse, recombine, rearrange these [words] with nothing of the [speaker] appearing in them (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 231).

In this interpretation, power can be turned into a historical, rather than transcendent, *a priori*, like discourses, epistemes and particular regimes of power. To bring power back to the side of agency would require a strategy for the individual to make visible how disciplinary regularities traverse him or her – through consciousness and practice - and a practice to disrupt those regularities.

Foucault supplies both in his ethical phase. First, Foucault states that the task of philosophical activity today is "the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself...the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" (Foucault, 1990 [1984]: 9). Second, Foucault states that having problematised the "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1997 [1982]: 225) through which individuals establish a relation of "governmentality" (ibid) to themselves, individuals must create a new relationship to self (Foucault, 1997 [1983]: 263) through an *askesis* or practice of creative elaboration (ibid, 263-265; Foucault, 1990: 9). Were an individual to problematize his or her consciousness, root out the categories through which he or she takes on the subjectivity that corresponds to the logic of a power

regime, and enact a new relationship to self in consciousness and practice, then that individual would be removing herself from the logic of the power regime.

This interpretation would sidestep my immanent critique that power enters a transcendent, rather than historical, ontological space. What Foucault offers individual actors, in this reading, writes Foucault squarely into the Enlightenment tradition with which he reconciles late in his career. Just as Kant answered the question ‘What is Enlightenment?’ by arguing that it’s a mode of thought by which “mankind [sic] can escape from its immaturity” (Foucault, 1997 [1984]: 306), Foucault’s politics could offer an ethics by which humankind can return to itself – by breaking the regularities that traverse it through pluralising acts of anti-power.

The reader who agrees with this interpretation and hopes to win back internal consistency for Foucault should be warned this may be a false victory; for if the subject can get her agency back and disrupt the operation of power, then Foucault’s system springs a leak elsewhere, for his subject has now reclaimed its ontological powers, which means they must simply have been lying in wait all along! I will return to this dialectical tension in Foucault’s thought in the second immanent critique of the chapter. For now it seems Foucault’s project may not allow him to have his cake (decapitate the subject) and eat it too (historicize his own ontology).

A different interpretation, for which there is much evidence, emphasizes that even in Foucault’s ethical phase, the problematization of technologies of the self and enactment of a new ethos of ‘care of the self’ in which individuals elaborate a self-chosen relationship to self, does not amount to an enactment of anti-power. According to this reading, even if technologies of self are problematized and new practices are brought into

being, the new practices may only hold at bay the manifestation of power rather than de-systematize power. Reading Foucault this way, power takes on a trans-spatial and trans-historical character that can only be, in some sense, consciously worked against rather than unconsciously enacted. Ethical subjects, in this reading, can try to circumscribe or fragment the space-time footprint of power's regularities by inspiring others to adopt an ethos of 'permanent critique' (Foucault, 1997 [1984]: 317) and elaborate their own sense of artistic self-creation. However, this activity must still be embedded in the agonistic constant of power relations.

Second Immanent Critique – A Return to the Autonomous Subject?

The flat ontology I'm attributing to Foucault also helps account for the close return, in his ethical phase, to the autonomous subject that his archaeologies and genealogies work against. I argued above that readers who wish to maintain that Foucault historicizes power must concede that this comes at the cost of liberating the subject. Now, from a radical political perspective, this seems like quite a bargain: trading in a transcendent conception of power and getting that power back in the form of a potentially autonomous subject seems worthwhile. In chapter five I will argue this deal may be too good to be true, as the ontological premises that make that exchange possible may not capture the character of either power relations or the individual.

Foucault must trade power back and forth due to his flat ontology. Because Foucault can only grant existence to empirical phenomena, he has no way of ontologically grounding power relations and individual agency at once; or, more

specifically, of grounding power relations and individual agency in separate (though related) things. Stated otherwise, the ontology Foucault works with does not allow him to produce a sufficient contrast between the properties of power and the properties of individuals who stand in relations of power. Instead, Foucault has to pour both into the agonistically conceived individual. If Foucault discerns regularities that cross subjects, then individuals must not have agency (the genealogical accent). If subjects enact their own ethos, then the pluralisation of practices points to a fragmentation of power (the ethical accent). Or, in an agonistic variant, both happen simultaneously: “Where there is power, there is resistance...but one is dealing with mobile points of resistance...furling across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds” (Foucault, 1990 [1976]: 95-96).

The perceptual criterion for attributing being also means that when it comes to theorizing a form of individual activity that can disrupt the workings of power, Foucault does not look to a form of collective activity, like Marx, to ‘take hold’ of power relations and concerted to transform them, but instead licenses a form of politics that has an individualistic and subjective logic. In Marx’s logic, social relations cannot be identified with individuals. Instead, relations form the conditions for the activity of individuals, conditions which ruling individuals on the one hand attempt to conserve or elaborate and ruled individuals usually unconsciously reproduce, or sometimes attempt to reform, or more rarely transform. Foucault, on the other hand, in identifying power with regularities in practice that cross and shape individuals, is not about to advocate collective activity to subvert power. Under Foucault’s logic of power, the attempt to act collectively would only reproduce power in a new form by establishing a different set of regularities.

Flat ontology also helps explain why Foucault equates society with the regularities of power. On the perceptual criterion, society cannot be distinguished from the sum of individuals affected by power. Politically, society can only be viewed as a parasitic constraint on enacting polymorphous, creative being. Thus, although Foucault sociologically stresses the way power shapes individuals, ontologically power never enables but only constrains. Foucault's vocabulary follows this logic when he discusses political transformation. In talking about gay politics, for example, Foucault argues: "Rather than saying what we said at one time, "Let's try to re-introduce homosexuality into the general norm of social relations," let's say the reverse – "No! Let's escape as much as possible from the type of relations that society proposes for us and try to create in the empty space where we are new relational possibilities" (Foucault, 1997 [1982]: 160). In this quote, Foucault seems to dichotomize political activity, constituting as negative a logic that seeks to transform social relations and constituting as positive a centrifugal logic that goes 'outside' society. Although I have no quarrel with prefiguration in-itself, given that Foucault argues "power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1990: 93) and that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (ibid, 95), it is hard to see how a centrifugal, prefigurative politics can bring an anti-power logic into being.

The tension that results from identifying power with regularities at the level of individuals is that Foucault's development of a politics appears to reproduce, in only slightly modified form, the logic of governmentality that he identifies with the disciplinary regime of power. Foucault develops the concept of governmentality in his genealogical phase. He shows that the "practices by which individuals were led to focus

their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire” (Foucault, 1990 [1984a]: 5) are “truth games” (Foucault, 1997: 224) whose origins lie in power strategies. Recalling Foucault’s analysis of the Panoptic logic of power, the occupant of the cell interiorizes the gaze of the central tower and polices her own activity. In this logic, individuals conduct “a series of operations on their own bodies and soul...to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (ibid, 224).

In Foucault’s ethical phase, the locus for political activity is also the individual’s consciousness and the form of activity also closely approximates the logic of governmentality. One could say, perhaps, that Foucault’s politics aims to reverse the logic of governmentality.²⁰ Rather than accepting the game of truth that we must refer all our activity back to a fictitious notion of authenticity, Foucault argues “exactly the contrary: we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity” (Foucault, 1997: 262). Instead of measuring all our activity against some norm, as, for example, in Kant’s categorical imperative,²¹ Foucault argues we should be more like Baudelaire, who does not “go off to discover himself...but is the man who tries to invent himself” (Foucault, 1997: 312).

The search for a way to simultaneously lodge in the individual a power that shapes the individual, but which the individual may be able to counteract, may inspire Foucault’s turn to Greek thought in the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality*.

²⁰ See Foucault, 1997: 263-5 for an overview of the four components of a genealogy of ethics, by which Foucault means a genealogy of the historical ways in which “the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (ibid, 263).

²¹ “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

Foucault looks to found a new relationship to self, not with a view to “reactivate” ancient Greek thought (Foucault, 1997: 261), but as a “very useful tool for analyzing what’s going on now – and to change it” (ibid). From Greek thought, Foucault retrieves the notion of an agonistic relationship to self whose:

“*techne* [technique] created the possibility of forming oneself as a subject in control of his conduct...a subject ...distinguished by his ability to subdue the tumultuous forces that were loosed within him, to stay in control of his energy, and to make his life into an *oeuvre* that would endure beyond his own ephemeral existence” (Foucault, 1984a: 138-9).

The concept of agonism allows Foucault to think of the individual as shot through by technologies of the self that accompany regimes of power while simultaneously attempting to elaborate a creative activity²².

Whatever the status of Foucault’s individual – whether the individual enters into an agonistic, Jekyll and Hyde play with power or manages to see him or herself clear of it – Foucault’s development of a politics begs the question of where the individual’s agency comes from. A premise of Foucault’s politics is that individuals can change their circumstances but that is precisely what Foucault denies the individual by doing away with the constituting subject in his archaeologies and genealogies. When Foucault first brings up resistance to power, in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, as I quoted above, he asserts that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1990: 95) without arguing why this must be so or how the individual went from being caught in a logic of penitentiary isolation to mounting “radical ruptures...occasionally” (ibid, 96).

²² Sociologically, Foucault does not explain how the unalienated, male, primarily intellectual Greek aristocrats that produce the documents Foucault analyzes provide a suitable analogue for inspiring political activity for alienated people on the sub-altern side of master-slave relationships. More generally, Foucault does not address the unequal distribution of resources, facilities and media to differing social positions. The absence may point to the implicit individualism that underpins Foucault’s conception of society. Foucault’s concept of power levels differences by affecting all individuals equally. Similarly, Foucault implicitly constitutes all individuals as possessing the means to produce themselves.

When Foucault discloses where resistance arises from, the basis for resistance appears to be located squarely in the epistemological space of the autonomous subject he seeks to evacuate: “At the very heart of the [power] relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, 1983: 222). For Foucault to speak of a ‘heart’ to the power relation and to locate that heart in the individual category of ‘will’ makes it seem that he has granted the autonomous subject an 11th-hour reprieve from its decapitation. Although Foucault says that “rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an ‘agonism’” (ibid) it still seems that Foucault falls back on something like a transcendental subject. Foucault’s repackaging of the subject as containing within its recalcitrant will both a pulse to freedom and a pulse to domination gives Foucault’s subject a slightly different cast than Sartre’s subject, for example, who searches for authenticity (Foucault, 1997: 262); but, the transcendental move is the same; ‘will’ serves as a foundation around which to erect a politics of resistance and creative elaboration.

Comparing Foucault’s conceptualization of power in his genealogical phase to his conceptualization of power in his ethical phase, it is hard to see how lodging the heart of the power relation in the subject’s recalcitrant will can adequately account for regularities that traverse *all* subjects. If the heart of the power relation lies in individual will then how can power exhibit such well-ordered regularity of appearance in the disciplinary regime of power? The strength of Foucault’s conceptualization of power in genealogies like *Discipline and Punish*, which demonstrate how power conditions the activity of individuals, becomes a tension for his ethical phase, where power becomes an essential property of individuals.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show the internal inconsistencies that beset Foucault's project to historicize ontology and get rid of the autonomous subject of subject-centred epistemologies. When Foucault emphasizes the regularities that traverse subjects, objects and knowledge, he has no choice but to eliminate agency and give society an exclusively parasitic cast identical with the regularities of power. To account for what systematizes conduct, Foucault must constitute power as an overarching covering law that transcendentally infects the whole social body. When Foucault switches to the standpoint of the individual, agency appears to proliferate. Foucault's template for radical politics therefore seems to promise a somewhat Promethean logic of anti-power activity; from being the traversed, docile, productive subjects of power, complicit in the interiorization of technologies of self to further entrench the logic of power regimes, individuals can autonomously "refuse what they are" (Foucault, 1983: 216), negate or at the very least hold at bay the regularities that give evidence of power's workings, and elaborate a self-chosen mode of activity.

I have also argued that the inconsistencies in Foucault's project are necessary entailments arising from his use of flat ontology. Unlike interpreters of Foucault who stress that his archaeological, genealogical and ethical phases must be read as distinct from each other, the argument I am offering shows that Foucault's ontology accounts for the appearance of difference between each phase and for the internal tensions within and between his phases. Within the archaeological and genealogical phases, attributing flat

ontology to Foucault accounts for how he must de-historicize power to historicize the subject. Within the ethical phase, flat ontology shows how he must de-historicize the subject to historicize power.

Methodologically, Foucault's search for regularities helps account for how Foucault advocates an individualistic, subjective form of politics. Between the genealogical phase and the ethical phase, because Foucault identifies power with constantly conjoined phenomena, his politics theorizes forms by which we can act otherwise, 'unconjoin' phenomena and de-systematize power; Foucault can pass from the deeply pessimistic cast of his social analyses to the relatively optimistic cast of his political ethos.

Although Foucault's work suffers from inconsistencies, the explanation for the inconsistencies need not. Foucault's flat ontology acts as a strait-jacket that constrains the insights of his analyses, and his methodology, when coupled with flat ontology, intensifies the tensions of his work.

The aim of this chapter has been to show that at the very least Foucault's project suffers from inconsistencies that must be resolved before he can serve as an efficacious mediator for radical politics. To borrow a phrase from Wittgenstein, I hope "we now see something differently and can no longer go on playing as before" (quoted in Bhaskar, 1998: 97). In chapter five, I will try to show what I believe Foucault's analyses presuppose – Bhaskar's differentiated, open, structured and stratified ontology – and how that ontology can resolve tensions in Foucault's project and better situate the very important insights Foucault brings to radical politics. To set the stage for that analysis, in

the next chapter I cover the development of Bhaskar's thought from philosophy of natural science to philosophy of social science.

Chapter Four: Bhaskar and the Philosophy of Science

Unlike Foucault, who begins with a philosophical training and moves into sociological, political and historical domains in his scholarship (without abandoning a dialogue with philosophy), Bhaskar goes mostly in the opposite direction, reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford and from that developing a philosophy with consequences for how we conceptualize sociology, history and politics. Bhaskar originally studied economic theory, motivated by “a concern with the problems of modernisation and underdevelopment” (Bhaskar, 2002: 123). But the economic theory of the time, based on the deductive nomological model, could not come to grips with conditions that varied from the industrialized West. The problem for Bhaskar was the assumptions behind the model. Under it, as I’ve summarized, any particular should be subsumed under a universal regularity such that given the occurrence of X, Y must always follow. Bhaskar understood that besides universalizing the conditions found in the economies of the industrialized West, the model further assumed an undifferentiated, closed and unchanging world. When Bhaskar went in search of philosophical tools to support his conclusion, i.e. that the world changes and is characterized by openness and differentiation among the things that compose it, he “discovered that there was no way [he] could do that, because philosophy had actually pronounced a taboo on the world: it had said you cannot talk about the world in itself, you can only talk about our descriptions of the world” (Bhaskar, 2002: 123).

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The taboo on ontology that Bhaskar perceived stimulated him to study the philosophy of science, which in the Anglo-Saxon tradition was dominated by Humean empiricism and its positivist methodological form in both natural and human sciences. Preceding Bhaskar and influential to his development (Bhaskar, 1999), philosophers of natural science like Kuhn, Lakatos and Feyerabend had begun to undermine classical empiricist philosophy by bringing into focus the sociology of natural science. They highlighted the role of intellectual paradigms in organizing the practice of science and the social conditions of production of scientific knowledge. This camp brought out the subject's role in the perception, manipulation and apprehension of the object of science but in a way that did not directly question the ontology behind classical empiricism.

Bhaskar's strategy differs substantially from, although he incorporates the insights of, the first wave of post-positivist philosophers of science. Instead of beginning with the subject's unexplicated role in the production of empiricist knowledge, Bhaskar first critiques classical empiricism on its own ground, in the natural sciences. Through that critique, Bhaskar develops a new ontology for the natural sciences, which I will attempt to schematically elaborate here as a way to introduce key concepts in critical realism and pave the way for my application of Bhaskar's ontology to Foucault's work in chapter five.

Bhaskar's analytic technique employs the Kantian transcendental question, 'how must the world be for X to be possible?'. Unlike Kant, who was interested in how synthetic a priori judgments are possible, Bhaskar asks, in the first phase of critical realism's development, 'how must the world be for natural science to be possible?'

(Bhaskar, 1998: 5). To break the taboo against talking about the world in-itself, Bhaskar took a claim empiricists did not dispute, which is that natural scientists conduct experiments to test their hypotheses, and asked ‘how must the world be to necessitate experiments?’, and as a necessary corollary, ‘what do scientists actually do in experimentation to grant them access to the invariant laws of nature?’ (Bhaskar, 1998: 168).

Bhaskar’s response, in the form of a transcendental analysis, initiated a new ontology for natural science, which became the first phase in the development of the range of philosophical tools Bhaskar had missed in his forays into economic theory. Just as Bhaskar had found in economic theory, empiricists in natural science argue that a necessary condition for the attribution of a law is a constant conjunction of events. In the natural sciences, Bhaskar argued that scientists must conduct experiments because constant conjunctions never occur without producing the conditions for them through experiments. Otherwise, they would not go to all the trouble. In this line of argument, Bhaskar echoes and elaborates the entailments arising from Marx’s contention, raised against the same ‘vulgar’ economic philosophy that stimulated Bhaskar, that “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearances and the essence of things directly coincided” (Marx, 1991 [1894]: 956).

In one stroke, Bhaskar fells three pillars of empiricist thought. First, the need for experiments to produce a constant conjunction points to the role of scientists in the production of knowledge about nature. Bhaskar calls this the *transitive dimension* of knowledge and distinguishes it from the intransitive domain, which refers to the natural world independent of our knowledge. This counters the ideology of the scientist as the

individual, passive, reasoning apprehender of the ‘facts’ of nature. Again echoing Marx, this time Marx’s thesis that “the educator must himself [sic] be educated” (Marx, 1932: 616), Bhaskar points out that far from simply amassing sense-data, natural scientists must be educated through a social process of knowledge transmission to perform experiments that produce salient access to the natural domain of interest. Moreover, Bhaskar notes that scientists materially engage and manipulate the natural world to produce epistemically relevant access to the ontological stratum of interest. For example, imagine a history of the development of sense-extending equipment in physics, culminating, for the moment, in the massive social enterprise to produce the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. Bhaskar also argues that scientists do not only apprehend sense-data but also interpret the natural world; what they see and how they speak of it depends also on conscious and unconscious education. The interpretation of the world can only occur through “antecedently established facts and theories, paradigms and models, methods and techniques of inquiry available to a particular scientific school or worker” (Bhaskar, 1975: 21). This second argument reflects Kuhn, and Foucault’s in his archaeologies. The development of the role of the transitive dimension in science knocks over the empiricist criterion that constant conjunctions are sufficient for the attribution of a causal law. By not accounting for the work of science in the production of constant conjunctions, classical empiricism leaves out a necessary condition for attributing the operation of a law.

Bhaskar goes beyond Kuhn and Foucault, though, and knocks down another pillar of classical empiricism, because he makes the distinction that while scientists must cause the sequence of events they call constant conjunctions, constant conjunctions must not

themselves be the grounding for laws.²³ If that were so, either scientists have discovered no laws (because no constant conjunctions obtain in open systems outside the artificial closures of experiments) or they produce them in experiments (Bhaskar, 1998: 9-10).

While the latter conclusion represents the tendency towards which the Kantian transcendental idealist camp leans (because it accepts the anthropocentric ontology of classical empiricism rooted in the category of experience²⁴), in Bhaskar's transcendental realist position, the sequence of events produced by scientists allows them to identify the operation of some mechanism that *differs* from the sequence of events.

By distinguishing between events (the object of interest for Foucault) and what Bhaskar calls the *intransitive* structured entities whose generative mechanisms, powers or ways of acting are triggered to produce events, Bhaskar can also claim constant conjunctions of experienced events are not even necessary for the continued working of some 'law' in open systems, a position that knocks over the empiricist ontological pillar that to be is to be perceived, or more precisely, that the domain of the perceivable exhausts the domain of the ontological.²⁵ In addition to the perceptual criterion of existence, Bhaskar argues that an analysis of scientific experimentation entails a *causal*

²³ Hume argues: "But notwithstanding this ignorance of natural powers [Bhaskar's intransitive dimension], we always presume when we see like sensible qualities...that effects similar to those which we have experienced will follow from them [Hume establishes the regular conjunction of sense-data as the basis to infer a natural power]" (Hume, 1995 [1748]: 47).

²⁴ Hume argues, "As to past *experience*, it can be allowed to give *direct* and *certain* information of those precise objects only, and that precise period of time which fell under its cognizance: But why this experience should be extended to future times and to other objects...I desire you to produce that reasoning" (Hume, 1995 [1748]: 48; emphasis his). Kant takes up the challenge and argues that *mind* makes *synthetic a priori* judgments possible [by synthetic Kant means a proposition whose predicate is not contained in the subject; i.e. that bread, for instance, should nourish the body (Hume's example) or all bodies are heavy (Kant's example)]. The point for Bhaskar is that Kant does not question the constant conjunction premise but carries it over into his philosophy.

²⁵ The history of the extension of sense also confirms that the domain of the perceivable is but a sub-set of a much larger domain of real entities. For the domain of perception to expand entails that molecules, atoms, electrons, quarks and neutrinos, for example, pre-existed the expansion of sense. Otherwise, the empiricist must argue that these entities came into being as our perception expanded, which immediately turns the empiricist into a subjective idealist, a position held by Berkeley.

criterion for the attribution of being. On this criterion, “to be is not [just] to be perceived, but rather (in the last instance) just to be able to do” (Bhaskar, 1998: 13).

The distinction between making constant conjunctions the basis for laws (with its underlying empiricist ontology) and understanding laws as the ways of acting of things (with its underlying transcendental realist ontology) must be stressed and will be a source of detailed comparison between Foucault and Bhaskar in the next chapter. Foucault employs the empiricist criterion, based in regularities, for attributing laws, while Bhaskar makes the ‘ontological dive’, so to speak, past the empirically observable phenomena of the world to enable social scientists to ‘dis-cover’ the structured entities that produce those phenomena.

Bhaskar’s terminology does not aim to introduce difficult neologisms but instead tries to offer new concepts that attempt to latch on to a newly identified referent in a way that may resonate, linguistically, with the transitive stock of previously existing theories and models (Bhaskar, 1998: 169). Bhaskar’s use of terminology acknowledges the dual nature of science. All scientific terminology stands in two relations: first, a relationship of adequacy to the intransitive entity it attempts to describe; and second, a relationship of analogy to the transitive building blocks of prior terminology from which we necessarily assemble new terminology (Bhaskar, 1975: 167). That Bhaskar chooses not to talk of ‘essences’, like Marx, indicates that Bhaskar intends to steer clear of the detritus that term has accumulated (the relationship of analogy) and has a similarly historicizing impulse as Foucault in mind (the relationship of adequacy)²⁶.

²⁶ Foucault’s use of terminology, like regularities, laws, correlations and atoms, when viewed in its relationship of analogy, invokes language tropes of empiricism and positivism, and only strengthens the argument that despite his critique of positivism, some of Foucault’s epistemological assumptions resemble positivist ones. Or, the way he models the sciences along hierarchical lines of crossing or failing to cross

Having shown the insufficiency of empiricist ontology, Bhaskar develops four ontological entailments from his transcendental analysis of scientific experiment. Bhaskar argues that the practice of experimentation as a cornerstone of science presupposes that the world must be *open, structured, differentiated, and stratified*. The *openness* of the world turns on the distinction between the artificial closures scientists produce through experiments and the usual course of things where events are rarely, if ever, constantly conjoined. The world's openness takes on added significance in the human sciences, where experiments are, generally, impossible to engineer. Interpreted under strict empiricist criteria this should entail the 'lawlessness' of social life but as Bhaskar found in economics, the widely held neo-classical economic doctrine of belief, so firmly entrenched in academia, could use the openness of social life to produce counterfactuals to 'falsify' Marxist theories while invoking a *ceteris paribus* law for positivist dogma (Bhaskar, 1998: 131-132).

The world's *stratification* can be retroduced from the distinction between events and the entities that generate them. Continuing our segue into a discussion of the social domain, Bhaskar's transcendental deduction of the structured character of ontology philosophically grounds Marx's discovery of the category error of empiricist political economy, where labour power (the transfactual power or *capacity* to get things done) is reduced to the exercise of labour (its phenomenal manifestation or *activity* of doing), thereby disguising the non-equivalent exchange of commodities between capital and

epistemological thresholds (Foucault, 2006: 207-8) stands in a relationship of analogy to the way Comte, the thinker who gave positivism its name, also ranked the sciences. Foucault places mathematics at the top of the hierarchy and sociology at the bottom, perfectly mirroring Comte – inversely! When looked at together with all the other evidence, it seems plausible to suggest that Foucault's implicit ranking criterion is the ability (or not) of these sciences to discover genuine regularities and therefore to uncover something like the workings of laws.

labour in production (if workers were paid for their labour, which is nothing more than the exercise of their labour-power, capitalists would not be able to extract surplus-value).

Bhaskar deduces the world's *differentiation* into many entities from the distinction between the artificial experimental closures that produce constant conjunctions and the everyday run of life where events are rarely, if ever, conjoined (Bhaskar, 1986: 27). If the world was undifferentiated, no distinction between experiment, where a constant conjunction provides access to a particular entity, and everyday life, where phenomena are not conjoined and therefore produced by more than one entity, would exist.

Bhaskar further argues that the possibility of scientific experiment entails that the world is *structured* rather than characterized by the seeming amorphousness of the unconjoined events of open systems. For if the ways of acting adduced to the structured entities of experimental inquiry are to be given universal scope and endurance in whatever space-time domain they occupy (and the application of science manifestly demonstrates that structured entities go on acting outside the experiments in which scientists identify them), entities, and their powers and tendencies, must be structured (Bhaskar, 1975: 35). Bhaskar's argument that entities are structured must not be confused with a foundational, ahistorical principle. Although some entities like, say, gravitational fields, are presumably invariant within the bounds of human history, other natural entities like those in the biosphere are patently not. In the context of my inquiry, relations of capitalist production, for example, are sufficiently structured to have endured hundreds of years. And yet, despite the endurance of the most basic tendencies of the capital-labour

relation, relations of capitalist production have also exhibited very wide development and differentiation spatially and temporally.

Within this relational ontology, structured entities can be internally related to other entities such that they would not be what they are but for the existence of other entities. Marx provides a good example of an asymmetrical internal relation when he points out that “the sun is the object of the plant – an indispensable object to it, confirming its life – just as the plant is an object of the sun, being an expression of the life-awakening power of the sun” (Marx, 1964 [1844]: 181).

Power relations also follow an asymmetric logic between super-ordinates and sub-ordinates. Although the individual occupying the master, lord or capitalist position depends on the individual occupying the slave, serf or worker position for his existence, he does not depend on any particular slave, serf or worker. The internal relation between master and slave grounds Foucault’s insight that power depends for its existence on the compliance of the sub-altern: “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault, 1983: 221).²⁷ However, the asymmetry of the relation points to the conclusion that the refusal to submit of any one sub-altern individual does not change the structure of the relation.

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In Bhaskar’s second phase of development he moves from establishing what can be said about the properties the natural world must possess for scientific experiment to be

²⁷ Foucault’s insight is prefigured as early as de la Boétie, who wondered “how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him” (de la Boétie, 2007 [c.1550]: 112).

possible to the question ‘what properties do societies and people possess that might make them possible objects of knowledge for us?’ (ibid, 13).

Bhaskar concludes that the ontology of people and societies is such that “the human sciences can be sciences in *exactly the same sense*, though *not exactly the same way*, as the natural ones” (ibid, 159). The human sciences retain their sense, vis-a-vis the natural ones, because the tenets Bhaskar attributes to the natural world’s ontology – its openness, structure, differentiation and stratification – also hold in the social world. However, the way, or methodology of the human sciences must be modified to acknowledge the internality of the human sciences to their subject matter: “The human sciences and philosophy...appear as distinct moments of the very same totalities they describe and explicate” (ibid, 159).

Bhaskar redeploys the causal criterion for ascribing reality to an entity and argues that both societies and people must be real, and distinct, on the grounds that but for the existence of each, social life would be unintelligible. Individuals must have the power to make things happen in the world because but for their activity, social forms like language would never be reproduced.²⁸ Simultaneously, human life cannot be reduced to some aggregate of Robinson Crusoes because it is only through relations between people that a social form like language arises in the first place or is reproduced or transformed.

In Bhaskar’s terminology, social relations refer to the intransitive dimension and individuals’ activity and concepts of their activity refer to the transitive dimension.

²⁸ Bhaskar organizes his argument for the ontological status of individuals through the category of reasons (Bhaskar, 1998: 80-119). Bhaskar argues that “intentional human behaviour is caused, and that it is always caused by reasons, and that it is only because it is caused by reasons that it is properly characterized as intentional” (ibid, 80). By reasons Bhaskar does not mean to fall back on the ‘knowing subject’ that Foucault critiques. Instead, Bhaskar has in mind that individuals must always possess some concept of what they’re doing - even if it is wrong or incomplete. And the blend of cognitive, emotional and conative reasons that explain an individual’s course of action may not be present to that individual’s consciousness (Freud’s unconscious). Moreover, any course of action has social as well as individual causes.

Unlike the natural world, the intransitive dimension does not exist independently of people. Were people to disappear the natural world would go on without us. Social relations, however, would not. Instead, the relationship between society and individuals suggests neither exists independently of the other. Looked at from the standpoint of social relations (the sum of which makes up the totality we refer to as society), relations do not exist independently either of people's activity nor of the conception people have of their activity. Looked at from the standpoint of individual activity, all activity must make recourse to some social form, which the individual employs in his or her activity. By employing a social form the individual also reproduces or transforms the relation that underpins it.

For Bhaskar the relationship between social relations and the individual suggests a transformational model of social activity (Bhaskar, 1998: 36-37). Individuals occupy social positions and embody practices that normally reproduce and sometimes transform social relations. Looking at transformation from the perspective of radical political action:

our idea of a non-alienating society...must be conceived as one in which people self-consciously transform their social conditions of existence (the social structure) so as to maximize the possibilities for the development and spontaneous exercise of their natural (species) power (ibid: 37)²⁹

Bhaskar emphasizes development through activity; however, the facilities, media, and materials of production upon which activity depends are not the inherent properties

²⁹ In a post-script Bhaskar adds that if "I were to re-write the book today I would stress the way in which social order is embedded and conditioned by the natural order from which it is emergent and on which it acts back" (Bhaskar, 1998: 174) Without this acknowledgement, the idea of a non-alienating society would lack a concept of the boundary conditions imposed by the natural world on the maximization of species powers. Or, accentuating the biological stratum of human life, a non-alienating society must be conceived as one that does not destroy its own conditions of survival.

of individuals but rather are socially (mal-)distributed products that individuals contingently access depending on their location in the ensemble of social relations.

To illustrate what Bhaskar has in mind, take the relationship between a capitalist and a labourer. Capitalist and labourer denote social positions that refer to a relation and not to individuals; individuals occupy the positions but cannot be identified with them. As Marx argues, “To be a slave, to be a citizen, are social characteristics, relations between human beings A and B. Human being A, as such, is not a slave. He is a slave in and through society” (Marx, 1973: 265). When human being A occupies the position of labourer, his or her activity, mediated through concrete social forms, contributes to reproducing the capital-labour relation; however, the relation may not be reduced either to A’s activity nor A’s concept of the activity.

In Bhaskar’s characterization of a relation like capitalism, the conception human being A has of her activity does not necessarily change the fact of her undertaking it, and in undertaking it of reproducing the relation. In other words, knowing what we are doing at work, like operating a computer or cash machine, differs from what we think of what we are doing. Moreover, *concept-dependency* does not entail *concept-determinacy*. A great number of concepts of what we do is consistent with the daily reproduction of capitalism. For example, we may work to keep our children out of poverty, to support ill family members or less consciously to reproduce our class position. These reasons have nothing to do with reproducing *capitalism* but rather with reproducing the *individual*. That said, in pursuing our individual reasons for reproducing or developing ourselves (even as works of art) most of us necessarily reproduce capitalism through that activity (the only conditions of production most of us have to work with).

Similarly, the practice-dependency of a relation like capitalism is not the same as practice-determinacy. To substantively change the capital-labour relation requires not just any change in practice but particular changes. Although on realist grounds very little can be said in the abstract about concretely transforming a complex relation like capitalism, its great spatial extension and temporal endurance makes it reasonable to suppose that even refusing to reproduce the capital-labour relation by not working may not lead to its transformation. Although refusal by many to reproduce capitalism could *change* the relation, unless the refusal wrested ownership and control over society's productive resources from the few, the refusal would not *transform* capitalism. Moreover, the totalizing nature of capitalism always threatens to re-absorb centrifugal, prefigurative political actors that breakaway from reproducing capitalism.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized the development of Bhaskar's ontology from his work in the philosophy of natural and human science. I have emphasized the transcendental mode of analysis and critique of empiricism through which Bhaskar argued for the ontological tenets of differentiation, openness, stratification, and structure. The key point from the transcendental mode of analysis and critique to retain for the following chapter is that Bhaskar does not adduce evidence extraneous to his object of analysis to critique it. Instead, the scientific activity carried out under the auspices of empiricist ontology forms the minor premises for Bhaskar's deduction of a different, more expansive ontology. In the next chapter I will show how a similar exercise

performed on Foucault's work can also suggest the adequacy of Bhaskar's ontology. For radical politics I will argue that if Bhaskar's depth ontology better accounts for Foucault's inquiries, Foucault's politics must be reconceived.

Chapter Five: Transcendental Critique of Foucault's Work

In this chapter I move from an immanent to transcendental mode of analysis and critique. The development of my transcendental analysis and critique will turn on the difference between the flat ontology Foucault works with and the depth ontology that Bhaskar develops for social science.

In section one I show how Bhaskar's ontology differs from Foucault's by recovering the analysis from the previous chapters. I demonstrate that the internal tensions in Foucault's work can decompress when I swap Foucault's ontology for Bhaskar's. I organize the contrast through the tenets of differentiation, openness, stratification, and structure of Bhaskar's depth ontology, emphasizing one or the other tenet depending on the tension under analysis. For radical politics, the contrast between Foucault and Bhaskar stresses that when analysed with Bhaskar's ontology, the nature of power no longer resides in the regularities of power's appearance. Instead, power relations are transcendently real, transformable referents that form a condition for the activity of people who stand in relations of power.

In section two, I transcendently analyse Foucault's conception of the Panoptic logic of the modern disciplinary regime of power. I argue that if Foucault's conception captures the logic of contemporary power relations, then an effective framework for radical politics must possess a dimension of social and individual transformation. I position Foucault's analysis of the logic of power relations against Hegel's conception of the master-slave relation and Marx's analysis of the capital-labour relation in the large-scale industry phase of capitalism. The contrast allows me to do justice to Foucault's

insight into the productive side of power relations and demonstrate the necessity for individual transformation in addition to social transformation. Finally, I argue that without transforming Foucault's ontology, his politics cannot produce a negation of the power relation he analyses and may not even provide a convincing basis for individual transformation.

Examining Foucault through a Depth Ontology

In chapter three I argued that two, internally related, tensions in Foucault's framework restrict its effectiveness. In this section I will show how those tensions can decompress when I replace Foucault's flat ontology with Bhaskar's depth ontology. I also highlight a constellation of ancillary issues that relate to Foucault's ontology, as in his difficulty in differentiating his objects of inquiry, his conflation of development with progress and the false dichotomy he sets up between the universal and specific. Analytically, I will arrange the substitution of Foucault's ontology with Bhaskar's around the tenets of Bhaskar's ontology: the stratified, differentiated, open and structured character of the world.

In reality, these tenets are internally related and incapable of separation. For example, opening the world without stratifying it would entail seeing the world as an unintelligible flux of phenomena. As a result, it is important to stress that the tenets Bhaskar ascribes to his ontology are analytic and not ontological distinctions. The ontology is singular and the predicates he ascribes to it are multiple. This also means that no tenet on its own, in the analysis below, achieves the decompression of Foucault's

internal tensions. Equally, the internal tensions in Foucault's framework are analytically distinguishable but in reality arise from an internally related problem field owing to flat ontology.

Recalling the immanent analysis, Foucault faces a dilemma of how to ground social analysis when he restricts himself to perceivable entities. Because the only visible entity Foucault has to work with are individuals (and the material results of their actions), Foucault has to ground society and the individual in the individual. As we've seen, none of the three permutations Foucault experiments with provide a resolution to the dilemma of accounting for two things with one. In the first permutation, power 'falls out' of Foucault's historical ontology and becomes transcendent to individuals. This outcome saves power at the expense of the individual's agency but only by making power transcendent. In the second permutation, the individual 'falls out' of Foucault's ontology and becomes transcendent to power. This outcome saves the individual's agency at the expense of power but only by making Foucault's political subject very similar to the autonomous subject he earlier sought to decapitate. In the third permutation, Foucault agonistically pours both power and the individual into the individual. This outcome neither historicizes power nor escapes the individualistic foundation of the autonomous subject.

Bhaskar, on the other hand, supplements the visible criterion for attributing being with the causal criterion. This doubles the number of entities with which Foucault could construct his analysis. By allowing for the existence of social relations on the causal criterion, Foucault could ground power in social relations that differ from individuals. Now, none of the three permutations produce internally inconsistent outcomes. In the first

permutation, when Foucault analyzes the individual from the side of power, Foucault can uncover a logic that forms a necessary condition for the individual's activity without setting that logic over and above the individual. In the second permutation, when Foucault analyzes power from the side of individual activity, power does not atomize into the self-willed decisions of suddenly autonomous political actors. Instead, Foucault can see that for the individual to produce him or herself as a work of art will require transforming the social logic of the power relations in which he or she stands.

Metaphorically, Foucault would trade his pointillist social canvas in for an Aristotelian conception of the artist. Instead of individuals fashioning themselves as singular works of art, individuals could, as an aesthetic limit, produce themselves as artists by sculpting (i.e. transforming) the social clay of the pre-given relations in which they stand (Bhaskar, 1998: 34). In the third permutation, Foucault no longer has to conceive of the individual in "an agonistic relation with oneself" (Foucault, 1984a: 67) whose "adversaries...[are] part of him" (ibid). Instead, power relations and their logic are something distinct from individuals and not essentially part of their make-up. Foucault can sustain his insight that individuals are shaped through relations of power without needing to make power take up residence inside the individual to argue his point.

The stratification of Foucault's ontology with Bhaskar's depth ontology shows that Foucault implicitly identifies non-empirical entities with transcendent entities. As I have shown, the ontological properties Bhaskar adduces to social relations from his transcendental analysis of social life puts activity- and concept-dependent limits on social relations. These limits would allow Foucault to gain a non-reductive analysis without giving up his impulse to historicize ontology. For example, an episteme can exhibit great

temporal endurance and form a condition for the production of knowledge without being over and above all individuals.

Methodologically, if we stratify Foucault's archaeological and genealogical inquiries using Bhaskar's ontology, the regularities Foucault discovers in his inquiries would be cast in a different light. The change need not affect the technique or method by which Foucault conducts his inquiries. Instead, the ontological change alters the status of the regularities of Foucault's inquiries. The rough regularities of discourses or disciplinary regimes no longer act as the basis for a causal relationship between the regularities and the individuals affected by them. Instead, regularities allow Foucault to *detect* the operation of a social relation that *differs* from, or cannot be reduced to, the roughly conjoined phenomena of events or statements.

In employing flat ontology, Foucault must posit that the regularities themselves be the basis for a law. This explains Foucault's dilemma between positing that either regularities regulate themselves or that a transcendent entity like power acts as something like a covering law and explains his regularities. When Foucault opts for the first choice, he reduces power to its exercise. Typically, Foucault makes this choice in his ethical phase. For individuals to be able to "refuse what they are" (Foucault, 1983: 216), Foucault must argue that "power exists only when it is put into action" (ibid, 219). When Foucault opts for the second choice, he hypostatizes power or discourse. Typically, Foucault makes this choice in his archaeological and genealogical phases. Besides the instances I've cited above, Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" provides an example of a hypostatization of discourse that reduces the author of a work to occupying an 'author function' (Foucault, 1998 [1969]: 205-222). On the first horn of the dilemma,

Foucault runs the risk of under-estimating the endurance of the power relation and making the reproduction of power a voluntary act. On the second dilemma, Foucault runs the risk of making power impervious to any transformation.

Because Foucault posits that the regularities themselves are the basis to attribute the existence of his concepts, the contents of his ontology change whole-scale when the regularities of one disciplinary regime, for example, give way to another. On the stratified view, when one set of regularities gives way to another, that gives evidence for changes to some strata of the relations that underpin the sets of regularities but may not necessarily entail a whole-scale change all social strata.

To illustrate the contrast, compare how Foucault treats the change from the corporal to disciplinary regime of power with how Marx treats the change from the manufacture to large-scale industry phase of the capitalist labour process.³⁰ In Foucault's analysis, each regime exhibits a single logic and the change from one period to the next leaves nothing of the previous logic behind.³¹ Marx, on the other hand, working with a stratified ontology, sees that the logic of the labour process has changed, owing chiefly to advances in productive forces that allow for the production of "machines by means of machines" (Marx, 1977: 508), but does not reduce the change to the more deeply nested

³⁰ The comparison has more than illustrative value. Foucault dates the transition to the modern disciplinary regime very similarly to the dates Marx gives for the transition to the large-scale industry phase of the capitalist labour process. This means Foucault and Marx offer analyses of processes occurring contiguously and contemporaneously in society. Furthermore, the similar logic of disciplinary power and large-scale industry, particularly the way subordinates' essential powers are alienated to super-ordinates and made the object of manipulation, invites a reassessment of the internal relations between Marx's inquiry into the logic of production and Foucault's inquiry into knowledge, the subject, and rationalities.

³¹ Foucault does note that the change from one regime to the next was not instantaneous: "the gloomy festival of punishment was dying out, though here and there it flickered momentarily into life" (Foucault, 1996: 8). Although Foucault notes these flickers he cannot situate them in the ontology he works with. I will revisit the tension between what Foucault's analysis presupposes and what Foucault's epistemological formation allows him to account for in section two.

logic of the capital-labour relation³². Moreover, the more deeply nested logic of the capital-labour relation endures from manufacture to large-scale industry even though the form of appearance of the more deeply nested logic has changed.

As we saw in chapter two, Foucault concedes that he has not found a way to explain how “empirical knowledge...possesses a well-defined regularity” (Foucault, 1996: xii) nor why one set of regularities gives way to another. The shift from archaeology to genealogy allows Foucault to explain the regularities of discourses and epistemes by reference to practices of power. However, he only manages to displace the problem of explaining a change from one episteme to another to explaining how one regime of power becomes another.

As I showed in chapter three, Foucault struggles to explain social change without recourse to an autonomous (ruling) subject when working with flat ontology. Unlike Marx, who can demonstrate that the labour process changes owing to the logic of the capital-labour relation (without making the change appear pre-determined), Foucault cannot base an explanation in power relations because they ultimately just consist of regularities. Although it is beyond the scope of my thesis to investigate, the challenge Foucault has in explaining changes to his general objects, like regimes of power, may ultimately indicate that the causal mechanism does not lie within Foucault’s purview.

Foucault also seems to struggle to differentiate his objects of inquiry. On the one hand, he wants to insist that his regularities cross very wide swathes of space and time (the modern episteme and disciplinary regime covers 200 years). On the other hand, he

³² In fact, each stratum affects the other. The character of changes to the labour process owes its logic to the more deeply nested tendency of capital’s search for surplus value while the changes in the labour process in turn impel a greater emphasis on techniques to extract relative surplus-value rather than absolute surplus-value.

wants to retain the specificity of his inquiries and posit a consistency to more time-space bound regularities like discourses. However, to the extent that his epistemology bears the trace of the deductive-nomological model of explanation, Foucault is constrained in his capacity to differentiate his objects of inquiry, as regularities in one field must eventually be subsumed under something like a more general covering law. Insofar as Foucault emphasizes that regularities are local, he seems to undermine his broader claims and tends towards a more atomistic description. Conversely, if Foucault emphasizes the global character of regularities, he undermines his aim to show that power is multiform. As Foucault states: “For archaeology, [discourses] are so many *correlative spaces*. Lastly, in so far as it is possible to constitute a general theory of productions, archaeology, as the analysis of the rules proper to the different discursive practices, will find what might be called its *enveloping theory*” (Foucault, 2006 [1969]: 228; italics his).

The same tension runs through Foucault’s genealogies. On the one hand, Foucault wishes to discuss “a whole series of forms of power” (Foucault, 2000 [1978]: 283) and to “localize problems” (ibid, 285); but, on the other hand, he wishes to insist that “this doesn’t mean these are not general problems” (ibid).³³ And yet, Foucault never employs any concept more specific than power to refer to the local problems he describes, which adds conviction to the claim that Foucault’s epistemology contains some residue of positivist principles of explanation.

In his archaeologies, Foucault seeks to subsume the particular under the general. In his genealogies, Foucault reverses the direction of subsumption and conducts “an

³³ To compare the wide scope Foucault gives his single concept of power, compare the analysis of disciplinary regimes in *Discipline and Punish* (particularly p.130-1) to the analysis of sexuality in *History of Sexuality – Volume One* (for example: “In a specific type of discourse on sex, in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places” (very nearly singular!) Foucault, 1990 [1976]: 97).

ascending analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms” (Foucault, 1980 [1976]: 99). In ‘eventizing’ social life, Foucault wants to explain the general by reference to the local. Either view depends on a logic that seeks to find some ultimate lever by which to explain the appearance of manifold phenomena. The tendency to privilege one causal stream – ‘micro’ to macro’ or vice-versa – has the side-effect of making it difficult for Foucault to identify regularities that exhibit varying space-time scope without undermining one at the expense of another.

Foucault’s reversal of the direction of subsumption from archaeology to genealogy helps explain why Foucault is treated as a structuralist in his archaeologies and a post-structuralist in his genealogies. In his archaeologies, because Foucault subsumes statements to discourses, discourses to epistemes, and epistemes to the archive, he has the appearance of a high structuralist. In his genealogies, because Foucault argues that a micro-physics of power explains the ‘macro’ structures of the state or capital, he appears to have radically altered his methodology. The interpretation I’m offering is that Foucault’s shift from archaeology to genealogy does not consist of a ‘methodological break’. Instead, Foucault’s methodological strategy retains the same logic but simply inverts the direction of causal explanation from the local to the general.

Bhaskar’s tenet that the world is differentiated would allow Foucault to underpin his correlative spaces with distinct objects that are related, but not reducible to or subsumable under, more general ones or vice-versa. For example, fields of thought and practice, like medicine, may exhibit regularities in their ways of knowing, doing and seeing that point to discernable powers of the social relations in which those practitioners stand; powers which practitioners exercise (mostly unconsciously) in their conscious

activity of caring for the ill. Simultaneously, relations of medicine may partake of more general relations of production like capitalism or patriarchy that practitioners also exercise in their activity but perhaps even less consciously and less visibly.

By not identifying relations with regularities like discourse or disciplinary regimes Foucault would not have to side with specificity or generality as the ultimate basis to explain regularities. Instead, a set of local regularities would point to the medical relations that provide the basis for a discourse of medicine. And, a more general set of regularities would point to the extensive relations of an episteme.

Without making a move into differentiated, depth ontology, Foucault cannot provide a ground for himself to:

pose problems [and] display them in such a complexity that they can silence the prophets and lawgivers, all those who speak for others or to others. In this way, it will be possible for the complexity of the problem to appear in its connection with people's lives; and, consequently...for the legitimacy of a common creative action to also appear (Foucault, 2000: 288)

This quote shows Foucault searching for a way to defend against reductive, abstract social analysis. Foucault attributes the tendency to neglect complexity to “universal intellectuals” (Foucault, 1980: 126) who eschew concrete analyses of power by instead pronouncing on the universal features of power. To guard against that tendency, Foucault counterposes the concept of the specific intellectual to the universal intellectual. Foucault argues that the specific intellectual “draws closer to the proletariat” by working “within specific sectors, at the precise point where [the specific intellectuals’] own conditions of life situate them” (ibid, 126).

Foucault’s conceptualization of the relationship between the universal and the local has consequences for radical politics. Foucault seems to constitute the universal and local as a mutually exclusive dichotomy. The universal is abstract while the local is

“specific” (ibid, 126). To uncover the nature of power, Foucault gives value to the specific, local mode of inquiry into the ‘micro-physics’ of power against the abstract, universal mode of inquiry. Looked at through Bhaskar’s ontology, the consequence for radical politics of Foucault’s selection of the local pole in the dichotomy would be to balkanize ontology and leave out of the analysis relations, like those of capitalism, with an extensive footprint.

Bhaskar’s tenets of stratification and differentiation offer a way to conceptualize the ‘universal’ and ‘local’ that does not force a choice between the two. On the one hand, the world’s differentiation into many things provides a strong argument against the possibility of vanguardism implicit for Foucault in the universal intellectual; people operating in one place do not have epistemic access to the relations responsible for the concrete mediations of another. On the other hand, Bhaskar’s depth ontology shows that Foucault may bend the stick too far in the opposite direction. The world’s stratification implies a common plight in being oppressed to reproduce deeply embedded, exploitive relations like capitalism or the modern disciplinary regime. Transforming these relations may necessitate collective, concerted activity by most people in most places of the world - mediated through relations of greater and greater space-time bounding that culminates in the unique point of each individual’s biography.³⁴

³⁴ Bhaskar connects the relationship between general, deeply embedded relations and specific relations to the process of discovery in science: “If science is regarded as a continuing process of discovery of ever finer and in an explanatory sense more basic causal structures, then it is rational to assume that what is at any moment of time least certain epistemically speaking is the most basic from the ontological point of view” (Bhaskar, 2008: 38).

Foucault’s genealogical logic of inquiry runs a contrary course. He wishes to conduct more and more specific, local studies therefore implicitly giving ontological ascendance to the most epistemically certain stratum. Marx, on the other hand, working implicitly with Bhaskar’s epistemology, looks at the ‘local’ neither as a site to conduct ‘specific’ inquiries into micro-structures of power nor as a site to apply universal, abstract categories. Instead of the dichotomous choices, the particular serves Marx as a site for *concrete* inquiry into

I argued in chapters two and three that Foucault seeks to historicize ontology. For Foucault, successfully doing so would steer him through the Scylla and Charybdis of the object-centred and subject-centred progress readings of history. In the object-centred account, empirically discoverable laws, above history, dictate the unfolding of history. In this account, scientists' accumulation of empirical facts allows them to cast a retrospective glance on history that, by necessity, always places the present at the apogee of human history. In the subject-centred account, the constituting subject or autonomous consciousness, also above history, anchors its evolution.

Neither of Foucault's strategies to steer past the progress schools succeed completely. In his archaeological and genealogical phases Foucault counterposes an evolutionary history with a history that changes its form of appearance but cannot develop. History can change its form of appearance because one episteme or disciplinary regime can give way to another but it cannot develop because all regimes reproduce the malign drama of "the endlessly repeated play of dominations" (Foucault, 1998[1971]: 377). Although this strategy sheds the progress narrative of object-centred epistemologies

the forms that mediate it. Marx *arrives* at an understanding of the whole [not necessarily universal] by beginning from a concrete particular (in his case the commodity form) and observing the extent to which the particular entails relations that extend beyond the particular (Marx, 1973 [1857]: 100-101). Marx demonstrates a realist methodology by allowing the particular concrete site of inquiry to dictate the extent to which any explanation of that site's character entails reference beyond the particular site. In contrast, Foucault's specific inquiry resembles the abstract universal approach he critiques because the selection of specificity is just as pre-conceived a methodological choice as the universal one. In reality, one cannot determine *a priori* the extent to which understanding power in any particular domain will make recourse to relations that extend beyond it.

Somewhat speculatively, the tension could then be said to reverberate into politics; Foucault's approach balkanizes and 'superficializes' ontology into events and therefore stresses the need for individual problematization and creative activity. Marx, on the other hand, goes after the very enduring and extensive capital labour relation at the expense of the more contingent, conjuncturally determined configurations of relations, and therefore stresses the need for something resembling the all-at-once movement of the entire working class. Both are necessary on the ontological argument that each approach refers to actually existing strata of social relations.

it nonetheless posits a similar closure to history.³⁵ In Foucault's ethical phase, his historical strategy writes him into the enlightenment tradition. In this strategy, Foucault constitutes the subject as ignorant, up to now, of the logic of the power relations that shape him or her but potentially capable, by problematizing the technologies of the self through which she reproduces power, of taking history into his or her own hands. This strategy avoids the Scylla of object-centredness but only because it runs afoul of the Charybdis of subject-centredness. History is no longer closed but it becomes indeterminate; the individual is granted powers of radical auto-genesis that decouple the individual from the conditions under which the individual acts.

Bhaskar's open ontology offers safe passage to posit a history that develops without necessarily progressing. For Bhaskar, activity "presupposes the existence of social forms...People cannot communicate except by utilizing existing media, produce except by applying themselves to materials which are already formed, or act save in some or other context" (Bhaskar, 1998: 34).³⁶ Although history entails development in the sense that individuals reproduce, transform or elaborate potentialities of previously

³⁵ In a debate with Noam Chomsky, Foucault demonstrates how he implicitly operates with an essentialist logic that denies the possibility of historical development. Chomsky argues that we need to understand and combat oppression but not put aside entirely the "more abstract and philosophical task" of trying to "draw the connections between a concept of human nature that gives full scope to freedom and dignity...and to relate that to some notion of social structure in which those properties could be realized" (Chomsky and Foucault, 2006 [1971]: 42). Foucault cautions Chomsky on the "risk in defining this human nature...in terms borrowed from our society, from our civilization, from our culture" (ibid, 43). However, Foucault does not heed his own caution for he similarly adduces a nature to people, except in Foucault's case it is malign: "the proletariat makes war with the ruling class...to take power" (ibid, 51). Foucault's notion of history turns around the fulcrum of the pursuit of power and so can neither regress nor progress.

³⁶ Bhaskar's formulation echoes Marx, who says: "History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity" (Marx, 1976: 58) Marx further argues that "this can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history" (ibid, 58), a warning note that echoes Foucault's critique of the progress school of history.

existing social and natural forms, one cannot adduce an a priori logic to that development. On the other hand, as a necessary limit to the possibility of altering social life, the condition that the past conditions the present also entails a prefiguration of the future. The nearer a future gets to the present the more the past-in-the-present constrains the shape the future can take (Bhaskar, 1993: 142-43). For example, the accumulating past of unsustainable human activity increasingly shapes irreversible future climate change and catastrophic outcomes for many life forms.

Foucault's tendency to close history by constituting power as transcendent entails an endless repetition of the play of dominations. On the other hand, the tenet that history is open indicates that individuals who currently occupy positions that reproduce dominant power relations could prefigure social relations that as a possible emancipatory limit stage a more halcyon play than tragedy. Against Foucault's tendency to make history radically indeterminate and subjective, the necessary but not predictive relationship between past, present and future may entail that relations of solidarity and equality must be prefigured now to be more extensively possible later. Simultaneously, the power relations in which we presently stand must be consciously struggled against to envision a future without them.

A Transcendental Analysis of the Panopticon

In this section I make my strongest pitch that Foucault's politics necessitates a social and individual dimension of activity by showing that his most celebrated analysis presupposes it. If the reader agrees with this transcendental critique then Foucault's

politics necessarily becomes insufficient to transform the object of his analysis. Stated otherwise, I aim to preserve the insight of Foucault's analysis but demonstrate the necessity of supplementing Foucault's politics.

I position Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary regime of power against Hegel's analysis of master-slave relations and Marx's analysis of the capital-labour relation in the large-scale industry phase of capitalism. The contrast allows me to bring out how Foucault's analysis differs from Marx's analysis, and show how the logic of Foucault's analysis may open up an individual dimension to radical politics that is under-theorized or missing in Marx.

In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel argues that the slave, unlike the master, has more complete epistemic access to the conditions of her servitude. Because the master does not produce the objects of his desire, his consciousness moves from his desire to the object of his desire without the intervening labour to produce the object. The slave, on the other hand, sees the entire relation because she produces the object that consummates the master's desire. For Hegel, this sets in motion a powerful dynamic towards the negation of the relation. The slave will become conscious of her position, and therefore recognize both the parasitic nature of the master and that she already carries with her all the capacities to produce on her own.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx imports the logic of Hegel's parable to his analysis of ruling consciousness. Marx characterizes the thought of Stirner, Bauer and Feuerbach as ideological on the grounds that it does not begin from the real, material conditions that give rise to their objects of knowledge. Marx shows that the German ideologists reproduce the epistemic position of the master when they move from their

thought to the object of their thought and believe that a change in their thought necessarily changes the object of their thought.

A similar logic informs Marx's analysis of the large-scale industry phase of the capitalist mode of production. Marx shows that intrinsic to the necessary drive of capitalists to increase the accumulation of surplus value is a tendency to increase the socialization of production and interdependence among labourers. Marx shows that a condition for the further domination of capital over labour is paradoxically the further constitution of labour as capital's antithesis, a collective, united worker. In the language of Hegel, the capitalist's yearning for the object that will consummate his desire, which is the further accumulation of surplus value, leads to changes in the organization of labour that bring workers closer to consciousness of the nature of their subordinate position. This contradiction produces powerful tendencies towards the real negation of capitalism.

Spatially, as the logic of large-scale industry takes over, the relative separation of labour in the manufacture period gives way to great concentrations of labour in factories and their further pooling in the row houses of the burgeoning industrial cities. Marx argues that the increasing physical proximity of workers also facilitates the coming-to-consciousness of their class position and the nature of their exploitation.

Marx and Hegel's theorization of power relations has the same developmental logic. The dialectical development of the power relation produces conditions where the exploitive or oppressive inner nature of the relation makes itself increasingly visible to the subordinate class. Presuming the subordinate class will act on its interests once it becomes conscious of them, the power relation is inscribed with an auto-subversive tendency towards its transformation.

Foucault's social analysis of the same period as the rise of large-scale industry points to a contrary logic. Consistent with Foucault's project to construct a micro-physics of power far from the beating heart of the state, Foucault inquires into the organization of schools, barracks, prisons and also factories. Foucault argues that Bentham's Panopticon, as an ideal type, best encapsulates the disciplinary regime of power. In the architecture of the Panopticon the subject has no privileged epistemic access to the conditions of her subordination, nor does the logic of the Panopticon suggest a process of coming-to-consciousness of subordination. On the contrary, the Panopticon encloses the subject, objectifies her in her cell, and separates her from fellow prisoners with whom she might develop solidarity and common struggle.

Unlike Hegel's master, whose gaze extends to the object of his desire, in the Panopticon the observer of the central tower sees all and designs the prison according to his needs in the first place. The super-ordinate's gaze no longer passes over the subordinate but instead brings the subordinate into a total and constant visibility. The subordinate, rather than seeing the whole, looks solely towards the central tower, and according to the tower's careful design cannot verify the workings of her tormentor.

Spatially, in relation to Marx, Foucault subverts Marx's analysis that the increasing physical proximity between workers can produce increasing unity of class consciousness. Instead, Foucault's analysis, with its emphasis on the "dividing practices" (Foucault, 1983 [1982]: 208) of power, points to the lurid conclusion that a condition for the increasing separation between workers may be their increasing spatial proximity: "at the emergence of large-scale industry, one finds, beneath the division of the production process, the individualizing fragmentation of labour power" (Foucault, 1996: 145).

Epistemically, rather than being in a position of having a more privileged view of the whole, the subordinate now is doubly subordinated. The subordinate sees less than the super-ordinate and the subordinate has her epistemic view mediated for her by the super-ordinate in the central observation tower.

Foucault's inversion of the epistemic privilege of the subject highlights that Hegel and Marx place the subordinate outside the field of vision of the master and therefore also outside the field of effect of the master's capacity to shape the subordinate through the relation. This reproduces what Foucault calls the repressive view of power, where the effects of power relations are seen to merely block or constrain some essential freedom that the subordinate would enact but for the parasitic abuse of the super-ordinate. For Foucault the subordinate becomes a principle concern for the master and therefore no longer exists simply in a state of repression.³⁷ The power relation has productive effects at the level of the subordinate; the subordinate is shaped and shapes herself in the super-ordinate's image and according to the super-ordinate's needs.³⁸

If Foucault has it right, then he highlights the irreducible necessity of bringing to light the discourse-practices, or in Foucault's terminology the technologies of the self, through which subordinates are objectified and invited to turn themselves into prefabricated, self-regulating subjects. Foucault develops a persuasive template for this

³⁷ Marx's analysis of the capitalist labour process includes an examination of the many deleterious effects on the worker. Marx, however, does not analyse to the same extent how the worker herself becomes an object of manipulation for capital. Braverman, on the other hand, extensively discusses the origins and development of "scientific management", which he calls "an attempt to apply the methods of science to the increasingly complex problems of the control of labour" (Braverman, 1998 [1974]: 59).

³⁸ One way to distinguish the aspects of power relations that Marx and Foucault make visible is by the branch of the sciences they draw into their analysis. Marx examines the incorporation of the natural sciences into capital's drive to amplify productive forces: "[natural] science [becomes] a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital." Foucault examines the incorporation of the human sciences into superordinates' drive for "the maximum extraction of forces and time" (Foucault, 1996: 192).

individual dimension of activity in his ethical phase, beginning with the Nietzschean injunction to first 'refuse what we are' so we can become something else.

But revisiting the logic of the Panopticon's architecture suggests Foucault does not fully bear out the insights of his analysis. The gesture of refusal of what we are and the enactment of something new must also be accompanied by the concerted, collective practices Marx argues for in order to negate the relation that gives rise to the Panoptic logic in the first place. Although Foucault shows that the subordinate does not exist in an untainted state, the logic of the relation makes it so. The subordinate does not voluntarily internalize ruling categories and practices but instead does so because, trapped in her cell, she is in a position where the sum total of discourse-practices through which she lives her subordination are designed in the image of the master and therefore necessarily make her subordination opaque. Moreover, it is also the case that despite the atomized state produced by incarceration, we are caught collectively in the Panopticon and must break through our isolation and also collectively transform the logic of relations that give rise to a central tower.

The logic of the Panopticon irreducibly calls for a form of radical politics with individual and social dimensions. On the individual dimension, following from Foucault's analysis, expanding the field of visibility of the practices and dispositions that go with occupying the social positions through which we reproduce power relations, while not inherently emancipatory (the cell does not dissolve just because we come to see it as one), opens epistemic windows to see into the ontology of power relations and devise strategies to transform them.

On the social dimension, following from Foucault's analysis, the structure of the Panopticon is responsible for the logic of the unequal relationship between the few who occupy the central tower and the many who occupy the cells. No amount of individual-level problematization and elaboration of new practice can topple the logic of the structure. Foucault's argument that we must "face the task of producing [ourselves]" (Foucault, 1997: 262) begs the question of his analysis: with what means? The template for radical politics that Foucault offers presumes that we carry the means to produce ourselves like a "snail in its shell" (Marx, 1977: 480) but Foucault's analysis shows the individual does not possess any means of production.³⁹

At best, when viewed through the lens of Foucault's analysis, the form of politics he offers can prefigure alternative comportment but ultimately cannot get clear of the colonizing gaze that always threatens to reconstitute prefigurative actors into subordination. At worst, Foucault's politics plays into the logic of the Panopticon. For what better strategy could the central observer devise than to plant the seed that the individual can create herself as a work of art? By not directing her struggle to connecting with fellow cell-mates, breaking down walls and ultimately destroying the central tower, individual-level politics can lead not just to the docile reproduction of power relations but to their enthusiastic elaboration.

In contrast, Bhaskar's depth ontology may sustain the insights of Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary regime of power. Through the intransitive dimension, or the social and material relations in which individuals stand, Bhaskar provides the ontological strata to house inquiry into the prison itself. And through the transitive dimension,

³⁹ More specifically, the Panopticon analysis leaves the means of production out of the picture.

Bhaskar conceptualizes the epistemological conditions of individuals' interpretations and instantiations (or transformations) of the intransitive dimension.

Bhaskar's depth ontology can sustain a distinction and preserve a connection between social relations (the intransitive dimension) and the activity and concept of individuals who stand in those relations (the transitive dimension). The transitive or epistemological domain, which corresponds to the moment of 'governmentality' in Foucault's work, has a non-correspondent relationship to the intransitive or ontological domain, which corresponds to the Panopticon's architecture. Simultaneously, epistemology necessarily connects to ontology, in the sense that we cannot help but form conceptions of our conditions from the way those conditions are mediated through discourses and practices. Thus, Bhaskar's depth ontology can house Foucault's inversion of the epistemic privilege of Hegel and Marx's revolutionary subject. If we stand in real relations of exploitation or domination, but the universal set of discourses through which to interpret those conditions are provided for us by master narratives, we may struggle to become conscious of our subordination and instead submissively and productively reproduce our subjectification.

Seen through Bhaskar's philosophy, we can understand Foucault's pessimism about existing emancipatory discourses and his political move to begin by refusing what we are, or more precisely, to refuse the transitive stock of theories and practices through which we enact our subjectivity. Nonetheless, Bhaskar's ontology offers a different lesson from Foucault's pessimistic insight. Rather than move from Foucault's refusal of what we are to a valorization of a subjective, individualistic activity, we must first inquire into the nature of the structure itself. What we learn from that inquiry will dictate the

social mode of activity to transform the structure. Radical political activity could be seen less as an act of individual creativity than a purposeful transformation of previously existing social relations that includes but is not reducible to a moment of individual refusal and problematization.

Conclusion

The argument in this chapter completes my analysis and critique of Foucault's work. In section one I re-covered the analysis from chapter two and three and examined Foucault's analyses using Bhaskar's ontology. I argued that doing so decompresses the internal tensions in Foucault's work. The transcendental critique consolidated my characterization of Foucault's ontology as flat. In showing how Bhaskar's transcendental realist tenets offer a way out of the logic of needing to de-historicize power or the subject, I also reinforced my claim that flat ontology explains why Foucault cannot historicize both.

In section two I offered a direct contrast between Foucault's social analysis and his politics. I showed that whereas Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon presupposes a social and individual dimension to radical politics, Foucault's politics only sustains an individual dimension. Finally, I examined Foucault's analysis using Bhaskar's ontology and made explicit how Foucault's politics could be reconceived using Bhaskar's ontology.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Returning to the disjuncture in my reading of Foucault that formed the genesis for this thesis, I can now offer an interpretation of the condition that produced the disjuncture and a possible resolution for it. The tension between Foucault's analysis of power relations and the politics he develops to subvert them lies in the flat ontology that underpins his work. The possible resolution for the disjuncture lies in adopting Bhaskar's depth ontology.

In his genealogies and archaeologies, Foucault's discovery of regularities that traverse subjects and objects points to the detection of social relations that are distinct from but not independent of individuals. However, flat ontology constrains Foucault's capacity to ground regularities in something distinct from individuals. This constraint reverberates into the development of his politics. Foucault's politics seems to begin from the assumption that individuals can subvert the logic of power relations by conducting a series of changes on themselves. This logic can only be effective if power relations are conceived as a property of individuals and not social relations.

Foucault's methodological search for regularities intensifies, although is not directly responsible for, the disjuncture between Foucault's social analysis and his politics. In his archaeologies and genealogies, Foucault identifies society with the regularities that traverse the individual, which exacerbates the coercive logic of power relations. In his ethics, Foucault's politics advocates a centrifugal form of activity to de-systematize the regularities that traverse individuals. This lends to Foucault's politics a character that resembles the autonomous subject he seeks to do away with.

The premise that the regularities that traverse individuals point to a social logic calls for a reformulation of the ontology that underpins Foucault's work. Rather than staying with constraining flat ontology, Foucault's work may benefit from embracing the depth that transcendental realist ontology offers.

Depth ontology would allow Foucault to complete his critique of subject-centred epistemologies. Foucault could retain the historicization of the subject without appearing to rid the subject of agency in his social analysis. Because depth ontology supplements the empirical criterion for attributing being with a causal criterion, Foucault's regularities could be grounded in social relations rather than 'falling out' into a transcendent space. In his politics, Foucault could retain the 'care of the self' template he develops to facilitate the individual dimension of political activity but without losing a social dimension of political activity that his analysis of the Panoptic logic of power appears to presuppose.

If the reader agrees that my transcendental critique of Foucault finds its mark and that Foucault's analysis of power relations points to a social dimension for political activity, then this thesis lays the ontological groundwork for a rapprochement between Marx and Foucault for radical politics. Rather than confronting each other as agonistic adversaries, Bhaskar's ontology suggests that Marx and Foucault may be complementary thinkers for conceptualizing a more practically adequate mode of radical politics.

Marx and Foucault offer, at first glance, many ways to enrich each other's analyses. As I have adumbrated in footnotes, Foucault focuses on the incorporation of the human sciences into the production of human beings while Marx focuses on the incorporation of the natural sciences to the production of capital. Marx and Foucault also periodize history very similarly. Moreover, the resemblance of character of large-scale

industry and the disciplinary regime of power invites an investigation of their mutually reinforcing logic. Marx's focus on 'deep' structures compared with Foucault's focus on the micro-physics of power provides relatively clear demarcation lines for an exploration of how each stratum of social relations constitutes the other. Finally, Marx and Foucault, against abstract, moral conceptions of human being, emphasize productive activity as the vehicle through which to elaborate and develop human being; Marx accentuates the social dimension of that elaboration and Foucault the individual dimension.

Perhaps this final point best exemplifies how Foucault, Marx and Bhaskar may be thought together. If the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all, Marx and Foucault prioritize opposite sides of the necessary unity of individual and social freedom. Bhaskar, for his part, provides the philosophical underlabouring to think that unity-in-diversity.

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