

## Foucault's Order of Things

Foucault's project is to prove the radical discontinuity between various regimes of knowledge that he calls epistemes. He roughly periodizes thought along familiar breaks, identifying the same list of usual suspects in each period. Instead of following those figures along accumulative or a winding path toward truth, he problematizes previous casual relationships that had been posited by historians of thought. Because of Foucault's writing style, it's hard to tell which theory and people he's challenge, though it's pretty standard fair in Continental philosophy to have such a capricious lack of footnotes or signposts, but it's frustrating work.

The order of each epoch is ultimately what Foucault finds most valuable. In the Renaissance period order is based on visibilities founding resemblance. Foucault's virtuosic reading of *Las Meninas* serves as a warning to us as readers that he's not willing to accept the 'truth' in the episteme, but that he can masterfully construct for us the logic, ontology and epistemology of such an episteme.

Next, Foucault discusses the shift and uptake of representation as a concretization of resemblances that orders within the Classical period. Representation follows the structure of identity/different and representation. Specific ordering principles he describes are mathesis and taxonomia – this will later be linked to the split between the "hard" and human sciences.

I found reading part II on the modern period much more accessible. Within this period he chronicles the collapse of the ordering principle of representation. Within modernity, underlying invisible structures order all elements. These structures displace the function of representation as adequate ordering, first de-base the way in which representation functions and create new internal organizing principles (labor, life, language) which then second, are followed by new overall criterion for ordering (formalism, empiricism, philosophy).

I didn't read the mechanics of some of the last section very closely. I was having a hard time picking out what was important vs. just what was a demonstration of his argument. I was hoping we could talk about it in class, if we found it important, rather than just outlining each specific argument.

### English Forward [ix]

5 pts

- 1: Neglected field (considered in France to be non-rigorous). Premise: error-prone fields followed certain codes of knowledge // non-formal knowledge had a system [ix]
- 2: 'Regional study'. Multi-disciplinary ('a network emerged') [x-xi]
- 3: Not history of science: hos = scientific consciousness (and find out what was missing). Foucault = positive unconsciousness (the supplement) [xi]
- 4: Read as 'open site' (problematics, not answers). 3 spec a) change b) causality c) subject [xii-xiv]
- 5: structuralism: not one. [xiv]

Preface (map = exotic, impossible to understand, difference, etc)

\*Borges, 'chinese encyclopedia' [X of id/diff, same/other, through appearance] [xv+]

-vanishing backdrop/horizon [xvii]

\*heteroclitite (no common locus), heterotopias, "difference in itself", acategorical

Ordering, a "middle region" 'experience of order and its modes of being' [xix+]

Not history of ideas or science "rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible"

"the epistemological field" – episteme defined [xxii]

\*Classical and modern ages & obs on what's to come

## Chp 1: Las Meninas

Demonstrates the failure of representation.

Only representation visible (king queen) isn't being looked at by anybody! [7] (and is a mirror reflecting nothing)

## II

ID inadequate strategy [9]

-mirror = reflect canvas? [10]

-princess as center [12-3]

What is exterior to the picture? [13+]

-multiple sovereigns..

\*\*\*\*\* "it can never be present without some residuum, even in a representation that offers itself as a spectacle" 16

## Chp 2: Prose of the World // Renaissance episteme

Order: "The Four Similitudes" [17]

1) convenience = spatial proximity

2) emulation = resemblance at a distance

3) analogy = resemblance of relation; man at center

4) sympathy = resemblance provoking spatial and qualitative change

Signs: Signatures [25]

hermeneutics and semiology [29] zigzag path of resemblances

Limits of the world [30]

Plethoric yet poverty stricken. "condemned itself to never knowing anything but the same thing, and to knowing the thing only at the unattainable end of an endless journey" [30]

The microcosm (archaeological = 'what made it possible' – Marxist preconditions? Historical materialism??) [31]

\*rational, magical and erudition via Greek/Roman all on same plane [32]

Writing [34]

Language = part of world and primacy of writing [38]

\*knowledge = similarities of language [40]

Being of Language [42]

Comments on connections and change

## Chp 3: Representing (transformation from renaissance to classical)

17C = Don Quixote [46]

"his whole journey is a quest for similitudes" "the hero of the Same"

-id/diff [49]

Order [50] bacon (reps are idols), but really Descartes (imposes, ID/diff, measurement, order) [52]

→ rationalism [54-6]

1) analysis X hierarchy of analogies

2) complete enumeration X infinite process

3) id/diff X resemblance

4) discrimination X drawing together

5) history /science split (19C, historicity)

6) language = transmit truth

Classical = Rep of the Sign [58]

1) sign introjected into mind [59-60]

2) sign separates world (rather than unify) [60-1]

3) conventional sign privileged over natural, sign/signifier now 1:1 [61+]

Duplicated Rep [63]

Sign functions as 1:1 rep (not a third term, just what it represents) [64]

-both indication of appearance

- transparent and duplicate representation
- \*1) sign-thought fusion (co-extensive) [65]
- 2) no theory of signification (it IS the thing in itself) no exterior or anterior to the sign [65-6]

Imagination of Resemblance [67]

Resemblance = system of signs = concrete knowledge  
 “Linearizes simultaneity of thought”

Mathesis and ‘Taxinomia’ [71]

Mathesis = “ordering of simple natures” that which can be mathematized  
 Taxinomia “order of complex natures” can only be treated qualitatively  
 -empirical sciences, general grammar, natural history, analysis of wealth

classical episteme: mathesis, taxinomia and genetic analysis

SNIP (no speaking)

125-167

Chp 5 Classifying

What the historians say [125] “discovery of sciences of life” [laundry list of scientific ‘fathers of thought’]

- Descartes traced by historians as originator, then an intellectual tree
- Linnaeus and taxonomy
- theology vs science
- science vs. “old science” astronomy mechanic, topics, etc
- “immobility of nature” v transformation in nature

Natural History [128] examination and transcription of living things

-transformation of role of historian [130]

Threshold of Classical = “establish the great compilation of documents and signs” “restore to language all the words that had been buried.

Renaissance – strangeness of animals = spectacle

\*garden/history room of classical replaces procession/show/table of Ren

Structure [132] thing/language representation through analogous structure of language

object-sight- “nomination of the visible”

mathesis [136]

surfaces and lines [are the “structure”] [137]

Character [138] essential nature

\*System: small number of traits (‘particular few’) [140]  
 ignores difference

\*Method: keynote species [142]

\*\*epist = “a knowledge of empirical individuals can be acquired only from the continuous, ordered, and universal tabulation of all possible differences.” [144]

Continuity and Catastrophe [145] gaps in ideal = accident

Monsters and Fossils [150] evolutionary/’evolutionism’ argument

Discourse of Nature [157]

“the theory of natural history cannot be dissociated from that of language”

-“natural history in the classical age is not merely the discovery of a new object of curiosity; it covers a series of complex operations that introduce the possibility of a constant order into a totality of representations.”

Whole world = describable and orderable

-various ways natural history is contemporaneous with language

\*\*truly lacked a conception of life [159-62]

\*\*\*“we must therefore not connect natural history, as it was manifest during the Classical period, with a philosophy of life, albeit and obscure and still faltering one. In reality, it is interwoven with a theory of words...” [161]

SNIP (no exchange)

## OT Part II

### 7. The limits of representation

age of history [217]

some notes on *archaeology* as method, and what results it delivers [218]

\*recount modifications in “configurations proper to positivity” [logic] [character->function in biology]

\*alteration of empiric entities that inhabit positivities [ontology] [language->disco, production->wealth]

\*displacement among positivities [relation btwn biology, lang, econ]

NEW MODERN ORDER: \*first/foremost: not ID/Diff, non0quant, universal, mathesis

YES: organic structures, international relations perform function, discontinuous

Each “positivity” must be thought as having autonomous importance (failure of rep/ lang)

History is the ordering the “gives place” to the various organic structures (disciplines) rather than Order (in the Classical sense of order via ID/diff) [219]

\*\*\*\*\*”we tend to imagine that if these new domains were defined during the last century, it was simply that a slight increase in the objectivity of knowledge, in the precision of observation, in the rigour of our reasoning, the organization of scientific research and information – that all this, with the aid of a few fortunate discoveries, themselves helped by a little good luck or genius, enables us to emerge from a prehistoric age...” [220]

-“it took a fundamental event to bring about the dissolution of the passivity of Classical knowledge, and to constitute another positivity from which, even now, we have doubtless not entirely emerged.” [220]

\*\*\*\*\*”This event, probably because we are still caught inside it, is largely beyond our comprehension.”

-all positivities affected, force of sovereign power, “scattered” (

\*\*Modern = two successive phases of change: 1795-1800

first: Classical modes of being remain (men’s riches, species of nature, words of languages)

-representation (double representations) – id/diff as ordering

second: mode not compat with rep. positivities = foundation-less order via internal referencing

measure of labor [221]

adam smith did not invent labor [222] rather, he changes it’s role from exchange to commodity (‘abstract labor’)

\*possible (and therefore possibilities emerge) via a need/method of exchange split

-to establish the order between the two, labor emerges (‘made possible’) [and time]

\*’all men want, but they are able to and order exchanges through time and exterior necessity’ (sounds strangely organicist Freudian) [225]

wide-ranging effects; forms of labor/capital. Ideology. Time. (sets up conditions for the marginal revolution)

organic structure of beings [226]

-still classify through “character” of grps and species → generalizable but distinguishable units → table

-changes: technique, relationship between visible structure and criteria of ID (same process as a.smith)

-taxonomy followed organic structure, 4 ways... (character: 1) form, 2) function → 3) order natural beings, 4) classification-nomenclature connection destroyed)

\*major transformation: dividing-line between organic and inorganic [231-2] “frontiers of life”

word inflection [232]

emphasis on words as elements (ie: general grammar as purist form) shifts to inflection

-formalism that is not part of representation (235) (connects to transformation of labor)

\*\*\*great quote on formalism on 236

ideology and criticism [236]

each discipline finds elements that are not reducible to their representation:

-labor, organic structure, inflectional system

-all require exterior conditions but also have an underlying (invisible) interiority 237

“a minuscule but absolutely essential displacement, which toppled the whole of Western thought: representation has lost the power to provide a foundation” 238

“in order to find a way back...we must direct our search toward that peak, that necessary but always inaccessible point, which drive down, beyond our gaze, toward the very heart of things.”[239]

“this space of order is from now on shattered: there will be things, with their own organic structures, their hidden veins, the space that articulates them, the time that produces them; and then representation, a purely temporal succession, in which those thing address themselves...” 240

Kant and critique of representation[241-2]

objective syntheses [243]

‘transcendentals’ which make possible the objective knowledge of living beings, of the laws of production, and of the forms of knowledge. In their being, they are outside knowledge, but by the very fact they are conditions of knowledge; they correspond to Kant’s discovery of a transcendental field and yet they differ... 244

\*modern episteme:

- 1) anxiety over diff between pure formal sciences and empirical sciences → drive to formalize emp sci
- 2) foundational universality: through either 1) Fichte’s transcendental subjectivity or 2) Hegelian phenomenology

\*\*\*in the end: the tired formalism of human sci is baseless, and ultimately depends on subjectivity and philosophy

recap.: modern episteme = formal, empirical, philosophical

8. labor, life, language

new empiricities [250]

two phases to “irruption” that created the ‘quasi-transcendentals’ of life, labor and language

1) 1775-1795: smith [\$], jussieu [bio], wilkins [lang] – transformed but retained id/diff (X rep, mere expressivity]

2) change form of knowledge: (not reflexivity through reason!) knowledge as anterior and indivisible between sub/obj → new objects and new concepts/methods [252]

\*“we must not seek to construe these as objects that imposed themselves from the outside, as though by their own weight and as a result of some autonomous pressure upon a body of learning that had ignored them for too long; nor must we see them as concepts gradually built up, owing to new methods, through the process of sciences advancing toward their own rationality. They are fundamental modes of knowledge which sustain in their flawless unity the secondary and derived correlation of new sciences and techniques with unprecedented objects.” [253]

Ricardo [253] labor theory of value

Cuvier [263] organic structure = life as system

Bopp [280] words = part of grammatical system

Language become object [294] demotion of object to status as an object

Chp 9 Man and his doubles [303]

I return of language [303]

-recap of Classical thought – mechanistic: presupposes a general ordering of nature – crashed when discourse failed classical function of ordering [303-4]

\*language now dispersed [history (philology), formalized (linguistics), crit (deconstruction), writing] 303

\*natural history and econ were re-centered NOT dispersed 303

-reason language was largely ignored until Nietzschean rebirth

→ “philosophical-philological” multiplicity (Niet: “who is speaking” mallarme: what is speaking?) 305-6

\*\*Nietzsche killed god AND MAN!! [306]

II place of the king [307] cogito impossible under Classical period – discursive regime of truth couldn't make humans subject-object of representation

Recap of *las meninas* 307-8

\*\*\*\*"before the end of the 18C, man did not exist – any more than the potency of life, the fecundity of labor, or the historical density of language. He is a quite recent creature which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred two years ago" [308]

ex: classical episteme: man/nature are opposed [309] now being changed 309-10. Language = example implications of human/nature opposition being bridged (via language): 310

"the possibility of knowing things and their order passes, in the Classical experience, through the sovereignty of words: words are, in fact, neither marks to be deciphered (as in the Renaissance period) nor more or less faithful and masterable instruments (as in the positivist period); they form rather a colorless network on the basis of which being manifest themselves and representations are ordered" 311

Classical discursive regime prevented form of being from *cogito* to enter into the episteme 311-2

III analytic of finitude [312]

Foundations of biology, economics, philology (and classical discourse eclipsed) → archaeological mutation where "man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by *las meninas*, but from which his real presence has for so long been excluded." 312

\*→ speaking subject. "he, as soon as he thinks, merely unveils himself to his own eyes in the form of a being who is already, in a necessarily subjacent density, in an irreducible anteriority, a living being, an instrument of production, a vehicle for words which exist before him" 313 – (miraculous existence)

-but is also studied from the outside (life labor language condition man from exterior)

-also a subject of representations: produces them and understands through them

-iteration of argument how the shift from classical to modern: finitude as foundation for knowledge

IV empirical and transcendental [318] type

Empirico-transcendental doublet: knowledge of what renders all knowledge possible

"revealing the conditions of knowledge on the basis of the empirical contents given to it"

2 types of analysis over forms of knowledge: the body (transcendental aesthetic) & history (transcendental dialectic) [319]

guarantees positivist or eschatological knowledge 320 (but they are mutually exclusive)

empirical object, transcendental subject

question the paradox: what if man does not exist? 322

V 'cogito' and the unthought [322] scope

Transcendental necessity not in science of nature but the not-known – 323

"how can man think what he does not think...." Life, labor, lang, etc

cogito → questions of being 323+ thinking subject thinking unthought

conseq: 1) historical, phenomenological: no longer "affirming itself wherever it thinks" but "to show how thought can elude itself and thus lead to a many-sided and proliferating interrogation concerning being" (the unthought) [325] 2) man-unthought: "objective form of thought to investigate man in his entirety" → unconscious

\*\*amoral: 328

VI retreat and return of the origin [328] history

In mod – econ, lang, etc, always directed toward but can't rep its origin 329

A'it signifies that the origin of things is always pushed further back, since it goes back to a calendar upon which man does not figure; but, on the other hand, it signifies that man, as opposed to the things whose glittering birth time allows to show in all its density, is the being without origin, who has 'neither country nor date', whose birth is never accessible because it never took 'place.'" (331-2)

An extended analysis on origins and time through repetition– 332

-psychologist error of origins 333

\*\*recap of whole argument: 335

VII discourse and man's being [335]

Response to simple attempts to fit modern philosophy within classical's theory of language 335-7  
-function 'inverted'

break from classical theory of language is key: prevents eclipse of question of being 338-9

"thus we have moved from a reflection upon the order of Differences [Classical]... to a thought of the Same [Modern], still to be conquered in its contradiction" 339

VIII anthropological sleep [340]

Chp 10 the human sciences [344]

I three faces of knowledge [344]

II form of the human sciences [348]

III three models [355]

IV history [367]

V psychoanalysis and ethnology [373]

VI in conclusion [386]