



University
of Glasgow

Mackenzie, Iain Murdo (1994) *Limits, liminality and the present: towards a Foucauldian ontology of social criticism.*

PhD thesis

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3750/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

**LIMITS, LIMINALITY AND THE PRESENT:
TOWARDS A FOUCAULDIAN ONTOLOGY OF SOCIAL CRITICISM**

Iain Murdo MacKenzie

Thesis submitted for Ph.D., University of Glasgow, Faculty of the Social Sciences,
August, 1994.

(c) Iain Murdo MacKenzie, 1994.

ABSTRACT

Through a series of critical interventions in contemporary political thought, utilising the concept of liminality, this thesis points towards a Foucauldian ontology of the conditions necessary for social criticism. Beginning with a critical investigation of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical works (chapter one) the idea that Foucault's "analytic of the limit" provides sufficient grounding for a critical theory of society is challenged. While Foucault's approach contains many insights into the character of social relations it ultimately embodies a problematic transcendental conception of the present. It is argued that Foucault's early works require an "analytic of liminality" if this problem is to be avoided. Chapters two, three and four serve the following functions: firstly, they explore the concept of liminality as a feature of (respectively) the present, the self and everyday speech acts; secondly, they are critical interrogations of non-Foucauldian accounts of social criticism - from neo-Marxism and postmodernism, through communitarianism to critical theory; thirdly, they introduce a series of concepts that are sensitive to the "paradoxical" condition of liminality thereby suggesting the themes that a Foucauldian ontology of social criticism must endeavour to incorporate. In chapter five it is argued that Foucault's later works implicitly contain an analytic of liminality that entails a non-transcendental account of the present. Integrating the later work into his earlier work, therefore, provides a greater theoretical understanding of Foucault's ontology of social criticism. It is concluded that Foucault (and poststructuralism in general) represents a distinctive and convincing voice in the debates concerning the character of social criticism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Introduction	5
Chapter One	
The Limits of Michel Foucault	
<i>Introduction</i>	20
<i>Using Foucault</i>	22
<i>Subjectivity and Truth</i>	31
<i>The Limits of Foucault's Archaeology</i>	35
<i>Foucault's Genealogy</i>	44
<i>An Analytic of Power</i>	53
<i>Openings</i>	63
Chapter Two	
Failing the Present: Jameson and Baudrillard	
<i>Introduction</i>	70
<i>Postmodernism, Late-Capitalism and Hyperreality</i>	72
<i>New Collectives and Masses</i>	85
<i>The Retroactive Subject and the Simulated Object</i>	88
<i>Maps and Shrugs</i>	92
<i>The Temporal Present</i>	95
<i>Conclusion</i>	98
Chapter Three	
Narrative Identity and the Ipseity of Presence	
<i>Introduction</i>	101
<i>Taylor's Project</i>	102
<i>Historical Explanation and Narrative Personal Narratives and Moments of Crisis</i>	107
<i>Ricoeur, Narrative Identity and Crises</i>	114
<i>Taylor and Ricoeur: A Summary</i>	129
<i>Nancy and the Ipseity of Presence</i>	130
<i>Conclusion</i>	133

Chapter FourUniversal Pragmatics and the Immanent
Transience of Communicative Action

<i>Introduction</i>	135
<i>Habermas and Critical Theory</i>	138
<i>Work and Interaction</i>	142
<i>The Linguistic Turn</i>	145
<i>Abstractions and Standards</i>	156
<i>Debating the Transience of Communicative Action</i>	165
<i>Habermas and Searle</i>	171
<i>Deleuze and Guattari: Collective Pragmatics</i>	175
<i>Conclusion</i>	181

Chapter Five

Liminality and the Ethical Life

<i>Introduction</i>	183
<i>Many Silences</i>	187
<i>Individuality, Subjectivity and Subjectivisation</i>	193
<i>The Genealogy of Desire</i>	194
<i>The Transition to the Present</i>	202
<i>Foucault, Enlightenment and the Present</i>	209
<i>Liminality, Virtuality and Politics</i>	214
<i>Conclusion</i>	224

Conclusion	226
-------------------	-----

Bibliography	231
---------------------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the preparation of this thesis the patient and constructive criticism of Mike Lessnoff has proved invaluable. I gratefully acknowledge his persistent attempts to untangle my abstruse ideas and his willingness to let me pursue them further. The formulation of key themes in the thesis was greatly helped by the free and generous discussions with many friends and colleagues in the years spent at Glasgow University. The spirit of critical investigation among colleagues at Queen's University of Belfast has also been a source of great encouragement and I am grateful for all their help in the closing stages of this project. I would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance of The Economic and Social Research Council.

My brother Robert proved to be an inimitable critic and a real companion through the many twists and turns of the research process. His spirit of critical inquiry is indelibly stamped on this work. To Anna, and her insistence on the joyous and creative character of thought, I owe the realisation that this thesis is only a beginning. Last, but by no means least, without the unfailing love and support of all my family this project would not have been possible at all. This thesis is dedicated to them.

PREFACE

Engaging with the work of Michel Foucault, and with elements of contemporary French thought in general, raises problems regarding the nature and "style" of philosophical discourse. This is especially pertinent to the following work which seeks to juxtapose Foucault (and others) against current debates in the Anglo-American and German traditions of social and political philosophy. These problems broadly fall into two camps. Firstly, it may be that the incommensurability of different philosophical traditions erects an unbreachable barrier to meaningful exchange and discussion. Secondly, there are problems regarding the relationship between literature and philosophy. Is it possible, for example, to demarcate literature and philosophy as intertwined but nonetheless distinct modes of writing? While it is not my intention to investigate these debates in full, it is necessary to map out how these problems are dealt with in the following work.

On the problem of incommensurability, I shall present each philosophical tradition in the terminology and "context" that most adequately captures the richness of its approach. Although this may lead to abrupt changes of style at times, it is nonetheless justified by the insight that such juxtapositions can bring. For example, in chapter four, when exploring the relationship between Jurgen Habermas, John Searle and Gilles Deleuze on the importance of a "pragmatic" understanding of speech acts, it is *prima facie* possible to draw comparisons between their work. This is despite the very different styles each writer brings to the topic and the different philosophical traditions from which their particular discussions emerge. If such a comparison was to judge the thought of Searle as inadequate on the grounds that it was written in a very dry analytical style, this would be just as reprehensible as the thought of Deleuze being dismissed because it is presented in a style alien to most analytical thinkers. Therefore, my first point regarding the comparison of

different philosophical traditions is an appeal for equity in the name of a fair reading.¹

Requesting that each thinker be examined in the context of their tradition is not an excuse for lack of rigour. It is an attempt to portray the various approaches discussed in this thesis at their most rigorous and convincing. Moreover, the juxtaposition of different theoretical traditions is, as Foucault suggested, the very heart of philosophical activity:

what is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean - if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? ... it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it.²

To question established hierarchies of thought it is necessary to bring differing traditions into contact with each other. It is to engage in a practice that has sustained philosophical thought since its inception, namely the examination of its own assumptions. This is my second point.

Thirdly, there is no basis for a "plain", self-explanatory or transparent approach to philosophical issues. This does not preclude debate. It enlivens and informs discussion by way of the many nuances that each approach and tradition can bring to a given subject. In this way, I hope to show how a widening of the terms of traditional philosophical discourses - be it the introduction of "continental" thought to "Anglo-American" debates, or vice-versa - can create openings in political

¹ For one account of the ways in which Foucault, for example, has been unfairly read see Paul Bove's discussion of Charles Taylor's essay, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", Political Theory, vol. 12, May 1984, pp152 - 83, in "The Foucault Phenomenon: the Problematics of Style", Foreword to Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988.

² Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure trans. Robert Hurley, Penguin, London, 1985, p9.

philosophy rather than polemical stances that remain entrenched around issues of "style".

It may be that the reader feels aggrieved at the prospect of the author refusing to translate issues into a unified style. This would, however, misinterpret the point being made. It is not that concessions are not given but that upon close examination concessions are (for the most part) not required. Furthermore, I would adhere to the formulation of Gillan and Lemert:

Too much attention to the reader's interests in clarity and we become fools for having destroyed whatever is legitimately subtle in our subject. Too much commitment to the subject's complexity and we become foolish enthusiasts. Neither type of fool deserves to be read.³

Finally, in treating each philosophical tradition as equally valid and deserving of assessment on its own terms, it could be claimed that, far from facilitating communication and discussion between the competing styles, I am legitimating their separation. In maintaining the distinctiveness of each tradition the problem of reading across the traditions is ignored. However, the following chapters (in particular chapters three and four) demonstrate that it is possible to retain the distinctive voice of each tradition without jeopardising the "requirements" of philosophical discussion. The differences must be preserved but they are not as great as is sometimes imagined.

Underlying many of these debates are problems regarding the relationship between literature and philosophy. It may be contended that, whatever literary merits the writings of Foucault, Deleuze and others may contain as fictional expressions of the human condition, they do not fulfil the requirements of truth necessary for

³ Garth Gillan and Charles C. Lemert, Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, pviii.

philosophical writing. Increasingly, a similar charge has been mobilised in the other direction. Many postmodern writers have come to view any attempt at systematisation or logical coherence as *ipso facto* repressive of "difference" and exclusionary. The only remaining approach to "reality", it may be argued, is the open engagement of the writer with the literary tropes and forms embedded in the many "texts" that constitute our lives.

On these debates much has been written.⁴ My own intuition, apparent in the chapters below, is that there is no need for philosophy to exclude literature or vice versa. Certainly this is no more than an intuition, but where I have felt that a particular point can be more adequately conveyed by reference to "literary techniques" I have done so. As with the problem of incommensurable philosophical traditions, I tend towards working "inside" the frontiers between literature and philosophy. Indeed, the aim of getting "inside" all sorts of frontiers and thresholds is the dominant theme of this thesis.

⁴ Useful works include: J. Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays, trans. W.H. Hohengarten, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992; R. Rorty, "Philosophy as a kind of writing", The Consequences of Pragmatism, Harvester, Brighton, 1982; J. Derrida, Of Grammatology, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976. This is, of course, only a selection of a vast area of debate.

INTRODUCTION

V. a little like
 going to and fro
 till in the end
 close of a long day
 to herself
 whom else
 time she stopped
 going to and fro
 time she stopped
 time she stopped

W. More¹

Perhaps there exists in speech an essential affinity between death, endless striving, and the self-representation of language...from the day that men began to speak toward death and against it, in order to imprison it, something was born, a murmuring which repeats, recounts and redoubles itself endlessly, which has undergone a process of amplification and thickening, in which our language is embedded today²

This thesis did not originate with a hypothesis to be proven or disputed; nor is it an overview of debates concerning a particular topic; nor a textual exegesis of one or more authors; nor an analytical dissection of certain themes; though it is, to varying degrees, all of these. I shall look at each in turn.

Chapters one and five begin with a hypothesis; Michel Foucault is a thinker of the limit not the liminal. Throughout the thesis I shall consider the efficacy of this statement as a starting point as well as its usefulness as an end point (that is, the extent to which it suggests other questions and hypotheses). In particular, the first

¹ Samuel Beckett, "Rockaby", The Collected Shorter Plays, Faber and Faber, London, 1990, p276. I am grateful to Anna Cutler for drawing my attention to this quote.

² Foucault, "Language to Infinity", Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, D.F. Bouchard (ed), Cornell University Press, New York, 1977, p55. See also "What is an Author?", The Foucault Reader P. Rabinow (ed), Penguin, London, 1984, p119 for a similar, but less nihilistic, account of the relationship between discourse and "murmuring".

and last chapters are concerned with a critical exposition of Foucault's major works in the hope of revealing the merit of thinking about his project in the terms set out in this initial statement. Chapter one develops the hypothesis as a source for a critical appreciation of his earlier (archaeological/genealogical) work, while chapter five seeks to excavate the role of liminality in his later (ethical) writings - the relationship between these different theoretical strategies is explored in the relevant chapters. It is argued that the concept of liminality provides insight into the theoretical assumptions that propelled his approach to social criticism. Before going on, it is necessary to situate this discussion in the broader perspective of current debates.

Recent debates in contemporary political philosophy have focused on ways of avoiding the problems of traditional political theory, with its ethnocentric and patriarchal essentialisms, while simultaneously seeking to maintain a distance from the disabling relativism of postmodern philosophy. From the idea of complex equality to the conception of justice as political not metaphysical, from calls for radical democracy to the analysis of communicatively structured ethics, from hermeneutic accounts of community to feminist perspectives on power and knowledge (and much more besides) contemporary debates in political philosophy are brought to life by the attempt to find the elusive space between traditional theory and postmodernism. In this arena, the "weak" foundations upon which to ground an adequate conception of social criticism can be found - foundations, that is, that give due regard to notions of "difference". It is this slippery terrain that I shall explore and attempt to occupy. This is not to say that all the possible positions within contemporary thought are exhaustively discussed. Most notably, the work of Rawls and contemporary feminist writers are left unexamined. These are undoubtedly major omissions but practicalities demand that such decisions are made. I do not wish to suggest that contemporary liberals or the many feminist insights into contemporary social and political thought have nothing to contribute to

the debates, only that to incorporate such writings would require a much larger piece of work. However, I do hope to have conveyed a sense of the range of contemporary debates by including sections on Jameson (neo-Marxism), Baudrillard (postmodernism), Taylor, Ricoeur and Nancy (communitarianism/hermeneutics), Habermas (critical theory), Searle (analytical thought) and Foucault and Deleuze (poststructuralism).³ In this way, some of the key problems in delineating the space between traditional and postmodern theory can be ascertained.

This entails a further point. In pursuing this wide range of thinkers I am not suggesting that the following work in any way constitutes a rigorous examination of *every* aspect of each theorist; it is not a thoroughgoing textual exegesis and critique of each of these thinkers. Apart from being pragmatically impossible in a work of this size, it is not my aim to produce some grand synthesis that incorporates the traditions of political thought I have mentioned. Rather, I hope to provide some pointers regarding a more fruitful interaction between the thinkers that are examined, in a way that seeks to get beyond the superficial posturing that has tended to plague debates between these various traditions. Of course, eschewing any attempt to embrace every aspect of this diverse range of thinkers is not an excuse for a lazy reading of the texts involved. The selection of authors (and themes within these authors) is open to question in the "traditional" sense, as are the interpretations put on the themes that are extracted from their work. I am not attempting to side-step the issue of whether or not I have represented the theorists fairly.

It is not enough, though, to assemble this diverse range of authors in the name of debates concerning foundations for social criticism. The field of vision must be narrowed and this is achieved by focusing the debate around the concept of

³ I realise that almost all of these bracketed terms are contentious but as part of a general introduction they serve to indicate the variety of approaches examined below.

liminality. It is worth spending some time explaining the history of this concept, my reasons for using it and possible problems that it presents. The history of the term "liminal" is drawn primarily from the discourses surrounding anthropology and sociology. In 1908 van Gennep published his seminal work on rituals of passage, Rites de Passage,⁴ in which he outlined the different stages involved in rites of transition; for example, the transition from childhood to adulthood, from woman to mother, from elder to ancestor and so on. He defined the idea of rites of passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age". Moreover, each period of transition contained three different phases; the first phase of *separation* in which the individual or group are removed from the existing social structure; the second phase of *marginality* (or limen) which is characterised by the paradoxical position of the individual or group in relation to the preceding and forthcoming social structure; and the third stage of *aggregation* during which the passage is retrieved and consummated in the new social setting. Indeed, for van Gennep, and other early proponents of the idea,⁵ this concept was not only useful as a tool for understanding the processes involved in life-changes (like those mentioned above), it was also pertinent when examining, "any change from one state to another."⁶

It was Victor Turner, however, who gave the idea of rites of passage its most thorough examination, and in particular he concentrated upon the liminal phase of the period of transition.⁷ For Turner, transition as a whole (exemplified by the

⁴ Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1960, originally published in 1908.

⁵ For example, Henri Junod, The Life of a South African Tribe Volumes 1 and 2, David Nutt, London, 1912; particularly p74.

⁶ V. Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*", The Forest of Symbols, Cornell University Press, New York, 1967, p95.

⁷ See V. Turner, On the edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience, E. Turner (ed), University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1985, p7, where Turner attributes his interest in van Gennep to reading Rites

liminal phase of that transition) was "a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation". He goes on to suggest that we think of the process of transition as analogous to water becoming vapour or a grub becoming a moth - that is, as a qualitative change of state. He has, therefore, a strong sense of the very real changes that occur at times of transition and how these changes involve major reconceptualisations of the initial categories by which a person or group describe their identity. Furthermore, the "liminal persona" (the person or group going through the transition) is considered "structurally invisible" - "they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified".⁸ It is this paradoxical position that is diagrammatic of the liminal phase (and processes of transition as a whole). Turner views the liminal as "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise"; an arena where "we are not dealing with structural contradictions...but with the essentially unstructured (which is at once destructured and prestructured)" and that it is a time often associated with "the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless."⁹

Turner was not content to develop this analysis in the field of (traditionally defined) anthropological research. In his later work, he addressed the possibility that liminality functioned in many areas of social life and at many levels. In his lecture "Liminality and Morality"¹⁰ he considered the usefulness of a liminal approach to periods of historical transition; periods "when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape."¹¹ Such times are those which problematise

de Passage while engaged on his own transition with his wife Edith as they set sail from England to America.

⁸ Turner, "Betwixt and Between", p96.

⁹ Turner, "Betwixt and Between", pp97-98.

¹⁰ Turner, "Liminality and Morality", Firestone Lecture, delivered at the University of Southern California, quoted in Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox", *Celebration*, Victor Turner (ed), Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C., 1982, pp109-135.

¹¹ Quoted in Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox", p117.

the existing moral and social structures, not from the position of another moral code, but from *the process of transition itself*. As in the liminal phase of rites of initiation, the liminal phase in general creates a time for playful imagination and creativity that can instil critical perspectives and attitudes. It is, though, also a time of possible alienation and lack of self-definition. Therefore, the insight that may accompany the "unbounded" and "unstructured" position may be gained at the cost of profoundly unsettling experiences. As Myerhoff puts it, however, the central feature of periods of liminality is that "criticism and awareness are almost inevitable in liminal circumstances."¹² It is this aspect of liminality that I shall try to explore below in a Foucauldian context. As a preliminary to this I shall briefly outline the background to my introduction of the concept of liminality into the literature surrounding Foucault's writings.

It is a commonplace among commentators on Foucault's work that his thought is aimed at provoking a "limit-attitude" towards discursive categories and institutional formations.¹³ It is argued that Foucault's major insight was his recognition of the need for a philosophico-historical project that traced the formation of systems of thought in a way that displayed the outer reaches, the edges or limits of these systems. One may draw a comparison with Thomas Kuhn's analysis of scientific paradigms.¹⁴ As with Kuhn, Foucault's project is aimed at revealing the contingencies that enabled discursive patterns to form, contingencies later masked under progressivist categories of discursive self-definition. It is important to remember, nonetheless, that the different areas of study, the natural as opposed to

¹² Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox", p117.

¹³ Although there are numerous examples of this interpretation, of particular interest are: Clare O'Farrell, *Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?*, Macmillan, London, 1989, and Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan, *Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*.

¹⁴ T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970. For discussion of the issues involved in making this comparison see, H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1982 pp69-70 and pp76-78; and D. Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit*, Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp17-18.

the social sciences, makes for different emphases and attitudes in their accounts of knowledge formation.¹⁵

Foucault's project, the argument continues, is aimed at undermining these hidden structures by pushing our thought to the very limits of possible understanding. Transgressing those limits exposes our preconceptions revealing the structures that underpin different forms of knowledge and power. Madness and Civilisation,¹⁶ for example, reveals the intimate relation between the incursion of rationality into the public sphere and the exclusion of certain categories of people as "mad", that is, not fit for rational thought. Exposing these categories and means of exclusion helps to foster a critical understanding of the relationship between the promotion of rationality and the constitution of madness as irrationality. The "renewed rites of purification and reason"¹⁷ that would come to create the "great confinement" of the mad demonstrates the close and unambiguous links between the formation of an age of reason and the alienation of large sections of society from that process - alienation, that is, in terms of confinement, medicalisation, normalisation etc. This revelation invites us to transgress the limits of our thought and to gaze beyond the confines of our "normal" conceptual structures. It asks us to consider the character of the relation between reason and madness as one that is not wholly reasonable. In this way Foucault's project can be viewed as expressing a limit-attitude which constantly strives to undermine our common assumptions; it is a project that forces the transgression of our boundaries of thought.¹⁸

¹⁵ This point is stressed by Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p76.

¹⁶ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, Routledge, London, 1992.

¹⁷ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p3.

¹⁸ It is at this point that the difference with the Frankfurt School becomes most obvious. Foucault, on this account, proposes a method that tries to subvert Enlightenment reason whereas the Frankfurt theorists are typically involved in trying to "reconstruct" reason; "to salvage the wreck of the Enlightenment" (I am grateful to Shane O'Niell for this evocative way of putting it).

It is my contention that this interpretation of the Foucauldian project is more useful as a starting point than as an end point; it is a place to begin critical discussion of his work not a way of summing it up. Rather than simply accepting that Foucault's thought encapsulates an "analytic of the limit" we must try and find an approach to his work that looks beyond this reading. This is the case for two reasons. Firstly, it is important that the critical discourse around Foucault does not become too complacent or too readily subsumed in its own terms of reference. This is the only way of avoiding the reification of the author that Foucault so despised.¹⁹ Secondly, it is important for scholarship inspired by Foucault's work that the charges levelled against his thought by critical theorists²⁰ are met. Critics of Foucault have argued that as a theorist of the limit he offers no way of conceptualising a normative grounding for social criticism. This means, they continue, that his thought boils down to a brand of nihilism with "neo-conservative" political consequences. These charges must be rebuffed if the "empirical insights" of his work are not to be subsumed in the "weak" foundationalism of neo-Kantian perspectives. This assumes, of course, that Foucault offers a novel perspective on the nature of social criticism that is occluded by the neo-Kantian approach. One aim of the following chapters is to demonstrate this to be the case.

To this end, I propose to examine the idea of the limit-attitude from the perspective of the transition implicit in crossing limits, that is, from the perspective of the

¹⁹ See, for example, the interview "The Masked Philosopher", Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984, L. Kritzman (ed), trans. A. Sheridan and others, Routledge, London, 1990, pp323-330. The irony of refusing to foreclose interpretations of the author's work on the author's wishes is noted.

²⁰ I take the Critical Theory inspired objections to be, J. Habermas, T. McCarthy, S. White (see bibliography). While these critics offer an array of perceptive insights into Foucault's work, I shall examine what I take to be the major argument against his work: that is, that he offers no normative grounding for critique and is therefore a form of "neo-conservative". Throughout the thesis I shall look in more detail at the possibility of social criticism from a *Foucauldian* perspective. In this way the charge of "neo-conservatism" is reformulated within the terms of Foucault's project rather than as a response to the charges of the Critical Theorists.

liminal.²¹ It is erroneous to assume that in crossing the boundaries of our thought Foucault's genealogies present a self-evident critique of social norms. As hinted at above, this is highly problematic given that we are left with very little in the way of a grounding for social criticism. Importantly, though, this does not entail that we return to the weak normativism of neo-Kantianism. Rather, there is a way of conceiving of the philosophical grounds for criticism that is in keeping with the poststructuralist critique of Enlightenment thought. My accent to this debate is to introduce the concept of liminality. Typically, Foucault's critical attitude is envisaged as a transgression of the limits of our thought, of going beyond them into some unspecified arena. Yet, it is more fruitful to place the emphasis on the actuality of transition as a critical force, on moving through the limits into the zone of liminality where categories are disrupted and yet to be defined. This is the difference between the "lightning transgression" of limits, which I take to be an uninformative idea of the act of surpassing conceptual boundaries, and liminality, which captures the paradoxes of transgression, the paradoxes inherent in critically examining social relations.²²

²¹ At this point it is worth mentioning that the idea of the liminal is not wholly foreign to Foucault's work. As early as *Madness and Civilization*, p11, the idea of liminality is mentioned in relation to his discussion of the "ship of fools". However, this is quite a different matter from a reconceptualisation of his project via the concept of the liminal.

²² There is a potential problem with the terminology that I employ throughout the discussion. Terms such as "transition", "transgression", "becoming", "virtuality" and "liminality", while they are not synonyms, are used, more or less, interchangeably. However, the crucial factor is the context in which they appear. At times, the notion of "transgression", for example, will refer to the "lightning transgression" mentioned above, that is, as a concept to be criticised. In the last chapter, Foucault's notion of "transgression" is employed differently to suggest the "inside", or liminal moment, of transgression. Indeed, one aim of this project is to establish that, while Foucault talked of "transgression" (and related terms) throughout his work, the view he had of this concept changed as his theoretical approach changed. The meaning assigned to particular terms should be clear from the context of the discussion.

My reasons for stressing the concept of liminality will hopefully become clear. Briefly, I favour this term as the one that most adequately expresses the paradoxical character of transition and the different levels on which transition/transgression operates. It is also a term that is not loaded with too many philosophical preconceptions and, therefore, it enables the following reading of Foucault to maintain a certain critical distance from the vast secondary literature surrounding his thought. Further elaboration of the idea of liminality is given at the start of chapter five.

This approach to Foucault presupposes that I do not adhere to the position that poststructuralist thought functions as a critique of *all* foundations in philosophy and politics. It is not constructive to polarise the debates between critical/liberal theory and poststructuralism around the foundationalism-antifoundationalism debate. To do so is to occlude the very real points of contact, the shared historical understandings and common origins, that can be found between these traditions. Moreover, by characterising poststructuralism as a critique of all foundations, many of its proponents are playing into the hands of its detractors by offering a vague and unresolvable 'Other' to the dominant philosophical tradition.

The worth of pursuing a poststructuralist conception of social criticism, therefore, is not to be found in abandoning the idea of foundations altogether. On the contrary, in excavating a counter-tradition to the Enlightenment conception of what constitutes a foundation, poststructuralist thought proposes an alternative account of social criticism.²³ The challenge of poststructuralism lies not in its rejection of all philosophical foundations but more particularly in the rejection of the Hegelian dialectic (including Marxist versions of it) and the phenomenological-existential conception of the sovereignty of an immutable subjectivity.²⁴ Putting it in these terms may be construed as emphasising the banal. Certainly, it is not enough to characterise the difference between poststructuralism and critical theory. Yet, the importance of poststructuralism is in the way that it pursues these dialectical/phenomenological foundations ruthlessly. Poststructuralism aims to purge thought of all "microfascisms"; to find and expose all traces of dialecticism and to unmask the immutable subject wherever it resides. Waving the postmodern flag of "Otherness" - as if that was all that was required - is an empty gesture. To

²³ A similar point is made by M. Hardt *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, UCL Press, London, 1993, ppix-x.

²⁴ One of the best sources of Foucault's account of his relationship to Hegel, Marx, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre among others is *Remarks on Marx*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1991.

find an alternative foundation for social criticism, one that draws upon the *margins* of the Enlightenment, is to offer a real challenge to the different aspects of the dominant tradition.

A brief examination of poststructuralism as a reaction to these two dominant traditions of French thought in the early twentieth century can clarify this position. The pervasiveness of Hegelianism in France was largely due to the work of Kojève. His interpretation of Hegel caught the mood of the time in that it provided an intellectual response to the events of the Bolshevik revolution and Lenin's claim that an understanding of Hegel was imperative for a greater understanding of Marxism.²⁵ The embrace of Hegelianism through its propagation by Kojève became so widespread that, as Descombes suggests, it became the focus for "the desire for a common language" in French philosophy of the period.²⁶ Alongside this stream of thought, and to some extent intertwined with it, the phenomenological/existential approach to subjectivity flourished with the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.²⁷ The desire to reinvigorate the experience of subjectivity over the abstract Cartesian cogito became the guiding principle of this approach. Yet, it also became the millstone around its neck. In simply reversing the Cartesian formulation, prioritising the "I am" over the "I think" it remained firmly in the tradition of thought developed since Descartes. The subject was still absolute.²⁸ In response to these two convergent traditions there arose another way of conceiving of history and subjectivity, but a way that itself depended upon two 'minor' strains in French philosophy.

²⁵ See V. Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp9-10.

²⁶ Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, p11.

²⁷ Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, pp48-74.

²⁸ Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, p69.

As a way of thinking through the problem of progressivism in history, encapsulated in the dialectic, it became necessary (for Foucault in particular) to turn to the works of "Cavaillès, Koyré, Bachelard and Canguilhem". Their emphasis on discontinuity instigated the need to interrogate the relation between "the positivity of the sciences and the radicality of philosophy".²⁹ Thus Foucault came to be interested in the history of "truthful discourse" - the ways in which truth functions in specific domains of inquiry. This preoccupation would continue throughout his works (admittedly, in various forms) guided by the belief that the study of the formation of concepts allows for a critical theoretical position to be constructed without the baggage of Hegelianism.³⁰ He also found in Canguilhem a way of reconceptualising the subject as conceived by Phenomenology.³¹ Yet, the most telling aspect of his reaction against the subject-centred approach of the dominant tradition was his reading of another minor line of French thought; the line through Nietzsche to Bataille and Blanchot. Foucault explained the relations as follows;

What did one find instead [of the dominant tradition] in Nietzsche? The idea of discontinuity, the announcement of a "superman" who could surpass "man". And then in Bataille, the theme of the limit-experiences in which the subject reaches decomposition, leaves itself, at the limits of its own impossibility. All that had an essential value for me. It was the way out, the chance to free myself from certain traditional philosophical binds.³²

In this way we can see that, for Foucault at least, the coming together of two minor traditions in French intellectual life enabled him to free his thought from the philosophical atmosphere of the time. It was not the rejection of all philosophical foundationalism that motivated his work. It was the attempt to find foundations

²⁹Foucault, "Introduction" to G. Canguilhem, The Normal and the Pathological, trans. C.R. Fawcett in collaboration with R.S. Cohen, Zone Books, New York, 1991, p11.

³⁰ Foucault, "Introduction", The Normal and the Pathological p16.

³¹ Foucault, "Introduction", The Normal and the Pathological p20.

³²Foucault, Remarks on Marx, p48.

that did not entail the problematic assumptions of dialectical and subject-centred philosophies. As Hardt has put it, poststructuralism rests on "the affirmation of alternative lineage's from within the tradition itself".³³ He continues;

Post-structuralism does critique a certain notion of foundation, but only to affirm a more adequate one to its ends. Against a transcendental foundation we find an immanent one; against a given teleological foundation we find a material, open one.³⁴

Liminality is one way of conceptualising the character of this alternative approach to foundations in Foucault's thought.³⁵ Interpreting Foucault through the concept of liminality suggests a Foucauldian ontology of the immanence of social criticism. Putting it another way, the concept of liminality serves to explicate a non-transcendental and non-teleological Foucauldian conception of social criticism. It is this idea that is explored throughout the following chapters.

In chapter one, Foucault's attempts at providing an archaeology of the human sciences and a genealogy of regimes of power, while highly insightful, are shown to be ultimately defeated by the "analytic of finitude" that he sought to overcome. Although his "history of the present" functions as a way of going beyond the limitations of his archaeological approach it too becomes enmeshed in the finality of its own limits. In other words, the present becomes the transcendental foundation of his genealogy. This has the consequence of disabling an *active critical present*; a present as limitless, a present as boundless, a liminal present.

³³ Hardt, Gilles Deleuze, px.

³⁴ Hardt, Gilles Deleuze, pxv.

³⁵ It is important to clarify that I do not hold the introduction of the concept of liminality to be the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle. Rather I think of it as one way of enlivening the debates, a way that is perhaps more amenable to the process of dialogue between the various philosophical schools than one drawn exclusively from the French tradition.

In chapter two, the idea of a liminal non-transcendental present is explored via the thought of Jameson and Baudrillard. Their work, moreover, is brought into a critical perspective through Henri Bergson's method of *intuition philosophique*. It is argued that despite the superficial differences regarding the conceptions of the present offered by Jameson and Baudrillard, the ideas they proffer of the present - as ultimately recuperable through a Marxist narrative or wholly dispersed in a synchronic hyperreality - rest upon similar transcendental assumptions. Broadly speaking, and without pre-empting the fuller discussion, we can think of their approaches as being mirror-images of each other. It is further argued that Bergson's thought embodies the conceptual tools necessary for the investigation of a non-transcendental liminal present. However, there are other philosophical projects that also aim to avoid the transcendentalism of Marxism and postmodernism. In chapter three I examine the communitarian-hermeneutic alternative via the work of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur.

So as not to repeat the argument of chapter two, however, the focus is on the relation between narrative identity and the self proposed by Taylor and Ricoeur. This has two advantages. Firstly, I hope to prefigure the charge that in criticising Marxism and postmodernism I was not engaging with the most productive aspects of contemporary political theory. The more subtle rendering of the importance of narrative in our everyday lives given by Taylor and Ricoeur allows for a further narrowing of the critical space that I hope to occupy. Secondly, in bringing the idea of liminality into the discussion on identity and the self it is possible to convey a further aspect of the usefulness of this concept as a critical tool. Liminality, in other words, helps to direct our attention to the dangerous universalism implicit in even the most well intentioned of hermeneutic positions. Lastly, an approach to the self that is sensitive to moments of liminality is suggested in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, particularly his idea of the "ipseity of presence".

In chapter four, I pursue the possibility that the idea of the liminal can be made redundant as a critical concept to the extent that it can be subsumed by a pragmatic analysis of speech acts. My principal concern here is to rise to the challenge of Habermas's "reconstructive" theory of communicative action. As a way of advancing this investigation Habermas's relation to Searle is scrutinised. It will be argued that the "immanent transience" of communication (implied by a liminal present) suggests the need for a pragmatic understanding of everyday speech which rejects both intersubjective and intentional accounts. The "collective pragmatics" of Deleuze and Guattari, while preserving the insights of the Habermasian account, fulfil this role.

The various threads of the argument are reassembled through a return to Foucault in chapter five. It is argued that Foucault's later works contain an implicit recognition of the importance of liminality and a liminal conception of the present. In other words, Foucault's "ethical project" contains a reinvigorated conception of "transgression" that enables his theoretical approach to avoid transcendentalism and reach "inside" the present. Thus, contrary to the majority of interpretations which focus on Foucault's ethical commitment as an end in itself, I argue that it is most fruitfully assessed as a novel reading of his "limit-attitude" to social formations. In this respect the liminal becomes a fourth aspect of Foucault's thought (knowledge, power and subjectivity being the others). Yet it is *not* an aspect that completes his project. On the contrary, it clears a path for further consideration of the nature of social criticism in Foucault's work.

The conclusion summarises the analysis in two ways. First, there is a review of a selection of the secondary literature on Foucault's work and its bearing on the interpretation presented throughout the thesis. Secondly, five different models of social criticism are summarised and a case put forward for the recognition of poststructuralism as a distinctive voice in these debates.

CHAPTER ONE
THE LIMITS OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

Introduction

Michel Foucault is a philosopher of the limit not the liminal.¹

This gesture to concision, this hypothesis, designer label or slogan, is created in order that it may show, immediately, its shortcomings and failings. Its inadequacies are "up-front", in full view of any critical gaze that may fall upon it. Moreover, it is these inadequacies that open up the area of analysis. In the tensions of this slogan - all slogans have tensions - the questions that shall preoccupy this work are constantly reiterated: what does it mean to say that Foucault is a philosopher of the limit? what is liminality? what place, if any, does the liminal occupy in Foucault's work? what difference does it make to Foucault's critical endeavour to emphasise liminality over limits? and so on. And such is the need of the slogan; to allow its own dissolution and dismemberment while the trace of its inscription is a memory, faint yet empowered.

Foucault's archaeological/genealogical works skirt the boundaries of our vocabularies, the limits of our gaze and relations. He invites us to view with him the taut lines of stress that become visible as the centre (be it the dominant code, discursive practice or concentrations of power) contracts in defensive rigor or moves to incorporate "others". This is "*the limit-attitude*"; the pull to the edge and the surge of vertigo that challenges us to see, not to show in an act of "proof", the relations interiorised within and through the norm. This is the limit-attitude; the

¹In "A Preface to Transgression", Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault p33, Foucault declares that the illumination of "the language of transgression...lies almost entirely in the future". By introducing the idea of the liminal (through Foucault's language of transgression) perhaps the process of illumination can be furthered.

scrutiny of the breakdown of intensities at the points of greatest weakness in order that the "workings" of the central mass may be discerned. It is a critical attitude that questions the core notions of our thought from a position of distance from that core. Yet the view from the limit is not Archimedean, it is not a fixed point of pure gaze and correlative pure judgement; it is a view from many points, indeed from many movements, where judgement is "fictionalised".²

But it is not simply this. We must know and recognise the limits, a recognition captured in the movement across these limits. This is *the thought of the limit*; the actualisation of "transgression" as the act of defining the frontier.³ It is being able to know the limits only once they are past. Recognising that the movement beyond boundaries is not a step into a void or vacuum, Foucault suggests that crossing the limits of thought is to feel thought once more in relations of attraction and repulsion, similarity and difference, recognition and exclusion. The limit, therefore, is defined in the immediate instance of its transgression in thought, "the flash of its passage"⁴, and then it is lost in the need to define afresh new limits relative to new systems of relations. Yet the memory of the limit must persist in the act of transgression. This is the thought of the limit; the will to make this paradox work; to transgress in a "lightning movement" the limits of thought.⁵

This is inadequate, but in *time* the limits, evident precisely in thought's "lightning transgression" of them, confront our thought and its centripetal preoccupations and

² For example, Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Colin Gordon (ed), trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1980, p193.

³ Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", p33-35. In chapter five I shall examine the way "transgression" is used by Foucault in his essay, "What is Enlightenment?", The Foucault Reader.

⁴ Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", p33.

⁵ C. O'Farrell, Foucault: Historian or Philosopher? p32, captures Foucault's thought well with this phrase, which she takes from Foucault's "A Preface to Transgression", p35, where he talks of crossing the limit as "a flash of lightning in the night".

tendencies.⁶ In history, Foucault discerns the movements that have brought limits into being, be they the limits of medicine, punishment, sexuality or reason itself, and he tempts us to engage in a to-and-fro across these limits - to view the self-defining and other-defining techniques of these practices, while simultaneously traversing the limits of *our* relationship with these events. Our history, as a "history of the present", is one that is thoroughly imbued with relations to the limits of thought, it is thoroughly imbued with power relations. This is *the limit-attitude thinking the thought of its own limits*. It is the trajectory of this movement towards transcendence that is explored throughout this chapter.

Using Foucault

Foucault's famous rebuke, "do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order",⁷ makes coherent commentary difficult if not impossible. And this is precisely the point. For Foucault, authorship is a mechanism that is often drawn upon to hide and obscure the uncertainties and paradoxes that exist within any text or body of work. In the essay "What is an Author?" Foucault states; "the author is...the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning".⁸ The escape routes from the world of a particular text to the "outside" of that text are closed off, suggests Foucault, by the assertion that the textual "world" corresponds wholly to the imaginative "world" of the author. In other words, the author has come to represent the sole arbiter of "correct"

⁶ And yet it is the time of transgression that seems missing from Foucault's thought, the transgression of limits being a "harrowing and poised singularity", "A Preface to Transgression", p35. It is this tension in Foucault's thought that I shall explore in more detail throughout this chapter asking how the time required for transgression, the time of liminality, can be thought of in a way that empowers his analysis of limit-experiences. This will become clearer as the argument unfolds below.

⁷ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, Routledge, London, 1991, p17.

⁸ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p119.

interpretations regarding the text. This is the limiting effect of the author; the claim to complete control of the text through the subjection of the text to the projected coherence of the author's intentions. Although Foucault recognised that authorial projections of coherence may lead to "the creation of discourses" he added that "it is very likely impossible to account for their positive and multiplicatory role if we do not take into consideration their restrictive and constraining function."⁹

It was Foucault's aim to write in such a way that it minimised the limiting effects of his authorship. He sought to multiply the escape routes from his texts and to diversify the number of possible readings of his work. Foucault was constantly driven by the desire to "think otherwise":

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.¹⁰

In the active disavowal of the limiting effect of authorship writing can function as an intersection; a coming together, not that things may fall into place, but rather that they may part, suggesting new openings and approaches. Foucault writes from many intersections. His works would never pretend to be the last word on a subject. Talking of The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Foucault could be referring to any of his major works:

This book does not have the function of a proof. It exists as a sort of prelude, to explore the keyboard, sketch out the themes and see how people react, what will be criticised, what will be misunderstood, and what will cause resentment.¹¹

⁹ Foucault, "The Discourse on Language", his inaugural lecture to the College de France, given 2 December 1970, printed as an appendix to the American edition of The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. Sheridan, Pantheon, New York, 1972.

¹⁰ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p8.

¹¹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p193.

Or again in more general terms:

What I say ought to be taken as "propositions" or "game openings" where those who may be interested are invited to join in; they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc.¹²

This approach does require a certain attitude. It requires an attitude that revels in not knowing the direction an analysis will take in advance. It seeks to open the "labyrinth" of possibilities inherent in all analysis and that uses such multiple options as a creative force to be encouraged rather than a problem to be overcome: "to those...for whom to work in the midst of uncertainty and apprehension is tantamount to failure, all I can say is that we are clearly not from the same planet."¹³ In short, Foucault's investigations constitute historical and philosophical gambits. His approach owes a large debt to his reading of Roussel.¹⁴ In Roussel, Foucault found a writer who conjured new forms and statements out of the "already said" of everyday discourse. Foucault saw in Roussel's experiments on writing the means "to say other things with the same words, to give to the same words another meaning".¹⁵ Foucault's own writing was constantly striving to outdo itself. It is as if he threw concepts into the air to watch them shatter and form new patterns upon landing.

For Foucault, writing and the processes that constitute analysis ought to be non-linear. Linearity is characterised by the attempts of philosophers to derive pure first

¹² Foucault, "Questions of Method: An Interview With Michel Foucault", After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, K. Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy (eds), MIT Press, London, 1989, p101.

¹³ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p7.

¹⁴ Foucault, Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel, trans. Charles Raus, Athlone Press, London, 1987.

¹⁵ Foucault, Death and the Labyrinth, p96.

principles of thought from which they construct, layer upon layer, a self-contained explanatory system for the phenomena in question. For example, the search for the fundamental truths of humanity, the essential and universal features that are hidden to all but those with insight into the depths of human nature. It is "traditional philosophy"- the philosophy of humanism, or of revealed essences and movements - yet it is also the realm of the hermeneuticist as the philosopher who discerns hidden meanings and origins. Such an approach, Foucault claims, is now "obsolete".¹⁶ Referring to his own "genealogical" method as an alternative Foucault suggests;

Whereas the interpreter is obliged to go to the depth of things, like an excavator, the moment of interpretation (genealogy) is like an overview...which allows the depth to be laid out in front of him in a more and more profound visibility; depth is resituated as an absolutely superficial secret.¹⁷

I shall return to the nature of the genealogical approach later. For the moment I wish to make the straight-forward point, following Blanchot, of "how distasteful he [Foucault] found the notion of depth"¹⁸ - depth in the sense of an underlying series of logical connections that relates universal principles to particular situations. For Foucault, the search for a prime mover or fundamental principle is "an endless task"¹⁹ and by implication a futile one:

if interpretation is a never ending task, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret. There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because,

¹⁶ Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre", Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84), trans. J. Johnstone, S. Lotringer (ed), Semiotext(e), New York, 1989, pp35-39.

¹⁷ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p107.

¹⁸ M. Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him", Foucault/Blanchot, Zone, New York, 1990, p67.

¹⁹ Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. M. Sheridan, Routledge, London, 1991, pxvi.

when all is said and done, underneath it all everything is already interpretation.²⁰

In The Birth of the Clinic Foucault likens the search for philosophical truth to the search for religious truth. Foucault equates the search for the deep truths of man to the search for "the word of God" suggesting that "for centuries we have waited in vain for the decision of the word."²¹ In place of "the decision of the word", with its connotations of deep calmness and serenity, there has been a synonymic din. That is, a clatter of repetitions and reworkings claiming insight and profundity as they fall one upon the other in a search for the bedrock truths of humanity. To avoid adding to this philosophic din, Foucault travels from the depths to the surfaces.

Referring to the human sciences that are his principle area of study, Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest that, for Foucault, it is "the surface details of these social sciences...that provide the key to what is really going on."²² Foucault's approach is to create maps of social relations - be they relations acting within discursive practices, disciplines or institutions - that counters attempts to link these relations to a founding principle residing "above" or "below" society. It is to form a topology of "surface networks"²³ that defines phenomena in terms of the contiguity of their parts. It is to be, as Deleuze has put it, a "new cartographer".²⁴

With an eye for surfaces comes an ear for silences. Not simply an ear for the unsaid, for the Other of language (though that too), but an ear for the "brash

²⁰ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p107.

²¹ Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, pxvii.

²² H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p102.

²³ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p105

²⁴ Deleuze, Foucault, translated and edited by Sean Hand, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990 pp23-44.

silence", the silence that proclaims itself from the rooftops. In The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Foucault criticises the idea that in recent history we have "liberated" sexuality into the realm of discourse from where it had previously been banished:

people will be surprised at the eagerness with which we went about pretending to rouse from its slumbers a sexuality which everything - our discourses, our customs, our institutions, our regulations, our knowledges - was busily producing in the light of day and broadcasting to noisy accompaniment.²⁵

For Foucault, one of the most pernicious forms of discursive practice is that which incorporates phenomena, like madness and sexuality, precisely by endlessly referring to it as a silence. Mapping these silences to display the discursive practices that have engendered the sense that certain topics are taboo - revealing how we can become unwittingly embroiled in the practices that entice us into thinking that "our liberation is in the balance"²⁶ - is one of Foucault's most prominent themes. The various attempts at producing a method to accompany this theme shall be critically assessed below.

Perhaps the most immediate reaction to a philosophical approach like Foucault's, one that tries to reorient our usual strategies of thought, is to suggest that it is all very well and good, but writing of this kind does not constitute philosophy. After all, where is the sense in calling a text philosophical if it refutes the notion that philosophy offers a fundamental insight into, for example, the nature of human agency? Would it not be more appropriate to refer to such an approach as literary, for example? Indeed, Foucault is perfectly open in calling his works "fictions". In conversation with Lucette Finas he stated this clearly; "I am well aware that I have

²⁵ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p158.

²⁶ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p159.

never written anything but fictions."²⁷ Or, as Maurice Blanchot rephrases this same statement, "I am a fabulist composing fables whose morals one would be unwise to wait for."²⁸ Yet Foucault immediately adds:

It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or "manufactures" something that does not as yet exist, that is, "fictions" it.²⁹

What is the force of this complex statement? How are we to conceive of the relation between fiction and truth? One way is to compare it to Helene Cixous' critique of patriarchal thought where she combines the strategies of working within the historically formed (male) systems of thought with a creative act of imagination, a way of reconceptualising possible modes of expression; "What I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy: and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project."³⁰ For Deleuze, Foucault's fictions function to create truth, or more precisely new truths, which open up new strategies of Being, that "have changed what it means to think."³¹ Fiction operates as the outside of truth, but in fiction many truths are to be found.³²

²⁷ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p193.

²⁸ Blanchot, Foucault/Blanchot, p94.

²⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p193.

³⁰ H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", New French Feminisms, E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (eds), Harvester, Brighton, 1980, pp245-264, p245. Of course this is not to down play the differences between Cixous and Foucault on many issues.

³¹ Deleuze, Foucault, p120.

³² For an interesting discussion of the importance of "fiction" in Foucault's thought see R. Bellour, "Towards Fiction", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, translated and edited by T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992, pp148-156.

Foucault is not attempting to reduce philosophy to a form of literature, as perhaps Rorty is,³³ rather he is trying to analyse the relationship between the two. Foucault's works are "fictions" in the sense that they do create new topologies and maps of strategic relations, yet such an act of creation is also a philosophical one in that it challenges revered philosophical assumptions. Foucault wishes to engage philosophy with its own presuppositions through the act of "fictionalising" a way of philosophising that appears as the "other" of itself. This is not an act of dissolution, rather it is an attempt to enable an analysis that is self-reflexive in character, a way of thinking that comes to terms with the role thought plays within the analysis; "the history of thought insofar as it is thought about the truth. All those who say that for me the truth doesn't exist are simple-minded."³⁴ And later in the same interview:

The task of speaking the truth is an infinite labour: to respect it in its complexity is an obligation that no power can afford to short-change, unless it would impose the silence of slavery.³⁵

The truth is a complex and changing thing - one creates truth as opposed to discovering it. This may seem a very unphilosophical approach. According to Deleuze and Guattari,³⁶ however, the act of "creating" new concepts, new truths, is precisely the activity that can be called philosophical. They claim that "philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing or fabricating concepts, because concepts

³³ Putting it crudely Rorty is concerned to conflate fictional truth and factual truth, levelling them to the same plane, whereas Foucault is more concerned to explore the possibilities of the historical relationship between fictional discourse and discourses that claim to speak the truth. This difference may be further expressed by consideration of the way in which Rorty seeks to establish the contingency of language as a whole, while Foucault is engaged in the localised relations of truth and the fictions they engender - hence Foucault's greater sensitivity to regimes of power and the specificity of knowledge formation, for example. See Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

³⁴ Foucault, "The Concern for Truth" in Foucault Live, p295.

³⁵ Foucault, "The Concern for Truth", p308.

³⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, What is Philosophy?, Verso, London, 1994.

are not necessarily forms, discoveries or products...philosophy is the discipline that involves *creating* concepts".³⁷ This strong sense given to the act of creating concepts is perhaps the best way to understand Foucault's philosophical approach. It is an approach that I shall return to in the last chapter.

But what is the truth of Foucault? How do we comment on Foucault? How do we read an author that eschews the fixed identity of authorship? How do we interpret the writer that writes on silences? We can not hope to uncover the "Real" or the "True" Foucault - the one coherent text that underpins the whole gamut of his works. There is no essential Foucault. Or, as Blanchot remarks of Foucault, he is:

a man always on the move, alone, secretive, and who because of that distrusts the marvels of interiority, refuses the traps of subjectivity, asking where and how there emerges a discourse entirely surface and shimmering, but bereft of mirages.³⁸

So how do we comment on Foucault? To sloganise; do unto his ideas as he did unto others. One must scrutinise his ideas so that the surfaces and silences of his texts become visible and audible. Foucault's own limits must be transgressed in order that they may be defined. The "brash silences" of Foucault's own texts must be examined in detail. His fictions must be "fictionalised", and brought into a more complex relation to the truth. It is to do to Foucault what he claimed to be doing to Nietzsche's thought; "to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest."³⁹

³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, p5.

³⁸ Blanchot, Foucault/Blanchot, p68.

³⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, pp53-54. The full quote is as follows: "For myself, I prefer to utilise the writers I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest."

Relocating the trace of the opening slogan, in Foucault a theory of the liminal is "brash" in its silence. Change, shifts and transgressions are everywhere in Foucault's work; from changing perceptions of madness, through paradigm shifts in academic disciplines, through different "regimes" of power, to the relationship between the confessional and the couch. Yet the "criticism and awareness" inherent in these periods of change, the intricacies of the liminal experience as a theoretical construct, are the silences within this cacophony.⁴⁰ The aim of this piece is to look to these silences not in order to "fulfil" Foucault or complete his thought but precisely the opposite, to see what new dimensions and connections are possible. I shall not comment on Foucault, I shall try to use him.

Subjectivity and Truth

It is worth clarifying a point that has been implicit in the discussion so far; the phenomena Foucault is interested in investigating. Foucault-as-archaeologist is primarily interested in the internal regulatory principles of the disciplines known collectively as the "human sciences". Foucault-as-genealogist tends to view these disciplines in terms of their relationship to the wider organising practices of social formations.⁴¹ It is probably more correct to refer to the "human" rather than the "social" sciences as a good deal of Foucault's work was on disciplines like biology

⁴⁰ Donnelly, "On Foucault's Uses of the Notion of Bio-Power", *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, pp199-203, offers an "appreciative but critical" account of the way that Foucault often "elided" his genealogies, that is his descriptions of "specific mechanisms and strategies" with his "epochal" descriptions regarding the "diagrammatic" features of particular periods. He goes on to conclude that there is an "unabridged gap" between these two strains in Foucault's thought (on bio-power). I agree with Donnelly in many respects, indeed part of my hope with introducing the idea of the liminal into his work is to show how we can reconceptualise the relation between the historical work and the philosophical foundations of that work. I would disagree with Donnelly when he suggests the way to resolve the difficulty he sees in Foucault is to keep these categories of the genealogical and the epochal separate. It is more fruitful to analyse the way in which these categories can be linked, or shown to overlap - to create a liminal zone of creativity and ambiguity within Foucault, rather than to try and resolve it via exclusionary techniques.

⁴¹ The distinctions and similarities between Foucault's "archaeologies" and "genealogies" will become more apparent as the chapter proceeds.

and psychiatry which are not normally thought of as "social" sciences. However, with this caveat in mind, I shall revert to the standard practice of using the terms interchangeably unless otherwise specified.

There is one possible misunderstanding that needs to be mentioned. In "Michel Foucault's Immature Science"⁴² Hacking portrays Foucault as offering a conceptual framework for understanding the status of the "immature" social sciences that is similar to the perspective of Anglo-American debates around Kuhn and Putnam. By bringing Foucault's thought "down to (our) earth",⁴³ Hacking offers a way of embedding Foucault in analytic debates. Hacking argues, for example, that the only real difference between Foucault and Putnam is that Putnam is pre-occupied with the study of established "mature" sciences whereas Foucault is interested in the "immature" human sciences. Once this point is made, continues Hacking, we can easily accommodate Foucault into Anglo-American debates simply by recognising that he is actually studying a different set of practices from those studied by traditional philosophers of science. Yet, as Wartenburg forcefully argues,⁴⁴ the account of Foucault given by Hacking is highly "sanitised" and misses "the main insights" of Foucault's project. One can agree with Thomas McCarthy,⁴⁵ that the primary interest of Foucault - and the Frankfurt School to which he is also referring - is, "the role that the social and the social scientifically trained experts have played in the process of rationalisation."⁴⁶ The point of study is the interesting paradox that these "experts" have produced little, if any, concrete knowledge of society yet

⁴² I. Hacking, "Michel Foucault's Immature Science", Nous, volume 13, 1979, pp39-51.

⁴³ Hacking, "Michel Foucault's Immature Science", p40.

⁴⁴ T. Wartenburg, "Foucault's Archaeological Method: A Response to Hacking and Rorty", The Philosophical Forum, volume 15, no.4, 1984, pp345-364.

⁴⁵ T. McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School", Political Theory, volume 18, no.3, 1990, pp437-469.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason", p440.

have been accorded positions of power within the modern world. One can agree further with McCarthy, that Foucault differs from the Frankfurt School, and is thus even less susceptible to Hacking's interpretation, in that he offers his ideas as "anti-social-science" rather than as a reworking of the human sciences.⁴⁷ Or as Machado⁴⁸ puts it, Foucault's work on the human sciences "cannot be fixed into a rigid canon." Thus, while Foucault studied the human sciences he did so from a larger perspective than is generally the case (with the exception of the Frankfurt School) and in such a way that they are viewed as intimately embroiled with practices of control and institutionalisation as a whole.

With Foucault generally situated in this way, we can go into more detail. For Foucault, perhaps the key period in this "process of rationalisation" is the end of the eighteenth century, for it was during this period that, through Kant, human agents came to view themselves as (simultaneously) autonomous subjects and the object of their own thought. In The Order of Things Foucault characterises this era as the one in which; "Man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows; enslaved sovereign, observed spectator."⁴⁹

It is this "double", this dual conceptualisation of the status of human beings, that inaugurated the sciences of "man". This set the limits that define our understanding of "man", as a science of "man".⁵⁰ Foucault calls these limits *the analytic of*

⁴⁷ McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason", p442.

⁴⁸ R. Machado, "Archaeology and Epistemology", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, p17. Machado offers a much more subtle account of Foucault's project in The Order of Things than Hacking, an account which emphasises that: "It is the idea of an immutable, systematic and universally applicable method that Michel Foucault is asking us to question", p17.

⁴⁹ Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Tavistock Publications, London, 1977, p312.

⁵⁰ Foucault insists that this possibility of a science of man was excluded by the prior Classical episteme because of the way that it ordered humans in a "chain of being" in relation to God. In the new episteme this chain is broken via the introduction of man as "the measure of all things."

finitude - "the limits of knowledge (that) provide a positive foundation for the possibility of knowing."⁵¹ In the formation of this analytic Foucault views the beginnings of "the process of rationalisation"; the subject assumes an unassailable position, it becomes the content of knowledge and that which forms it; it is a process that constructs its own foundations out of its own limits. With the analytic of finitude are born the human sciences.

It is clear that Foucault's studies of the human sciences are intimately entwined with an investigation into the construction of the "subject"; that is, to the ways in which we construct the "truth" of ourselves. In an interview just before his death Foucault explicitly stated that throughout his texts he tried to "discover how the human subject entered into 'games of truth'."⁵² Certainly one should be slightly wary of such retrospective appraisals given Foucault's tendency to characterise all his previous work in terms of whatever approach he happened to be pursuing at the time. Yet this conceptualisation of his own project is probably the most adequate way of thinking about his overall approach, precisely because the vagueness of the phrasing allows for the subtleties of his many outlooks to be retained but thought through as containing a degree of continuity. In the following sections I shall turn to a critical appraisal of the different ways Foucault sought to work through the relationship between subjectivity and truth. The first is his archaeological approach.

See, The Order of Things, pp307-312 and the useful gloss offered by Dreyfus and Rabinow in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, especially pp27-28.

⁵¹ Foucault, The Order of Things, p317.

⁵² Foucault, "The Ethic of The Care of The Self as a Practice of Freedom", Philosophy and Social Criticism: The Final Foucault, Studies on Michel Foucault's Last Works, nos.2-3, 1987, pp112-131, p112. In chapter five I argue that this general Foucauldian project can be reconfigured as the attempt to trace the history of thought. This is important when considering Foucault's later works to the extent that it avoids the possible confusion of conceiving of Foucault's ethics as a "return" to the subject.

The Limits of Foucault's Archaeology⁵³

For Foucault it is not a question of the "truth" or "falsehood" of the human sciences. This must be the case given his assertion that truth and falsehood are constituted as a product of discursive practices; "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."⁵⁴ So another way of approaching the terrain must be found, one that places the analytic of finitude - "man's attempt to fully affirm his finitude and at the same to completely deny it"⁵⁵ - under a critical gaze; an approach, that is, which does not rely on a re-establishment of finitude. To achieve this, Foucault sought to chart each successive attempt at grounding the sciences of man on the analytic of finitude and analyse the ways in which it has led to "repetition" and "retreat" each time.⁵⁶ However, Foucault at this time was still in the thrall of the idea that a method could be detailed that would "throw off the last anthropological constraints" of the human sciences by revealing, in a "generalised" way, the mechanisms of such constraints.⁵⁷ With his archaeological method Foucault sought to "uncover" the limiting effect of the analytic of finitude in order to create a way of thinking that did not prioritise the subject. However, Foucault failed in this attempt precisely because his analysis remained situated within the terms of the analytic of finitude. While this is far from a novel interpretation of his archaeological work, Dreyfus and Rabinow providing the definitive account of this

⁵³ The terminology in the following section ("archaeological method" etc.) is such common currency now among anyone familiar with contemporary political theory that I feel it is somewhat foolish to give a definition, to point out that Foucault is not talking about "digging up" the past etc. However, for those maybe not so familiar with the material, perhaps the best place to look for a useful account of this term, and its correlates, is the "Introduction" to The Archaeology of Knowledge.

⁵⁴ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p49.

⁵⁵ Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p31.

⁵⁶ Foucault, The Order of Things, pp315-317.

⁵⁷ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p15.

critique,⁵⁸ it is important to work through this argument in order that the critical position developed throughout this chapter can take a more definite shape.

Foucault's archaeological approach is founded on an appreciation of a previously "unthought" aspect of language. Foucault delimits an area located between the idea of language as an invisible structural background - as an accepted unity upon which we draw - and the idea of language as simply a series of specific utterances - that language can only ever layer over our thought "a dust of facts."⁵⁹ It is this area that Foucault calls "the domain of discourse"; a domain where "regularities" may emerge but stultifying unities be avoided; a domain where the specificity of language may be celebrated without becoming debilitating.⁶⁰

With his archaeology Foucault sought to uncover the discursive practices operating within autonomous domains; practices that constituted the self-regulating frameworks of the specific disciplines he examined; practices which the archaeologist could view from a distance, enabling insight into the hidden structures of thought that constitute these disciplines. In this way, archaeology is prejudiced against the non-discursive; the mute environments of light and visibility that interest the genealogist (as we shall see later) play only a very restricted role in archaeological inquiry. Archaeology emphasises the "field of use"⁶¹ surrounding

⁵⁸ Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, pp90-100. For an alternative account of Foucault's archaeology, one that is critical but ultimately sympathetic to his project, see, Gary Gutting, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

⁵⁹ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p28. An interesting analysis of Foucault's use of the term discourse, its problems and insights, is given by M. Frank, "On Foucault's Concept of Discourse", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, pp99-116.

⁶⁰ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p29.

⁶¹ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p104.

statements; "the relation between statements"⁶², that constitute autonomous linguistic domains and form the disciplinary boundaries of the human sciences.

Foucault's aim in pursuing his archaeological approach is summed up in The Order of Things;

such an analysis does not belong to the history of ideas or of science; it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori...ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only perhaps to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards.⁶³

In order to carry out this inquiry Foucault introduced a new tool of analysis and coined it the *episteme*.⁶⁴ In suggesting this concept Foucault wanted to show that what he was not seeking to analyse was "a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates", but rather to analyse the interconnections on the level of "discursive regularities".⁶⁵ This shift of emphasis is important for Foucault in that^{it} allows a way of thinking about the human sciences which does not privilege the *Weltanschauung* in which a science came into being but focuses on the "process of a historical practice" immanent to the sciences he studies. In sum:

⁶² Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p31.

⁶³ Foucault, The Order of Things, pxxi-xxii.

⁶⁴ A thorough account of Foucault's use of the term "episteme" can be found in, G. Canguilhem, "The death of man, or exhaustion of the cogito?", trans. Catherine Porter, The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Gary Gutting (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp71-91.

⁶⁵ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p191. In saying this I am aware of the ambiguity that the term has in Foucault's writings; see O'Farrell, Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?, pp54-55, for a discussion of this ambiguity.

By *episteme* we mean...the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and possibly formalised systems....The *episteme* is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.⁶⁶

At this point we can return to the idea of "discourse" and further elaborate upon its role in Foucault's analysis. The primary unit of discourse is the "statement". Yet, as is apparent from both the passages just cited, Foucault is not interested in the novelty of statements - the archaeological method does not aim to find the original moment of the discourses it studies. Rather, the archaeologist is concerned to map the *regularity* of statements;

the originality/banality opposition is therefore not relevant; between an initial formulation and the sentence which, years or centuries later, repeats it...[the archaeological inquiry] establishes no hierarchy of value; it makes no radical difference. It tries only to establish the regularity of statements....Archaeology is not in search of inventions.⁶⁷

The production of statements becomes, for Foucault, detached from the subjective intentions and cognisance of the producer; statements take on the form of "discourse-objects" amenable to study by the distanced archaeologist who is able to discern structures of meaningfulness, structures that simultaneously enable the production of statements yet which also limit and shape the nature of new statements.⁶⁸ Foucault as archaeologist sees his method as the beginning of the end

⁶⁶ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p191.

⁶⁷ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p144.

⁶⁸ It is interesting that in this first major justification of his approach Foucault rejects the notion of "limit-experience" implicit in, for example, the conclusion of Madness and Civilization. The possibility of "interrogating the being of madness itself, its secret content, its silent, self-enclosed truth" is abandoned for an analysis of "all that was said in all the statements that named it", The Archaeology of Knowledge, p32. This is interesting to the extent that it is a recognition of the impossibility of wholly occupying the "Other" as a way beyond the strategies that operate through

of the need to ground the study of human beings on the analytic of finitude; archaeology is "an enterprise by which one tries to throw off the last anthropological constraints; an enterprise that wishes, in return, to reveal how these constraints could come about."⁶⁹

The similarities with certain forms of structuralism⁷⁰ are obvious; the primacy of meaning defining systems over individual speech acts and the search for the formal laws that govern such systems. In The Order of Things Foucault views the notion of "code", for example, in terms that could have come directly from any of the major structuralist texts;

The fundamental codes of a culture - those governing its language, its schemas of perception its exchanges, its techniques its values, the hierarchy of its practices - establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.⁷¹

Yet Foucault, despite the admission that his approach is "not entirely foreign to what is called structural analysis"⁷², on the whole vigorously refuted claims that he

discourse. However, as I shall argue below, Foucault's first reaction to this, his archaeological method, was in fact an over-reaction that itself became trapped in the Same (to use O'Farrell's terminology).

⁶⁹ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p15.

⁷⁰ Once again we come up against the difficulty of taking a term like this as containing a definite meaning. As Descombes demonstrates, Modern French Philosophy, pp75-109, the history and use of this term is complex and problematic. With specific regard to Foucault, Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, pp52-58, make the distinction between atomistic and holistic structuralism, suggesting that Foucault is quite definitely not a proponent of the former but does, at this stage in his work, resemble certain features of the latter. For my part, I shall make no specific comment on these complexities, taking my lead from Foucault's belief that all that held together the structuralist movement was its opposition to a theory of the subject: "it's not simply a matter of structuralism or the structuralist method - it all served as a basis for and a confirmation of something much more radical: the calling into question of the theory of the subject", Remarks on Marx, p58.

⁷¹ Foucault, The Order of Things, pxx. Compare this to the idea of the code found in Levi-Strauss's Structural Anthropology, vol. 1, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, London, 1968.

⁷² Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p15.

was a structuralist. There is some merit in distinguishing archaeology from structuralism. In contrast to structuralism, which is characterised as the purveyor of "the great universal discourse that is common to all men at a particular period", Foucault says of his project; "I did not deny history, but held in suspense the general, empty category of change in order to reveal transformations at different levels; I reject a uniform model of temporalisation".⁷³

Without going into the value of Foucault's self-distancing from structuralism,⁷⁴ it is important to examine more closely his rejection of "a uniform model of temporalisation." One of Foucault's more famous (or infamous) positions is his suggestion that history ought to be viewed as a series of "ruptures". In The Order of Things, for example, Foucault cites two major points of rupture as crucial to our understanding of the human sciences. The first brought the Renaissance period to an end and witnessed the birth of Classicism (circa 1660) while the second brought the beginnings of Modernism (circa 1800). My aim is not to study the historical accuracy or details of these ruptures or discontinuities - that is a task for trained historians - but rather to view the role that the concept of rupture played in Foucault's archaeological thought. Blanchot characterises it well:

Now Foucault...does not reject history but distinguishes within it discontinuities, discrete - local rather than universal - divisions, which do not presuppose subsisting beneath them a vast silent narrative, a continuous, immense and unlimited murmur which would need to be suppressed (or repressed).⁷⁵

⁷³ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p200.

⁷⁴ Another way of phrasing the distinction Foucault invokes is to conceive of structuralism as the search for universal pre-conditions of knowledge formation, whereas archaeology always begins with the "suspension" of judgement on what any particular pre-conditions might be. It is important to note, however, that the charge against structuralists - that they ignore history - is not beyond dispute; see, for example, "Claude Levi-Strauss" by J. Boon, in The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences, Quentin Skinner (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp159-176.

⁷⁵ Blanchot, Foucault/Blanchot, p73.

With the notion of rupture Foucault attempts to steer our thought towards the limits of the self-regulatory discursive practices that are the *raison d'être* of the archaeologist. In the opening pages of The Birth of the Clinic these limits are brought vividly in front of the reader with the report of the practices of a certain Dr. Pomme whose treatment of hysteria patients can only leave us bewildered. It is worth quoting in full:

Towards the end of the Eighteenth century, Pomme treated and cured a hysteric by making her take "baths, ten or twelve hours a day, for ten whole months". At the end of this treatment for the dissection of the nervous system and the heat that sustained it, Pomme saw "membranous tissues like pieces of damp parchment...peel away with some slight discomfort, and these were passed daily with the urine; the right ureter also peeled away and came out whole in the same way". The same thing occurred with the intestines, which at another stage "peeled off their internal tunics, which we saw emerge from the rectum. The oesophagus, the arterial trachea and the tongue also peeled in due course; and the patient had rejected different pieces either by vomiting or by expectoration".⁷⁶

The empirical truth of this account, whether it actually took place or not, is not important. Furthermore, that current thinking on the treatment of hysteria patients has changed is beyond doubt. Yet must we conceive of the shift in terms of a rupture? Is it not possible that medical thinking on hysteria has simply "progressed" in a seamless fashion; that there has been an advancement of thought by way of trial and error? For Foucault, such suggestions are implausible. He argues that today we can not even know what this description means, though at one time it represented a serious objective account of the treatment of hysterics. Dr, Pomme's "treatment" of hysterics prefigures our own conception only in the sense that it reveals a "new disposition of the objects of knowledge".⁷⁷ Foucault's aim is to use

⁷⁶ Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, pix.

⁷⁷ Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, p68.

this realisation to inform a critique of our commonly held belief that medical knowledge is converging on an objective truth of the human body. His technique is to point to the chasm that exists between the truth of statements like those of Dr. Pomme and the meaningful framework within which these statements were conceived. Once we come to terms with the fact that the report of Dr. Pomme was constituted as true within an accepted structure, though the method of treatment is obviously in no way "objectively true", we are drawn to consider the essentially arbitrary nature of modern frameworks of medical knowledge. Furthermore with this realisation Foucault invites us to view history as a series of discontinuous frameworks that cannot be encompassed by any form of grand narrative. The example of Dr. Pomme's report shows, among other things, the fallacy of a "unitary model of temporalisation".⁷⁸

In The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault draws another conclusion from the "ruptured" outlook of the archaeologist;

Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalisation and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness.⁷⁹

To avoid the glorification and reification of the autonomous subject in (and of) history, to avoid the limiting effect of the analytic of finitude, the archaeologist proposes that we conceive of time as ruptured and discontinuous. The conception of the regularity of statements within epistemic formations "constituted as

⁷⁸ This is, of course, a technique repeated often by Foucault (the technique of shocking us into the realisation of the arbitrariness of our systems of thought) and is most famously used in the later work, Discipline and Punish, where the opening pages describe in vivid detail the execution of Damien and the very different, but now recognisable, regime of Leon Faucher, see pp3-7.

⁷⁹ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p12.

objects"⁸⁰ removes the individual from the analysis; the sequence, or narrative, of passing time is reconceived as a series of events that carry no hidden meaning and no subject. Or as Machado has put it, archaeology aims "to produce a history of knowledge from which all trace of the history of the progress of reason has disappeared".⁸¹

Which is to say, Foucault had tried to do to the human sciences what they had tried to do to the human subject. While the experts of the human sciences attempted to clarify laws of human behaviour through various levels of disinterested observation and recording, Foucault conceived of the archaeological project as being the distanced observation of the discursive practices of the disciplines involved; the observation of the observers. Dreyfus and Rabinow refer to this move as "double phenomenological bracketing"⁸² rightly suggesting that Foucault saw this act of doubling as "the road towards that stable, autonomous theory"⁸³ that would allow for the study of the human sciences if not of human agents themselves.

Yet the archaeologist's only props are the dubious assumptions that discursive practices are visible in a pure form - as types of "science-objects"⁸⁴ - to the gaze of the archaeologist; that the study of discourse is readily available to the "phenomenologically detached" archaeologist; that the archaeologist can continue the inquiry without discursive constraints. For the practice of archaeological analysis it is necessary that the study of discourse somehow escapes the problems generated by the study of "man". Yet it is far from clear how this is achieved. Has

⁸⁰ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p205.

⁸¹ R. Machado, "Archaeology and Epistemology", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, pp3-19.

⁸² Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, pp49-51.

⁸³ Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p90.

⁸⁴ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p207.

Foucault's archaeology actually escaped from the analytic of finitude that it sought to examine?

As Foucault argues that the human sciences are caught between the finite object of study and the subjectivity of the scientists, between the "enslaved sovereign" and the "observed spectator", so archaeology is caught between the archaeologist's capability to be an inquirer into history on a-historical grounds, while also claiming to chart the historicity of the human sciences. The archaeologist must, firstly try to deny her own finitude and claim knowledge of events that is unlimited by the conditions of knowing, while secondly affirming her finitude in order that these conditions of knowing are available. Foucault the archaeologist becomes trapped within the limits of his own making; limits that define his attitude yet that must remain hidden from him. This is the limit of the analytic of finitude; these limits were as Blanchot points out "the aspirations of a structuralism then in its death throes".⁸⁵

Foucault's Genealogy

The need to overcome these limits led Foucault to a reconsideration of Nietzsche; from archaeology to genealogy; from the analysis of the being of language, the archaeological question, to an inquiry into the politics of language, the genealogical question. But more than this, Foucault began to look to the apparatuses of power - the social practices, organisations, and institutions - that envelop the realms of "autonomous" discourse the archaeologist was previously concerned with. The limit of finitude arose within archaeology because of its inability to explicate a non-teleological method of interpretation. With the analysis of "autonomous" discourse came the positioning of the knowing subject as "outside" of the phenomena in

⁸⁵ Blanchot, Foucault/Blanchot, p70.

question - archaeology came to represent the idea of progress it sought to overcome. As a result, the limits of knowledge became the necessary conditions for the possibility of knowing. This constituted the limit of finitude of archaeology.

In an attempt to transgress this limit, Foucault began to formulate genealogical questions in order that he could situate the interpreter-as-genealogist firmly within the problem area. That is, Foucault no longer accepted the possibility of "double phenomenological detachment" and sought instead to theorise the involvement of a responsive and reflexive observer fully aware of her embodiment within fields of discourse, practices and institutions. The intricacies of this transgression are the subject of this section.

I wish to make two broad contrasts between archaeology and genealogy as a preliminary. First, the genealogist - and I refer principally to the genealogies of disciplinary practices offered in Discipline and Punish and of sexuality in The History of Sexuality: An Introduction - views social relationships as complex environments not simply correlative to the regularity of serious statements. Gilles Deleuze⁸⁶ draws the distinction between "a system of language" and "a system of light" in order to capture the importance that non-discursive formations play in the genealogy of social practices. The need for this distinction is that it enables the genealogist to free the analyses from the limiting effect of the primacy of the statement which had tied the archaeological project to problematic conditions of knowledge. By concentrating on the statement the archaeologist inhibited questions of power - to which we shall turn shortly.⁸⁷ As a way of further

⁸⁶ Deleuze, Foucault, p32.

⁸⁷ As Deleuze, Foucault, pp32-33, points out, Foucault did consider "non-discursive" background environments in his books Madness and Civilization and The Birth of the Clinic. However, in these works they were "designated negatively". In the shift to a genealogical understanding of the networks of power and how these interact with the formation of knowledge Foucault could see these elements of "light and visibility" in a more "positive form". Importantly, it is not that Foucault replaced an analysis of language with an analysis of non-discursive forces, but that he

illustrating the distinction between "language and light" we can look to Foucault's study of Jeremy Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon.

In conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, Foucault summarises the structure of the building as follows;

A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening onto the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseers gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection.⁸⁸

He further sums it up by saying that each inmate is "perfectly individualised and constantly visible".⁸⁹ Or as Blanchot puts it, the Panopticon "reveals the absolute power of total visibility".⁹⁰ As the circulation of light and visibility throughout the Panopticon is pure and total, it is beyond signification in the form of regularised statements. Moreover, the strategies of disciplinary practice as a system of light working in the structures of the Panopticon are expressed throughout the social body (to the lunatic, patient, worker, or schoolboy) not merely within enclosed domains of autonomous discourse.

now takes these forces into account in his work in a way that creates a new and interesting approach to the relation between knowledge and power.

⁸⁸ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p147. See also Discipline and Punish, pp200-201.

⁸⁹ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p200.

⁹⁰ Blanchot, Foucault/Blanchot, p85.

The Panopticon also allows us to begin to draw out the second feature of genealogical inquiry that distinguishes it from the archaeological project; namely the role of power in the analysis. I wish to make two points initially; that Foucault views power, as expressed through the Panopticon, as continuous and as diagrammatic. The continuity of power is captured in the twofold relation that firstly, the inmates are never sure when they are being watched so they must assume that the surveillance is constant, that there is "permanent visibility"⁹¹; and secondly, that the guards or overseers are themselves thoroughly enmeshed in the relations of power within the Panopticon, they are not in some sense above or outside those relations. As Foucault puts it: "power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes".⁹² Or, as Barou suggests; "one has the feeling of confronting an infernal model that no-one, either the watcher or the watched, can escape".⁹³ To which Foucault adds;

It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom power is exercised....Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no-one owns. Certainly everyone doesn't occupy the same position; certain positions preponderate and permit an effect of supremacy to be produced.⁹⁴

The traditional source of power, the monarch, finds no place in this modern conception of the functioning of power; indeed no individual is the locus of power (not even Bentham himself).⁹⁵ The operations of power are no longer dictated by the will of one person, they are no longer dependent upon an individual's character and nature (the monarch may be a good, bad or indifferent one) but are continuous

⁹¹ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p201.

⁹² Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p202.

⁹³ See, Power/Knowledge, p156.

⁹⁴ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p156.

⁹⁵ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p157.

throughout the social body as "a complex system of cogs and gears" where "each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point".⁹⁶

Moreover, the continuity of power exhibited within the Panopticon becomes the model for the modern conception of relations of power in general. Foucault was entirely serious in his assertion that the inmates of the Panopticon were "workers and schoolboys" as well as prisoners; indeed, as the last quotation suggests, Foucault had in mind the myriad of power relations existing throughout the entire population. Foucault expresses this in Discipline and Punish when he talks of the Panopticon as; "the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form...it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use".⁹⁷

The fact that the Panopticon remained on paper is of no consequence to Foucault - "its vocation was to become a generalised function".⁹⁸ It was the discussion of the ideals of power and the abstraction of these ideals that interested him - the role of the Panopticon as a diagram of power relations, a way of thinking about the "polyvalent applications" that this model of power relations instituted.⁹⁹ Power becomes constituted in predominantly spatial terms, that is, in a configuration that

⁹⁶ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p158; Discipline and Punish, p204.

⁹⁷ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p205. Deleuze, Foucault, p34, makes the same point when he states that "the abstract formula of Panopticism is...to impose a particular conduct on a human multiplicity", whatever that multiplicity may be, for example workers, schoolboys etc.

⁹⁸ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p207.

⁹⁹ It is important not to confuse the idea of analysing the panoptic diagram of power with an ideological approach to the way power operates. Foucault argues, Discipline and Punish, p206, that power thought of in ideological fashion places the source of power "outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint" whereas the actual functioning of this form of power "is so subtly present in [the functions it invests] as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact". See also Deleuze, Foucault, p37 where he describes the diagram acting "as a non-unifying immanent cause that is co-extensive with the whole social field".

ensured the continuity of power relations thus seeking to impose an order on to the population without respite. As Deleuze phrases it, power becomes "a machine that is almost blind and mute, even though it makes others see and speak".¹⁰⁰ I shall go into more detail on Foucault's conception of power in the next section. Presently it is enough to realise that with the introduction of power into the analysis, Foucault is making an important break with his earlier archaeological project.

What is genealogy? In looking for a new approach to history Foucault sought to reinvigorate the Nietzschean idea of "genealogy"; an approach to history that is "gray, meticulous and patiently documentary".¹⁰¹ The task of the genealogist he characterises as the thorough and painstaking search through history to uncover the "details" that other, unifying histories have obscured. It is in these details that the genealogist finds grounds to criticise the "meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies", thus opposing itself "to the search for origins".¹⁰² Foucault takes genealogy as an account of specificity in history; it is a way of recovering the "jolts and surprises" in history. This is not one possible way of giving history its due, "history is genealogy".¹⁰³

To put it another way, genealogy can be described as an act of "making visible". It is the "making visible" of the social practices designed to increase the visibility of the population. In this sense it is the same as the archaeological approach of "double phenomenological detachment", with however an awareness of non-discursive features and the relations of power within society. But it also involves

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze, Foucault, p34.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", The Foucault Reader, p76.

¹⁰² Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p77.

¹⁰³ Noujain, E.G., "History as Genealogy: An Exploration of Foucault's Approach to History", Contemporary French Philosophy, A. Phillips Griffiths (ed), Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp157-174.

the attempt to "make visible" the genealogist as a constitutive part of an investigation; it is the attempt to create a reflexive approach to interpretation. Before turning to this central aspect, however, it is worth looking at some of Foucault's more general views on the nature of genealogy.

The genealogist does not aim to unearth the hidden narratives of history; genealogy tries to "record the singularity of events outside of any fixed finality".¹⁰⁴ In the "relentless erudition" of the act of "making visible" the genealogist refutes the metaphysics of all embracing theories of history and replaces these with "the secret that...(things) have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms".¹⁰⁵ However, genealogy is not the task of saying "'Voila , long live discontinuity, we are in the discontinuous and a good thing too' but to pose the question, 'How is it that at certain moments...there are...these transformations which fail to correspond to the calm, continuist image that is normally accredited?'"¹⁰⁶

In refusing grand metanarratives genealogy emphasises the local. It becomes a strategy for mapping out the topology of local situations; seeing the networks of power at the small scale and coping with them as such, rather than through the application of all encompassing frameworks.¹⁰⁷ Moreover as there is no unifying theme to history, for the genealogist, there is no prospect of a unifying liberation. There is no pre-ordained class, no transcendental spirit nor pure rationality which

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p76.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p78.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p112.

¹⁰⁷ We can view Foucault's publication of the memoirs of the criminal Pierre Riviere in this way; I, Pierre Riviere ... trans. by F. Jelinek, Michel Foucault (ed), Peregrine, Harmondsworth, 1978. In Foucault Live, p132, Foucault remarks that Riviere's document "so escapes from every possible handle, that there is nothing to be said about this central point, this crime or act, that is not a step back in relation to it". The specificity of the document is made to stand on its own without recourse to a historical narrative that subsumes it.

carries with it the universal hopes of "mankind". The hope that there may be a residual humanism that binds human beings in some moral community is also a futile hope, the modern subject is a fabrication of the times and constituted through the operation of multiple applications of power;

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals...the individual is an effect of power.¹⁰⁸

This same point is made more succinctly in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" when Foucault remarks that "nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men".¹⁰⁹ Without an available schema the genealogist must rely on the "positivity" of the local situation as the yardstick for analysis. Or perhaps it is the concept of power that assumes the role left by the absence of other frameworks? This possibility will be examined once a fuller account of Foucault's notion of power is given. For the moment we must return to the another axis of the genealogical approach, namely the role of the self-reflexive interpreter.

The important link between the genealogist and his object of study can be found in the definition of genealogy as "the painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude *memory* of their conflicts".¹¹⁰ In his elaboration on this Foucault cites genealogy as "the union of erudite knowledge and *local memories* which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p98.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p87-88.

¹¹⁰ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p83 (my italics).

tactically today".¹¹¹ Yet the memory of the genealogist is not the memory that accompanies forgetting, it is not the wish for total recall. Neither is it the act of tapping into a collective memory of past events, for no such thing exists. It is the relation of the genealogist to her own contemporaneity; the realisation of the genealogist's position as a trace within her own analysis and the further realisation that this trace has an effect on the present, that is, on the local struggles of the genealogist's situation. It is the "history of the present", which is not "the presentist fallacy"¹¹² of projecting current meanings and concepts on to historical events, but the specifically self-critical attitude to the past and its relation to the present in a way that does not remove the act of interpretation but places it firmly within the bounds of the analysis. The memory of past struggles is the "absolute memory" that is "itself endlessly forgotten and reconstituted".¹¹³ The genealogist must continually assert her presence as thought thinking-back-on-itself. As Dreyfus and Rabinow phrase it:

Genealogy accepts the fact that we are nothing but our history, and that therefore we will never get a total and detached picture either of who we are or of our history...we must inevitably read our history in terms of our current practices.¹¹⁴

This is not a futile exercise, but it does mean a coming to terms with the role of power, and the effect that it has in any attempt to provide an analytic of our relation to the past. With this in mind we shall turn to the conception of power held by Foucault, principally the view espoused in The History of Sexuality: An

¹¹¹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p83 (my italics).

¹¹² For a useful discussion of this see Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p118.

¹¹³ Deleuze, Foucault, p107.

¹¹⁴ Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, pp122-123.

Introduction. However, it is worth saying a few words about the relation between archaeology and genealogy first.

Foucault does not view genealogy as a wholesale replacement for archaeology rather as a compliment to it:

archaeology would be the appropriate methodology of the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy would be the tactics whereby on the basis of the descriptions of these...the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play.¹¹⁵

For Foucault then, there are instances of specific local practices where archaeology would be the most useful method of study in that it would reveal the arbitrariness of the hermeneutic approach, and show that projected continuities of narrative were in fact intersected by moments of rupture. The primary task of the archaeologist is to expose teleological presuppositions within disciplines. This completed, however, archaeology must give way to the genealogical excavation of archaeology's own teleological assumptions. That this leads genealogy into a non-teleological but transcendental relation to its own presuppositions will be argued in the closing section.

An Analytic of Power

There is a limit to cross; the frontier (time) between us - who us?- and those past, that is, the frontier (space) that must be traversed in the act of memory. Forgive my slogans - they help me remember - but "do to yourself as you would do to others" and recall how easily we forget the effects of power when it is tempting to do so; the strategies of the limit are strategies after all. In trying to unlock reflexivity Foucault is thus drawn towards a conception of power. This, though, is

¹¹⁵ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p85.

not a "theory" of power; "if one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it (power) as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis".¹¹⁶

In theory one forgets memory; the desire for security and fixity, the desire for origins, places the theorist outside of the domain one seeks to recuperate. The desire of the theorist is alienated from the analysis, it is interiorised as outside. In theory one forgets the limits; they simply do not exist, as they define the conditions of the epistemological act as "deduction". In theory one gets an analytic of finitude. In theory we could return to the archaeological project. Foucault suggests an alternative;

move less towards a theory of power than towards an 'analytics of power'; that is, toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis.¹¹⁷

Foucault wishes to transgress the limits of the theoretical approach by shifting the goal posts; with time-honoured philosophical technique he suggests not new answers to traditional questions, but new questions. He invites us to move from "what is power?" to "how is it exercised?"; from the genesis of power to the field of power, to the spatial relations it imbues, to its networks of transmission, to its fluidity of movement and ever shifting activities; "it is to give oneself as the object of analysis power relations and not power itself".¹¹⁸ Or again; "Power in the substantive sense, *le pouvoir*, doesn't exist...power means relations".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p199.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p82.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, "The Subject and Power", Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p209.

¹¹⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p198.

As I shall present it, Foucault concentrated on two principal ways in which the exercise of power can be conceived; the traditional perception of power as "juridico-discursive" and his alternative analysis of power as relational and "micro-physical". Through his approach I shall conclude this section with a look at Foucault's conception of the relation between power and knowledge and its bearing on the genealogical pursuit of reflexivity.

For Foucault, the "juridico-discursive" representation of power is one that "is deeply rooted in the history of the west".¹²⁰ He represents it in terms of five main features. The first of these he labels "the negative relation". By this Foucault means that power conceived in this way takes the form of "rejection and exclusion". Power is solely thought of as a relation that says no to other relations, that is, as a non-productive notion. In the case of sexuality, Foucault remarks that "it (the juridico-discursive view of power) never establishes any connection between power and sex that is not negative".¹²¹ Power is seen as impinging upon the domain in which it operates, as masking or distorting certain features of sexuality, never as a positive element in the production of pleasure; "its effects take the general form of limit and lack".¹²²

Secondly, Foucault points to "the insistence of the rule". This entails that the relation upon which power acts, for example sexuality, is initially sectioned into "licit and illicit; permitted and forbidden".¹²³ This prescription is enshrined in a rule of law; that is, power functions through discourse to the extent that "it speaks, and

¹²⁰ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction p83.

¹²¹ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p83.

¹²² Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p83.

¹²³ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p83.

that is the rule". This is the conception of power which takes as its ideal manifestation the word of the legislator; it equates power with the purity of juridical discourse and the "insistence" of the law implied within it.

Thirdly, Foucault sees in the juridico-discursive view of power a "cycle of prohibition", a mechanism that tries to induce within relations a scheme of self-regulation. The prohibitions - "thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not speak, thou shalt not show thyself; ultimately thou shalt not exist except in darkness and secrecy"¹²⁴ - become interiorised. "Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear".¹²⁵ Power acts as a limit in that it offers a form of Hobson's choice; the choice between "two non-existences".

Fourthly, Foucault discerns within this traditional view of power a logic that creates laws that carry a threefold weight. They actively affirm that the subject is taboo, while denying talk on the subject and simultaneously questioning the reality of the subject; "the paradoxical logic that might be expressed as an injunction of non-existence, non-manifestation and silence".¹²⁶ This is "the logic of censorship" that forms a crucial aspect of the view of power as juridico-discursive.

Finally, Foucault suggests that this way of looking at power assumes the "uniformity of the apparatus". By this Foucault means that at all levels of the operation of power, be it in the "form of the prince who formulates rights, of the father who forbids, of the censor who enforces silence, or of the master who states the law",¹²⁷ power is thought to act in the same way, namely as a general form of

¹²⁴ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p84.

¹²⁵ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p84.

¹²⁶ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p84.

¹²⁷ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p85.

constraint and submission. Power, on this account, is treated as a homogeneous function of restriction.

These five features constitute, for Foucault, the juridico-discursive conception of power; power as law and dictate, as repression and exclusion. In conversation with the editorial collective of Les Revoltes Logiques Foucault generalises this view as involving a "double subjectivisation".¹²⁸ On the one hand, power is thought of as a law pronounced by a "great absolute subject...the sovereignty of the Father, the Monarch or the General will". The "double" subjectivisation is completed in that one is led to think of "the point where one says yes or no to power".¹²⁹ This double subjectivisation presupposes "on the one hand a sovereign whose role is to forbid and on the other a subject who must somehow effectively say yes to this prohibition", be it through the "renunciation of natural rights, a social contract or a love of the master".¹³⁰

The source of this double subjectivisation is to be found, suggests Foucault, in the Europe of the Middle ages and the system of absolute monarchy that prevailed. Despite the onset of "the age of revolutions" and the overthrow of many monarchical systems Foucault contends that "law was a weapon of the struggle against the same monarchical power which had initially made use of it to impose itself".¹³¹ In other words the revolutionaries still retained the model of power as "juridico-discursive". Furthermore, it is still prevalent within "current conceptions";

¹²⁸ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p140.

¹²⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p140. See The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p85 for a similar statement.

¹³⁰ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p140.

¹³¹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p141.

At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of the monarchy. In political thought and analysis we still have to cut off the head of the King.¹³²

In sum, Foucault's argument is that theorists of power tend to be caught in a time-trap, unaware that power has taken on new forms - the nature of which I shall turn to soon. However, it is worth asking first why it should be that political thought - including Marxist thought¹³³ - came under such a spell. Foucault does suggest that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself".¹³⁴ The importance of this statement is that it captures the relation between freedom and power that accompanies the juridico-discursive approach. As long as we hope to retain a conception of freedom, "however slight", then we must view power as something that is oppressive and must be shed off our shoulders. This means that "power as a pure limit on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability";¹³⁵ without a conception of power as a restrictive set of mechanisms there would be no room for freedom. This, for Foucault, accounts for the persistence of this view of power and why political theory has still not "cut off the head of the king". Of course, as we examine Foucault's account of the operation of modern power this means that we must also be aware of how he hopes to account for freedom. Is it simply going to disappear from the analysis or is there an alternative account of freedom that accompanies his alternative approach to his analysis of the way power operates? This is a question that can not be fully

¹³² Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, pp88-89.

¹³³ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p88.

¹³⁴ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p86.

¹³⁵ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p86.

addressed until the final chapter with a look at his later writings; for now, though, we must be aware of it as a central issue in his work.¹³⁶

That power relations are never solely relations of domination, negative prohibitions or function as law is the main thrust of the argument of The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Far from there having occurred a "sexual revolution" in recent times, (thus implying that our sexual selves were restricted by the operation of power) Foucault argues that since the beginning of modern times there has been a relentless development of discourses on sexuality. Moreover, these have led to the creation of the domain of sexuality as a legitimate area for scientific study, they have created the "historical construct"¹³⁷ of sexuality;

what was involved...was the very production of sexuality. Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct; not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Many commentators have made the question of Foucault's account of freedom, or more specifically his inability to give an adequate account of this notion, the central question in his thought. One example will suffice; R.J. Bernstein's article "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic Ethos", Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment, Axel Honneth et al (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, argues that Foucault's account of a "sceptical freedom that limits itself to talk of new possibilities for thinking and acting but heroically or ironically refuses to provide any evaluative orientation as to which possibilities and changes are desirable is in danger of becoming merely empty". I point to this line of criticism now, however, not to try and engage with it rather to acknowledge that it is a persistent and important position. My reasons for leaving it to one side at present are that I want to try and rebut such criticisms but only through a more fundamental rethinking of Foucault's work, a rethinking that involves more general questions regarding his thought. In the last chapter I shall try and indicate how this reworking can open up the discussion of Foucault's account of freedom in a way that explores Foucault's thought from within his own domain, rather than applying a conception of normative critique onto his work, a conception he was at pains to reject.

¹³⁷ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p105.

¹³⁸ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, pp105-106.

The historical details of the argument Foucault proposes can be found in the text. I wish to use this example simply as a way of introducing, in a conceptual manner, the more positive notion of power Foucault outlines in the book. How does power operate, for Foucault? Power is a relation between forces and every distribution of forces is a distribution of power.¹³⁹ As mentioned earlier, power is not a substance, and thus it can never be singular, it must exist as a relation of forces;

what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions; an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future.¹⁴⁰

Given this non-substantivist view of the character of power, there follow three principal theses. First, power, as we have seen already, is not essentially repressive. Power can be a productive force, "it incites, it induces, it seduces"¹⁴¹, creating possibilities as much as curtailing them. Secondly, power is exercised rather than owned. It is not the property of one particular class or of any single individual, though it can be practised as domination by these, but it is a relation immanent in all expressions of force. Thirdly, power works through the actions of the dominated as surely as it does through the actions of the dominators. This is, of course, a consequence of the previous thesis in that if power is relational then it must function through every aspect of the relation. In this thesis we can discern

¹³⁹ There may be some confusion regarding the different notions of force and power. One way of thinking about this is to consider force to be the "series of clashes that constitute the social body" while power should be viewed as the "stratification" or "institutionalisation" of these clashes; Foucault Live p188. This is a crucial distinction given Foucault's desire to conceive of modes of power which do not correspond to the wholly negative view of power discussed above. If power is a relation of forces then there exist an open-ended number of relations in the whole social field, including relations that are productive. In relation to Deleuze and Guattari, B. Massumi, A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia, MIT Press, London, 1992, p19, makes essentially the same distinction; "Force culminates a boundless potential. It takes the uniqueness of the event to its limit. Power delimits and distributes the potential thus released".

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, "The Subject and Power" Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p220.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p220.

Foucault's Nietzscheanism. For Nietzsche the operations of power must not only be considered as bearing down upon us in an oppressive fashion, indeed philosophy itself must be considered as an expression of the "most spiritual will to power".¹⁴² For Nietzsche, the will to power is manifest in all action and thus it doesn't make sense to talk of power as simply oppressive.¹⁴³

Following in this vein, Foucault considers power as constitutive of ethical practice (though a fuller appreciation of Foucault's "ethics" and its relation to questions of power will be addressed in the last chapter);

Perhaps the equivocal nature of the term *conduct* is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. For to 'conduct' is at the same time to 'lead' others...and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities.¹⁴⁴

Strategies of power are therefore unique to particular actions and their effects. As we have seen, these strategies differed in the Panopticon from those in the formation of the domain of sexuality. In the creation of the "*scientia sexualis*"¹⁴⁵ the functioning of power is not so much defined in terms of visibility and discipline but in terms of "anatomy-politics" and "bio-politics". These refer respectively to the operation of power through the individual body and through the body of the whole population. In conversation with Lucette Finas, Foucault elaborates on these;

between every point of a social body...there exist relations of power which are not purely...a projection of the sovereigns great power over the

¹⁴² F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin, London, 1973, p21.

¹⁴³ A useful commentary on Nietzsche's conception of the "will to power" is given by R.J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973, chapter four.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p221.

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, pp53-73.

individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereigns power is grounded the conditions which make it possible to function.¹⁴⁶

These relations of power that function "between every point of a social body" are, as Gilles Deleuze points out, "local" but not "localised".¹⁴⁷ They do not rain down from a central authority, there is no locus of power, but there are movements and "inflections" that operate throughout the network of forces. Power does not "stop" at localities, this would simply be to replace the uniqueness of the sovereign with the uniqueness of many sovereigns, rather it operates between many points, through many movements and dimensions. Power is constituted as a "microphysics", or as a "capillary physics".¹⁴⁸ With the onset of the modern era, and the Panoptic diagram of power relations, came "the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives", the form of a "*synaptic* regime of power".¹⁴⁹ And as one cannot *know* the blood running through ones veins, one cannot *know* the actions and effects of power relations. That this is the case is because power is characterised as a practice, as a force acting in relation only to other forces, while knowledge is constituted as a form of regularity - as we saw earlier in regard to Foucault's archaeological project. The realms of power and knowledge are not co-extensive, they are not identical; yet they are inextricably linked. It is relations of power that actually constitute the various domains of knowledge, be they the fields of madness, medicine or sexuality, and it is the techniques of knowledge that "invest" the actions of power; "between techniques of

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, pp187-188.

¹⁴⁷ Deleuze, Foucault, p73.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p39, 201.

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p39.

knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority, even if they have specific roles and are linked only on the basis of their difference".¹⁵⁰

At this point we must recapture the trace of the genealogical memory.

Openings

Strategies of the limit are multi-dimensional; they shed light, not so much bright as diffuse, not so much penetrating as encompassing, and in this light time becomes problematic. From the limit, the cardinal point is the moment of rupture, the instance of discontinuity, that razes the ideological castles of teleological theory to the ground. The apoplectic faltering of history, the fleeting movement from one point to the next - but what next? - is what first draws the limit-attitude to its own necessary "folding".¹⁵¹ With the *episteme* Foucault sought a closure of thought, an interpretation that sucked out his own presence in an attempt to overcome the limits of that presence; he tried to side-step the analytic of finitude. Positing the regularity and completeness of the discursive practices of the human sciences he thought he could dispense with an account of his own situation. Yet, in the event, this had to fold.

It had to fold as a movement of the outside coming to terms with the need for interiority; the need for a critical consciousness. This is not the need to locate an inner sanctum from where thought may pass over its object in an undisturbed atmosphere, but rather it is the necessity to see the inside (the regular and the

¹⁵⁰ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p98.

¹⁵¹ The introduction of the terminology of "the fold" is taken from Deleuze's reading of Foucault; Foucault, especially the chapter titled "Foldings or The Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)". The term can have many uses, in this case it simply denotes the internal collapse of the archaeological-genealogical method by its own critical standards. I am introducing this terminology because I believe that Deleuze's reading offers a fruitful critical understanding of Foucault; an understanding that opens, rather than forecloses, new perspectives on his work.

complete) as an operation through the outside and as a *constant* "doubling" which binds the inside as of the outside. It is the experience of the madman as he is put adrift in his boat;

he is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely...a prisoner in the midst of what is freest, the openest of routes; bound fast at the infinite cross-roads. He is the passenger par excellence; that is, the prisoner of the passage.¹⁵²

In the passing of his thought, the shifts and re-inventions, Foucault relocates his own writing as a catharsis; he exposes the limits of his thought in order that these limits may be diffused. This is the reflexive moment, the moment where Foucault recognises his works as "fictions", the moment, the movement, of the fold of thought back on itself. The limits of our finitude as knowing beings are not overcome but rather brought back within the domain of the analysis so that they are no longer constituted as "outside" of it. This is the cathartic function of self-critical thought.

Yet in the attempt to diffuse ones "control" one must possess an analytic of the modes of diffusion; the pathways of "control" that "incite, induce and seduce" as well as exclude and prohibit. One must come to terms with power. In this Nietzschean genealogical shift, the relations embedded within the cathartic fold are given an immediacy, a practice in the "concrete, changing soil", through the trace of the interpreter's memory as a mark on the analysis. It is, as Foucault calls it, a "history of the present".

In trying to write this history Foucault looked to an analytic of "regimes of power/knowledge". In this way a link is forged between the need to understand the modes of the diffusion of power across time and the operation of power in

¹⁵² Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p11.

contemporary institutional relations. The genealogist works on the "flash of lightning" across these spaces; for example, from the conception of punishment as an open spectacle inflicted by all, to the disciplinary structures of light and visibility where the inmate is individualised, to the analytic of power relations, to Foucault's involvement with the GIP group in seeking prison reform.¹⁵³ There are many limits to cross and many movements to make.

Yet, movement and change and the act of transgression are unaccounted for in Foucault. Or, more correctly, they are brash in their silence, proclaiming their existence to hide the evidence of their non-existence. Recall how Foucault suggested a similar ploy was used to effect regarding sexuality.¹⁵⁴ Foucault reaches the threshold of transgression, he reaches the limits of his thought and its relation with the limits of "others", yet he reveals an incapacity to deal with the actual traversing movement that must take place. Or must it? It is my "bottom line" - or non-teleological, non-transcendental ontological foundation - that there must exist "unbounded" times of change as one transgresses ones limits. Whether they are the limits of analysis, of thought or of practice, these times can be usefully thought of as *zones of liminality*.

The memory of the opening slogan is brought back to the fore; Michel Foucault is a philosopher of the limit not the liminal. The thought of the limit is fixed as a thought of the present; it is the constant striving for transgression, without an awareness of the field of that transgression; it becomes an impossible attempt to reach a ghostly and elusive immediacy. The present becomes the limiting factor of Foucault's genealogical catharsis to the extent that it remains as a transcendental condition of genealogical knowledge. Foucault talked of transgression yet could

¹⁵³ On the last of these see the useful account in Michel Foucault, Didier Eribon, trans. Betsy Wing, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1991, pp224-234.

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p80.

posit only a "lightning movement", one lacking in the (paradoxical) content of transgression. As a consequence the genealogical project of recapturing a "history of the present" is unable to account for the experience of living in and through times of change, times of reappraisal - *and all self-critical thought constitutes a reappraisal!* The transcendental conditions of its thought ensure that the genealogical approach cannot cope with its own immediacy. Genealogy incorporates its own analytic of finitude in its conception of the present.

It may be suggested that Foucault expressly dealt with the objection that his analyses are unable to theorise the content of transgression as early as The Archaeology of Knowledge.¹⁵⁵ Does he not explicitly address the concern that his approach implies "the vacant moment of rupture"?¹⁵⁶ Does he not suggest that in examining this problem "in more detail" reveals that this is not the case?¹⁵⁷ Is not the precise aim of his archaeology to analyse the "system of transformations" that constitute the ruptures between and within discursive practices?¹⁵⁸ Thus, in criticising Foucault for constituting the present as a transcendental limit, as a moment of vague rupture, have I not mistaken the tenor of his work several steps back? Have I not allowed myself to get carried away with my opening slogan to the detriment of a careful analysis? Surely the concept of liminality is inappropriate as Foucault is well aware of the subtleties of transition on all levels from the historical, to the theoretical and to the political?

This would be to mistake my point, to misdirect my line of criticism and to accept too easily Foucault's own account of "transformation". Foucault is right in seeking

¹⁵⁵ See especially chapter five, "Change and Transformations".

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p166.

¹⁵⁷ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p167.

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p170 and 175. See also, The Order of Things, "Foreword to the English Edition", pxii.

to reject histories that examine the vast complexity of the past and try to "establish a system of differences" and overcome historical particularity in the name of a unifying theme.¹⁵⁹ Yet, his attempt to follow this with "a system of transformations"¹⁶⁰ seems to give the lie to a radical break with the approach he criticises. The idea of "transformation" assumes the simultaneous status of an object in archaeological analysis and the marker of its limits, its defining characteristic. Archaeology creates the possibility of examining discursive transformations, yet this becomes its own downfall because it can only conceive of these in terms of the very "system" it was hoping to avoid. This must be the case because the archaeologist is ultimately forced to stand "outside" of these transformations to study them. The archaeologist succeeded in problematising the teleological assumptions of "History" and "the Historical subject" but did not succeed in overcoming the teleology within itself.

It might be further objected, that the introduction of a genealogical approach into his work has overcome this "methodological failure"; that genealogy situates the genealogist within the analysis as an active and self-critical part of it. Does this not mean that I can simply think in terms of genealogical (rather than archaeological) transformations? Is it possible that the "content of transgression" was elaborated by his later emphasis on power and its relationship to the discursive regularities of knowledge? Was it not an express concern of Foucault's genealogy to give the idea of transgression a more definite content by introducing the method of a "history of the present"?

Such a criticism is based on a confusion between the history of the present as a solution to the problems inherent in Foucault's overly structuralist archaeology, and

¹⁵⁹ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p171.

¹⁶⁰ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p173.

the history of the present as offering an adequate conception of a critical relation between past, present and future. I agree that in pursuing a broadly Nietzschean concept of power and self-reflexivity Foucault has overcome the claim that his approach is self-limiting (in the teleological sense) but refute the claim that this is enough for an adequate conception of critical thought. Foucault's genealogy talks of transgressing the bounds of our thought, it talks incessantly of this, but it is incapable of theorising a way of passing the bounds of its own self-critical perspective. A history of the present may be non-teleological but at the cost of a transcendental understanding of the present. Is not the aim of critical thought to surpass the present, to find ways of conceptualising social relations that may transgress this boundary of our thought, the boundary of a transcendental present? A history of the present is scuppered by its inability to reach an immanent understanding of the present. Without this it will never gain a critical understanding of the future.

It may be continued that I am falling into the very trap described so well by Foucault in The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, the trap of thinking that we can liberate ourselves in some emancipatory leap into a better future. I criticised it myself. Am I now not falling back into the old ways, the old ideas of freedom that actually allow for (and constitute) our further constraint? Why don't I come right out and admit that I am siding with the champions of critical theory; that I am really criticising Foucault in the same way that Habermas, for example, criticises him; that Foucault can not offer us a theory of liberation, a way of breaking out of our chains, a way of rescuing the pure reason of the Enlightenment and putting it to the service of our freedom? If this is my point I must say so.

I am not here to criticise Foucault in this fashion. Yes, I argue that Foucault's archaeology-genealogy is lacking a critical edge to it, and I also agree that his work offers enormous "empirical insight" though it is theoretically problematic.

But we need not assume that the only way of attaining this critical perspective is to follow the critical theorists; that Foucault's thought contains problems does not mean that we have to think of these problems as "normative confusions". Is there another way of thinking about critical thought that Foucault's own analysis can suggest if not fully achieve? Is it not more productive to examine Foucault by his own standards and push the boundaries of his thought from within? Surely, in pursuing his own limits we can open up his work, chase the possibilities inherent within it, rather than consign it to the bin of irrationalism? I shall argue that the concept of liminality achieves this; liminality serves to explore the possibility of an ontological conception of social criticism within Foucault's works that does not indulge the (teleological and transcendental) normative preoccupations of the critical theorists. It challenges Foucault's thought in the spirit of moving it on as opposed to stopping it dead. That I can argue this is the task of this work.

It might be further suggested that I am indulging in a poor word-play, a play on the idea of the liminal as a substitute for the idea of the limit. I have yet to really expand on the idea of the liminal as a critical force, as a force that works against and with Foucault's thought. The liminal is itself a silence in this work, so far. In the following chapters liminality is explicated by way of its role as a critical tool in the discussion of contemporary debates. In the last chapter liminality is explored in the context of Foucault's later works. This will not constitute a complete investigation of the possibilities inherent in the concept. The existence of liminality is dependent upon facing limits, yet periods of liminality must be thought of as being without limits - we never know where change can take us, the ends may appear close yet be far-away, they may be false, they may be distorted, imagined or projected. *Zones of liminality, the thoughts of the liminal, are N-dimensional.* In the following chapter one such dimension is explored in the thought of Jameson and Baudrillard.

CHAPTER TWO

FAILING THE PRESENT: JAMESON AND BAUDRILLARD

Introduction

In the previous chapter I concluded that Foucault's archaeological-genealogical inquiries relied upon a conception of the present that acted simultaneously as the object of inquiry and the limiting factor of those inquiries. The present was both the observed and the privileged point of observation; it became caught in its own finitude. By arguing that Foucault's earlier work requires an analytic of liminality in order to overcome this problem, it is necessary to examine further the relationship between liminality and the present.

Asking the question "what is the present?" it is important to specify the character of the issues at stake. This can be achieved through a brief comparison of my approach with that of Smart in his article "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present" where he explicitly addresses "the nature of the present".¹ Smart sets himself the task of examining the sociological question of whether or not we are currently living through a modern or a postmodern present. While this is a crucial task for many diverse areas of thought, this is not the debate that I shall engage in. Although I shall cover some of the same ground as Smart and others,² my main aim is not a sociological examination of the present but a philosophical

¹ See Barry Smart "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present", Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity Bryan S. Turner (ed), Sage Publications, London, 1990, pp14-30. At some points Smart appears to be very close to the concerns outlined above when, for example, he speaks of "the present as a time of significant change or transition" p26. However, this operates for Smart as an assumption gleaned from sociological analysis rather than a theoretical claim regarding the philosophical possibilities of the concept of the present - a distinction explored immediately below. At this point it is also worth mentioning that although I wish to stick to the distinction between a sociological and a philosophical approach to the nature of the present I am not making an implicit assumption regarding the epistemological status of these approaches.

² Apart from Turner's Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity another excellent collection on issues surrounding postmodernity is the special double issue of Theory, Culture and Society vol. 5 numbers 2 and 3, 1988.

analysis of the concept of the present. My concern is not with the character of the present *as something else* (as modern, as postmodern) but rather with possible ways of conceiving of the present *in itself*.

In order to achieve this, I shall concentrate upon two very different commentators on the sociological character of the present, and use their analyses to look at the philosophical assumptions they make about the present. The two thinkers are Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. It will be argued that despite their very different approaches to modernity and postmodernity, both thinkers rely upon essentially similar philosophical assumptions about the nature of the present. This is revealed to be the case by comparing their analyses on three key debates in the discussion surrounding modernity and postmodernity: namely, the changing nature of the social sphere; the character of the subject; and the possibility of critical reflection. Close examination of these areas shows that Jameson and Baudrillard both presuppose firstly, that the present is a homogeneous domain; secondly, that the present is ultimately unknowable; and thirdly, (the proposition on which the first two rest) that the present is a distinct and discrete moment from the past and the future. Rethinking the debate in these terms helps to situate the sense of the present that I shall use in later chapters, as well as offering a fresh critical perspective on Jameson and Baudrillard.

The method of argumentation in this chapter is intended to recall Bergson's *intuition philosophique* and his general approach to temporality and the present.³ Firstly, the scope of current debates is "problematized"; secondly, the issues are "differentiated" in a new fashion; and thirdly, priority is given to thoroughly

³ I take my account of Bergson primarily from *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, Zone Publications, New York, 1991. I also intend to follow a Deleuzian interpretation of Bergson, an interpretation that places his thought firmly within the remit of contemporary debates; *Bergsonism*, Zone Press, New York, 1991.

"temporalising" the issue at hand, in this case the concept of the present.⁴ The elements of a "temporal present" and the insight it offers into overcoming the problems of the Foucauldian genealogical present are examined towards the end of the chapter.

Postmodernism, Late-Capitalism and Hyperreality.

Having rallied against confusing an investigation of the present as a philosophical concept with an examination of the sociological present, it is appropriate to redress the balance. To pursue the philosophical assumptions Jameson and Baudrillard make about the present it is necessary to have a prior grasp of their respective positions towards the postmodern as a sociological condition. In this way the following analysis can be situated in the more traditional commentaries on their work.

The term "postmodern" is generally accredited to Toynbee's work A Study of History.⁵ In this work he conceives of the modern age as a period of increasing embourgeoisement ranging from the fifteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. The modern is characterised by the belief that middle class life would slowly and surely come to dominate the social field leading to "a timeless present".⁶ Yet this belief was twice ruptured by the onset of the world wars in 1914 and 1939. The present no longer seemed secure; the drive towards middle

⁴ Deleuze's calls the *intuition philosophique* "one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy", Bergsonism, p13. I cannot hope to give all the subtleties involved in this approach their full due, but I hope it will become clear how my attempt at setting up the problems in this chapter relies heavily on the basic thrust of Bergson's approach.

⁵ See A. Toynbee A Study of History, vol. 8, London, Oxford University Press, 1954, and A Study of History, vol. 9, London, Oxford University Press, 1954. Smart, in "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present", p26, also mentions that "an early trace" of the concept of postmodernity is found in the work of de Onis. Smart takes this from M. Calinescu, Faces of Modernity, Indiana University Press, London.

⁶ Toynbee, A Study of History vol 9, p421.

class stability could hardly be considered reasonable after such catastrophic events. These ruptures affirmed the fragility of an unquestioned progress through technology; the dream of technical solutions to the problems of the age began to fade as the devastation of war laid waste to bourgeois ideals. Thus the "post-Modern Age" was installed. Moreover, the hope of increasing peace through technology began to look barren. Technology began to assume a role that carried it beyond the sphere of the human. It started to outstrip the "adaptational capacity of a single human life"⁷ and exacerbated gaps of wealth and inequalities rather than offering a solution to them.

The importance of this early usage is that, in many respects, it set the tone for future debates about postmodernity and postmodernism. It encapsulated the idea of changing economic structures and social conditions in the post-war era. More than this, it helped put the normative value of this transition on the agenda. Toynbee deemed the "post-Modern age" to be wholly negative, as apparent in his insistence that the postmodern age provided the choice of either becoming a "fiend" or a "robot".⁸ Smart sees in this attitude an approach that would resurface with the work of Bell two decades later.⁹ From the beginning, then, a key question surrounding the concept of the postmodern was whether or not to celebrate the closure of the modern age. Is it a matter of rejoicing in the failure of progressivist ideas, lamenting at their death or seeking to revitalise the modernist dream of progress? In many respects, the analyses offered by Jameson and Baudrillard engage in these debates. Yet, as it stands, this is too simple an interpretation. There is another strand to the concept of the postmodern that must be taken into account; the strand that comes from the arts.

⁷ Toynbee, A Study of History vol 9, p468.

⁸ Toynbee, A Study of History vol 9, p757.

⁹ Smart "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present", p28.

As Featherstone describes¹⁰, the term postmodernism became prevalent in the New York art scene of the 1960s. It became a way of expressing an artistic attitude that looked "beyond the exhausted high modernism" which was deemed as being too firmly trapped in the economic constraints imposed by museums and other institutions (especially academic institutions). At this time it was also picked up by architects as a useful way of describing their distrust of the grid like structures of Corbusier with their uniformity and lack of feeling for space as "habitable".¹¹ To this extent there existed an aesthetic element of postmodernism which involved the undermining of the assumptions of modernist art from an institutional as well as a stylistic perspective. This artistic strand to the postmodern in the arts is summed up by Featherstone:

the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface depthlessness of culture; the decline of the originality/genius of the artistic producer and the assumption that art can only be repetitious.¹²

It is this sense of postmodernism that has become the most familiar though it cannot actually be separated from the usage inaugurated by Toynbee. The sense of the "post-Modern Age" is very closely linked to debates about "postmodernism". As regards Jameson and Baudrillard, the perceived changes in

¹⁰ M. Featherstone, "In the Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction", Theory Culture and Society vol. 5, numbers 2-3, June 1988 pp197-215.

¹¹ See H. Caygill, "Architectural Postmodernism: The Retreat of an Avant-Garde?", Postmodernism and Society, R. Boyne and A. Rattansi (eds), Macmillan Press, London, 1990, pp260-289.

¹² Featherstone, "In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction", p202.

technology and the public sphere are very closely associated with their theoretical accounts of the issues raised by the "effacement" of boundaries.¹³

Turning to Jameson, one immediately notices that his analyses of postmodern cultural forms is incredibly sensitive to their diversity, complexity and subtlety. He possesses a wide ranging knowledge of the different trends that have come to be thought of as indicative of the postmodern. His flair for writing on aspects of architecture, literature or painting, for example, is scarcely rivalled by other commentators. Yet this undoubted eloquence is not without its drawbacks. As O'Neill suggests,¹⁴ the insight that he brings to the analysis of postmodern artefacts and effects makes his subsequent criticism of them seem "a little difficult". It is as if Jameson's "intellectual performance" muddies the waters of whatever insight he has to offer.¹⁵

For others Jameson's complicity in the postmodern goes further than simply an overly eloquent appraisal of its major cultural forms. Callinicos, in Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique,¹⁶ is not only "irritated" with those who refuse to take up the cause of social transformation in the name of a postmodernist dismissal of critical foundations, he is also wary of Jameson's desire to become so involved in postmodernism, as if the lack of a "clear" perspective might rub off. He argues that Jameson's attempt at placing himself "inside" the postmodern forsakes the Marxist critic's responsibility to pass judgement on this new formation of capital. For Callinicos the task of a Marxist

¹³ For an expanded account of the history to the term "postmodern" see Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, S. Best and D. Kellner, MacMillan Press, London, 1991, especially chapter one.

¹⁴ J. O'Neill, "Religion and Postmodernism: The Durkheimian Bond in Bell and Jameson" Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 5, numbers 2-3, June 1988 pp493-508, p498.

¹⁵ R. Levitas, "Review of Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 9, 1992, pp167-169, p167.

¹⁶ A. Callinicos, Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Perspective, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

analysis is simple; to explain postmodern theory as a superstructural effect of current economic conditions; to stress that there is no inconsistency between "the scientific analysis and the ethical appraisal of a social phenomenon".¹⁷ Jameson's position is too watered down for Callinicos.

And yet Jameson is at pains to underscore the Marxist character of his analysis. Thus we must briefly look at the kind of Marxism Jameson has in mind. For Jameson there is no longer a place for "old fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other".¹⁸ When we turn our critical gaze to the postmodern a more Althusserian approach must be adopted; that is, one that understands the postmodern cultural sphere as "semiautonomous";

If you prefer a now somewhat antiquated language, the distinction is the very one Althusser used to harp on between a Hegelian "essential cross section" of the present (or *coup d' essence*), where the culture critique wants to find a single principle of the postmodern inherent in the most varied and ramified features of social life, and the Althusserian "structure in dominance" in which the various levels entertain a semiautonomy over against each other, run at different rates of speed, develop unevenly and yet conspire to produce a totality.¹⁹

Without going into the realms of Hegel versus Althusser, one can see here the kind of distinctions that Jameson wants to make between his position and more traditional forms of Marxism. Postmodern cultural forms are deemed to be amenable to critique in an aesthetic sense, in a sense that draws upon the artistic and stylistic history of modern art, despite the suspicions of thinkers like Callinicos. Yet, following the tradition of postmodernism as a new age of technology and public life, Jameson also wishes to underscore his analysis with an

¹⁷ Callinicos, Against Postmodernism, p132.

¹⁸ Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, London, 1991, p46.

¹⁹ Jameson, Postmodernism, pxx.

account of the relations of production and consumption in "late-capitalism".²⁰ The issue, thereby, becomes one of the relation between these two perspectives - how the two aspects "conspire to produce a totality". In Althusserian fashion, Jameson approaches this by suggesting that, as the cultural forms of postmodernism have gradually spread throughout economic and social realms, this can only be fully comprehended if we assume that the process was actually initiated through the logic of late capitalism. In the last instance, then, Jameson can claim to cling to a Marxist political economy, while maintaining that his contextualisation of postmodernism, his closeness to the phenomena, constitutes an essential feature of his analysis (and not the self-delusions of a reactionary, as Callinicos broadly suggests).

However, if old style moralising Marxism is not an option according to Jameson, if his emphasis on the semiautonomy of cultural production is so different, where exactly is his critique situated? As Levitas has put it,²¹ "the temptation to quote Jameson...against himself is overwhelming" (though I shall use a different quote for my purposes);

We are somehow to lift our minds to a point at which it is possible to understand that capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has happened to the human race and the worst...the urgency of the subject demands that we make at least some effort to think of the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as a catastrophe and progress all together.²²

²⁰ Jameson appropriates the term "late capitalism" from E. Mandel, Late Capitalism, New Left Books, London, 1975. Callinicos, Against Postmodernism, p133, draws attention to several problems in this appropriation.

²¹ Levitas, "Review", p167.

²² Jameson, Postmodernism, p47.

How Jameson achieves this is, I believe, unclear. Perhaps the best way of trying to unpack the crucial "somehow" in this quote is through the use Jameson makes of "cognitive mapping", a concept he borrows from the novelist Lynch.²³ Jameson employs this concept as a way of bringing the "dialectic" of postmodern "alienation and globalisation" into a critical field of vision. His aim is to locate a new theoretical tool - it must be new given the new mode of late capitalist production - that can allow individuals to, "grasp our position as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which at the present is neutralised by our spatial as well as our social confusion".²⁴ Jameson hopes to overcome the malaise at the heart of postmodern society by illustrating how the processes involved in cognitive mapping can reclaim social/public space for collective activity. In creating cognitive maps postmodern subjects are entreated by Jameson to reclaim "a sense of place" that gives them a feel for the whole of their environment;

a reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories.²⁵

The idea of cognitive mapping is elaborated by reference to Lacan. The traditional problem of classical Marxist analyses - the problem of deciding how to recognise the difference between science and ideology, in Althusser's terms - can, claims Jameson, be given a new Lacanian twist. He argues that science and ideology are equivalent to Lacan's categories of the Real and the Imaginary. The cognitive map, on the other hand, encapsulates a Marxist understanding of the third Lacanian category, the Symbolic. For Jameson, consideration of this third

²³ Jameson, Postmodernism, p51.

²⁴ Jameson, Postmodernism, p54.

²⁵ Jameson, Postmodernism, p51.

term reveals the potential for a critical perspective towards postmodernism that avoids the pitfalls of the traditional Marxist approach. Postmodernism, rather than being simply an Imaginary (ideological) effect, becomes a semiautonomous Symbolic form with a foothold, in the last instance, in the Real. It is the idea of cognitive mapping which he believes most adequately captures the complexities of this situation. Concluding this (allegedly) immanent critique of postmodernism he argues that the "world space" of late capitalism must be recognised for what it is (that is, essentially global *and* fragmentary) and it must be reclaimed in the name of a new dialectic that overcomes this dichotomy through cognitive mapping of our symbolic experience.

However, in response to criticism regarding the vagueness of this notion of cognitive mapping,²⁶ Jameson makes a surprising admission;

Cognitive mapping was in reality nothing but a code word for "class consciousness" - only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind.²⁷

With this admission it is hard to envisage what, if any, contribution Jameson has made towards a Marxist understanding of the postmodern. Jameson appears to have added an extra layer of analysis with ultimately no gain in explanatory power. The postmodern Symbolic is always held in check by Jameson's Marxist account of the Real; that is, by his grand narrative of emergent class consciousness. Interestingly, though, Jameson's grand narrative employs assumptions about the present shared by postmodernism. To show this to be the case, it is necessary to sketch Baudrillard's account of the postmodern present.

²⁶ See especially, D. Kellner (ed.), Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique, Washington, 1989.

²⁷ Jameson, Postmodernism, pp417-418.

Baudrillard's early works²⁸ were attempts to develop the scope of Marxist analysis in ways that would incorporate a radical understanding of language. With the publication of The Mirror of Production²⁹, however, Baudrillard's concerns shifted dramatically; from conceiving of his work as a supplement to Marxist theory, to his disillusionment with the whole theoretical system of political economy that sustains Marxism. In this work he argues that the systems of signs that have increasingly tended to dominate the post-war period (for example, those developed by the advertising industry) are developing a logic that is no longer reducible to the economic categories of Marxist political economy (not even in the last instance, as with Jameson). Indeed, the very foundations of the Marxist position, Baudrillard continues, are no more than a mirror image of the theoretical categories that underpin capitalism. To this extent, Marxism can only serve to reinforce the logic of the capitalist system it seeks to undermine. Yet, Baudrillard has a larger prey than Marxism in his sights:

The logic of representation - of the duplication of its object - haunts all rational discursiveness. Every critical theory is haunted by this surreptitious religion, this desire bound up with the construction of its object, this negativity subtly haunted by the very form that it negates.³⁰

The whole "logic of representation" in the contemporary world, the logic that created an "explosion" of different categories and concepts, has been shaken to its very roots. There has been an "implosion" of these categories; a loss of conceptual boundaries that has cut a swathe through the hierarchies and dichotomies that form the basis of the modern attitude. Modernism as

²⁸ Le System des Objets, Gallimard, Paris, 1968; La Societe de Consommation, Gallimard, Paris, 1970; For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1981.

²⁹ The Mirror of Production, trans. Mark Poster, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1975.

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, edited by Mark Poster, Stanford University Press, California, p116.

characterised by Baudrillard was the process of thought drawing up its own limits and boundaries; its own league tables of values; and its own differentiation of socio-cultural spheres. The variety of categories, boundaries and ways of life constitutive of modernism have become increasingly remote from each other. The logic of specialisation immanent to modernity has led to ever greater social and intellectual fragmentation.

Postmodernity, for Baudrillard, is marked by the "implosion" and "dedifferentiation" of experience. In other words, postmodernity is characterised by the impossibility of distinguishing different areas of life; for example, the public and the private. The drive behind this epochal shift has been the extension of the cultural sphere across the whole social domain. However, the gradual incursion of the cultural into every sphere of social life, with which Jameson would agree, is not, for Baudrillard, to be met with a call to reinvigorate Marxism. The hope that the analysis of postmodern cultural forms can be redeemed through the search for an ultimate referent, a political economy of late capitalist production, is dismissed by Baudrillard because he believes that the cultural sphere has become so extensive that it only obeys its own rules; its own "laws" of production. At the heart of cultural production, claims Baudrillard, lies the inability to distinguish image from reality. The key feature of postmodernism is our lack of ability to differentiate the category of "real" production from "simulations" of that production. Thus:

the very definition of the real becomes: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction - the real is not only what can be produced, but that which is already reproduced, the hyperreal.³¹

Or again:

³¹ Baudrillard, Simulations, Semiotext(e), New York 1983, p146.

Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.³²

The background to this concept of hyperreality is Baudrillard's belief that it is no longer possible to conceive of structures of communication independently from the global culture of the media. This most characteristic of postmodern phenomena becomes the focus of his analyses of postmodernity. In Simulacra and Simulations³³ for example, the media system is viewed as infiltrating other modes of production to the point where the traditional distinctions between the object and its representation are collapsed. This lack of distinction engendered by the media society is apparent in advertising in a paradigmatic form. It becomes impossible to dissociate the object from its image, the chocolate from the sex for example, to the extent that it is more accurate to refer to buying the image rather than the object,³⁴ (or so Baudrillard would have us believe). The implosion of the real, he goes on, extends beyond the media, beyond all "modern" boundaries, and into the realm of the social. As an example, Baudrillard examines the problems raised in trying to account for acts of terrorism. He suggests that it is pointless to apportion blame upon specific organisations for terrorist violence because there is no way of ever knowing the reality of the situation;

Is any given bombing in Italy the work of leftist extremists; or of extreme right-wing provocation; or staged by centrists to bring every

³² Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p145.

³³ Simulacra and Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, Semiotext(e), New York, 1983.

³⁴ See Poster, "Introduction", Selected Writings, p7.

terrorist extreme into disrepute and to shore up its own failing power; or again, is it a police-inspired scenario in order to appeal to calls for public security? All this is equally true, and the search for proof - indeed the objectivity of the fact - does not check this vertigo of interpretation. We are in a logic of simulation which has nothing to do with a logic of facts and an order of reasons.³⁵

If this is the logic of postmodernism, the logic of hyperreality, then it seems pointless to even think of holding a critical stance in relation to it. Certainly, argues Baudrillard, if that critical stance is based upon distinctions that draw their roots from modernism then they are doomed to failure. But Baudrillard is not entirely without a concept of subversion. The key, he suggests, in a world thoroughly saturated with simulations operating on "the radio-active screen of information"³⁶, is to remain silent, passive to its demands, absorbing the information but refusing to act upon it, thus causing a haemorrhage in the flow of communication. Or alternatively, Baudrillard suggests a similar result is obtained by following the workings of the codes exactly, to the letter, because this too stifles the drive of postmodernity to mutate and keep the information coming. His attitude is summed up in a recent essay "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media";

And so the strategic resistance is that of the refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech; or the hyperconformist simulation of the very mechanisms of the system, which is another form of refusal by over-acceptance. It is the actual strategy of the masses. This strategy does not exclude the other, but it is the winning one today, because it is most adapted to the present phase of the system.³⁷

This politics of postmodernism contains none of the usual features. It is claimed as a new response to new times, but it is not beyond criticism. Baudrillard's

³⁵ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, pp174-175.

³⁶ Baudrillard, Forget Foucault/Forget Baudrillard, Semiotext(e), New York, 1987, p134.

³⁷ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p219.

analysis seems remarkably all encompassing in its approach. Is it not conceivable that the current means of information transfer can have beneficial effects to the extent that people may become informed and empowered? Regardless of the obvious problems associated with the onset of a media age, is it really necessary to take such a "fatalistic" approach to the issues? While the Gulf War, for example, may have had more than an element of staging and "hyperreality" to it, this does not mean that vital information concerning the reality of the situation was not communicated. Nor does this abolish the distinction between fact and fiction. As Norris succinctly puts it;

that the gulf war provided such a telling instance of our so-called "postmodern condition" is reason enough to take stock of that condition on terms other than its own.³⁸

While Baudrillard's theories may draw attention to aspects of our contemporary situation they do not function as useful diagnostic devices. Baudrillard simply ignores too much evidence that weighs heavily against his primary theses. Where Jameson seems incapable of making the postmodern work in a new Marxist context, falling back upon old categories of class consciousness, Baudrillard's attempt to think without any grand frameworks seems doomed to hyperbole in the process of trying to avoid narrative approaches. However, that these two attitudes appear so different is (on one level at least) a trick of the light. In representing the extremes of current thought about our contemporary situation, they actually rest upon the same foundation; namely, an approach to the present that treats it as, ultimately, a distinct moment in relation to the past and the future. It is a concept of the present that can be challenged.

³⁸ C. Norris, "The End of Ideology Revisited: The Gulf War, Postmodernism and Realpolitik", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 17, number 1, 1991, pp1-40, p40.

New Collectives and Masses

The first assumption Jameson and Baudrillard share regarding the present can be extracted from their analyses of the social sphere. This assumption can be labelled "the idea of an homogeneous present". That is, despite the fact that their ideas are sensitive to the many sociological complexities of postmodern life, this is not reflected in a complex philosophical understanding of the nature of the present (whether postmodern or not). The present is conceived as an encompassing backdrop, immobile and impersonal; ultimately, they both fail to account for the possibility that "difference" is immanent to the present. I shall turn firstly to Jameson's account of "new collectives".

Jameson argues that the infusion of the cultural sphere into other aspects of our lives, the postmodern turn in society, is accountable in terms of the logic of late capitalism. This entails, he argues, that we view postmodernism as a "reflex" of "yet another systematic modification of capitalism itself",³⁹ that is as a moment of an already existing cultural-economic system. This presupposes the question of what criteria Jameson establishes for the recognition of a genuinely new social system; that is, social relations that are more than a modification of the prior (capitalist) arrangement. It is a question that Jameson addresses explicitly. His answer is that, "a truly new culture could only emerge through the collective struggle to create a new social system".⁴⁰ This requirement of "profound collective self-transformation"⁴¹ is a constant theme running through Jameson's analysis. For the present to be "truly new" there must be a wholesale change in the cultural-economic formation of capital. While Jameson is prepared to allow

³⁹ Jameson, Postmodernism, pxii.

⁴⁰ Jameson, Postmodernism, pxii.

⁴¹ Jameson, Postmodernism, pxiv.

postmodernism a certain novelty to the extent that it is a semiautonomous sphere of development, a "cultural dominant" in the Althusserian terminology, he always holds this in check:

it seems to me essential to grasp postmodernism not as a style but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features.⁴²

Subordinate to what? For Jameson, the fragmentary appearance of postmodern reality is always redeemable, via Marxist analysis. The Marxist account of wholesale collective transformation requires, therefore, that the present is structurally uniform. That is, if at any given present moment differences are capable of being overcome, then the present must be essentially homogeneous. It is a position that, he believes, is the only (sensible) option available:

If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a co-existence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable.⁴³

The irony is that Jameson's account shares the assumptions of those who view "history as sheer heterogeneity". Before examining this further, however, I shall turn to Baudrillard's idea of the "implosion of the social".

Baudrillard, as mentioned earlier, argued that the categories of modernism were no longer of any use; their validity could no longer be taken for granted. The category of "the social", a category with a long pedigree but containing a strong resonance of modernity, is therefore subject to his critical scrutiny. As with the idea of reality, Baudrillard argues that "the social" has changed so dramatically in

⁴² Jameson, Postmodernism, pp3-4.

⁴³ Jameson, Postmodernism, pp5-6.

our postmodern situation that we need to rethink the issues. For Baudrillard this necessitates replacing the idea of the social with the idea of "the masses": "What is...fascinating is the surpassing of the social, the irruption of the more social than the social: the masses".⁴⁴ The most telling feature of "the masses", he goes on, is their lack of any meaningful cohesion; "the masses have no opinion". They are terminals of information transfer as opposed to a latent consciousness waiting to develop (as in Jameson). Yet, despite this lack of opinion the masses do possess an "evil genius", that is, an ability to undercut any theoretical attempt that seeks to endow them with a social consciousness: "the evil genius of the masses [is that by] constantly producing failure in the truth of the social...they turn themselves into an impenetrable and meaningless surface".⁴⁵

Leaving to one side the possible contradiction between his claims that the masses have no opinion and that "they turn themselves into an impenetrable and meaningless surface", it is interesting to note the assumptions underlying this notion of the masses and what these assumptions say about Baudrillard's concept of the present. As with Jameson, we are confronted with an all-or-nothing approach; either the modernist category of the social or the postmodernist dissolution of the social into the masses. Where Jameson sought meaning in the collective realisation of a homogeneous present, Baudrillard spurns this hope in the "fatality" of an equally homogeneous conception of a meaningless present. Both authors paint a picture of the present as something that must be taken wholesale, a present that must be conceptualised as a homogeneous moment of "collective" or "mass" experience. The possibility of the present as open to possibilities, containing many "rhythms and tensions",⁴⁶ is not fully entertained

⁴⁴ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p188.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p213.

⁴⁶ Bergson, Matter and Memory, p207.

despite their customary nod in the direction of the plurality of our experiences within the present (postmodern) domain. The potential of conceiving of the present as many local presents is not considered. Could the present not be thought of as different in different contexts? Could it not be the case that there is a radical heterogeneity of experiences of the present operative at "any given time"? In the last instance, both authors, to maintain their all-or-nothing approach, are forced to agree on the all-or-nothing character of the present. This critique can be fleshed out by way of an examination of the concept of subjectivity in Jameson and Baudrillard.

The Retroactive Subject and the Simulated Object

Jameson and Baudrillard have very different conceptions of the character of the postmodern subject. However, pursuing the idea that both authors misconceive the nature of the present an alternative picture emerges. Discussing the ways in which they conceive of "the subject's" relation to the present unearths hidden similarities in their work. Both Jameson and Baudrillard assume the subject's ignorance of the present. By this I mean that both authors have an account of the subject's relation to the present that relies upon the subject not knowing that present.

For Jameson, the possibility of setting up a new social formation (as discussed in the previous section) is related to his account of the subject's self awareness as essentially after-the-fact. As the change to a new social formation is a collective affair, so the awareness of this change is always already implicit in that collectivity, but only in the *a posteriori* realisation of the change. Jameson appropriates the Freudian terminology of "retroactivity" to describe this:

It is necessary to distinguish between the gradual setting in place of the various (often unrelated) preconditions for the new structure and the moment (not exactly chronological) when they jell and combine into a functional system. This moment is itself less a matter of chronology than it is of a well-nigh Freudian *Nachtraglichkeit*, or retroactivity; people become aware of the dynamics of some new system, in which they are themselves seized, only later on and gradually.⁴⁷

This general point is confirmed by Jameson's analysis of our experience of postmodern cultural forms. Discussing the "new spatial logic" that is such a central feature of the postmodern (that is, the way in which the postmodern "forgets" history), he argues that this must have a "momentous effect" on our conception of historical time. The past as referent has been subsumed by the simulacra of pastiche and nostalgia. This creates a "pseudo historical depth" that replaces "real" history.⁴⁸ With this entrapment in the "spatiality" of postmodern forms, "we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience".⁴⁹ This is a particular example of his general point that the present is unknowable. Recalling, though, that the postmodern is only partial, a "reflex" of late capitalism, the increasing spatiality of our consciousness is reprieved from a complete lack of "real" historical depth by reconsidering the insights of Marxism. The possibility of a revitalised Marxism is confirmed, for Jameson, by the lack of sense inherent in the alternative, postmodern, conception of subjectivity:

If indeed the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its protensions and retensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural production of such a subject could result in anything but heaps of fragments and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pxix.

⁴⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp18-20.

⁴⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p21.

For Baudrillard, a project like Jameson's is flawed from the outset. It relies upon a notion of the postmodern as retrievable within a modern frame of reference; Jameson utilises a set of concepts and practices that Baudrillard deems to be irrelevant in this new age. This is especially true of attempts to create a grand narrative around the postmodern which relies on the coming to consciousness of people in a historical setting; "we sense that in our era which is that of the end of history all of this is invalidated". Moreover, "a false sense of the radical" must be warded off and our "obsessive fear of the unreality of history" done away with if we are not going to fall into the traps of finding meaning in history. Meaning, Baudrillard contends, becomes apparent only in the pure event, the "catastrophé", that is now - the postmodern present.⁵¹

The subject, in the modern sense of an agent with some form of vantage point on reality, is no longer tenable. There is no Kantian *a priori*, Hegelian subjectivity, Marxist labourer, phenomenological or existential presence, no liberal individual endowed with autonomy that serves as the moment of reflection; there is no position from which thought may think its own object. Rather the object itself, in postmodernism, has assumed the privileged position, the vantage point on reality; or rather on hyperreality, since the object is itself only a simulation. The modern subject is displaced into the postmodern object:

The object is neither the subject's double nor his or her repression; neither the subject's fantasy nor hallucination; neither the subject's mirror nor reflection; but it has its own strategy.⁵²

⁵⁰ Jameson, Postmodernism, p25.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p192.

⁵² Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p198.

The principle of the object is its own indifference, its lack of care for the connections it makes with other objects. It is in this sense "fatalistic".⁵³ But crucially we must not think of this as oppression in a classical sense. Human agents are no longer liberal individuals or Marxist labourers but consumers, consumed in the "fatal strategies" of the object as the only possible way of getting a "paradoxical"⁵⁴ bearing in this postmodern world. Given the lack of historicity open to a subject, Baudrillard can only conclude as follows:

What is left then but to pass over to the side of the object, to its affected and eccentric effects, to its fatal effects (fatality is merely the absolute freedom of effects).⁵⁵

What is clear is that Jameson and Baudrillard have very different conceptions of the character of "subjectivity" in a postmodern setting. It is also clear that these very different views rest upon a similar conception of the subject's relation to the present. They are both drawn by the fact that the subject is ultimately in a state of ignorance regarding the present. For Jameson, the present is only "retroactively" recuperable in a Marxist narrative of the past. For Baudrillard, the present is a purely "eventalised" moment. The "subject" is, therefore, dissipated into the condition of the "object": it has become an effect. This picture of the "subject's" ignorance of the present that underpins both theorists is, however, questionable. Both Jameson and Baudrillard assume that the subject is unable to grasp the present in which it is immersed; that the subject faces the present as either wholly recuperable, but only in a discrete future, or as wholly unrealisable in its own discreteness. Both options place the present out of reach of the subject. That the subject may have a sense of the present as historical but

⁵³ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, pp185-206.

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p203.

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p205.

not subsumable in a grand narrative is an option they both ignore.⁵⁶ It is a possibility that their oppositional stances cannot but obscure.

Maps and Shrugs

On one level, the differences between Jameson and Baudrillard are most clearly expressed when considering their responses to the possibility of social criticism. Yet, it is also on this issue that the common ground that underpins their work becomes most visible. When considering the idea of critique both authors take the present to be a distinct moment, a moment that is different from the immediate past and the oncoming future. Indeed, it is this assumption which explains why they came to think of the present as homogeneous and unknowable.

That the present is a discrete moment for Jameson is apparent in his conception of critique as the moment of "realised totality"; that is, the moment when the opposite forces inherent within a given system are transcended in the dialectical movement of thought and practice. In this way he hopes to avoid the tendencies of some writers to make simple judgements on the character of the postmodern. In tracing the dialectical progression of postmodernism Jameson believes the critic can reach "the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt".⁵⁷ Given that the cultural critic is embedded within the postmodern, regardless of any attempt to escape it, it is clear that the old traditional positions of the critic are no longer tenable. The only option is to let the contradictions emerge in themselves;

⁵⁶ This possibility is addressed in more detail in chapter three when I examine Taylor and Ricoeur on narrative identity.

⁵⁷ Jameson, Postmodernism, p62.

So it is that, rigorously conducted, an inquiry into this or that aspect of the postmodern will end up telling us little of value about postmodernism itself, but against its own will and quite unintentionally a great deal about the modern proper, and perhaps the converse will also turn out to be true, even though the two were never to have been thought of as symmetrical opposites in the first place. An ever more rapid alternation between them can at the least help the celebratory posture or the old-fashioned moralising gesture from freezing into place.⁵⁸

Perhaps unwittingly, Jameson has provided the means to undermine his own position. In seeking to provide the cultural critic with a source of dialectical momentum, Jameson actually separates out the process of movement in the present from the understanding of that movement in the awaited future. The present moment is distinguished by the hind-sight to come in a markedly different future. Crucially, the way of linking these two elements, the way of thinking through the process of moving into the future, is left unsaid; dialectical critique can only make sense with the promise of a qualitatively different future, and yet this closes off the very possibility of moving into this future. The present appears as the failure of the future.

Baudrillard views any attempt at reinvigorating a critical sense of time as a lost cause, a cause that can not be brought back to life. As he puts it; in today's world, "all forms that tend to advertise a miraculous freedom are nothing but revolutionary homilies".⁵⁹ It is useless to think of our shedding off our postmodern skins in a return to some (Marxist) conception of underlying causes in history. For Baudrillard, we have no shackles to lose; "we are no longer even alienated, because for that it is necessary for the subject to be divided in itself, confronted with the other, to be contradictory".⁶⁰ With no "other", true self or

⁵⁸ Jameson, Postmodernism, p66.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p201.

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p210.

privileged critical perspective waiting in the wings all we can do is shrug.⁶¹ All that is left is to realise this, assume the "fatal logic" of the object and reconcile ourselves to the fact that "the pure non-causal event unfolds inescapably".⁶² With this it is clear that time has disappeared for Baudrillard, time is of no use in the postmodern world, it creates obstructions to the spatial spread of objectification. The present becomes a series of distinct moments in time with no way of drawing these events together. The past and the future are lost in the failure of the present.

It should be clear how this relates to Jameson's conception of the present. Both authors assume that the present is essentially a distinct moment. Either the present becomes a distinct realm that is wholly unrecoverable (as with Baudrillard) or it becomes recoverable only at a distinct moment in the future (as with Jameson). The failure of the present to live up to the future, and the failure of the future to live up to the present are two sides of the same coin. Both options can be said to "transcendentalise" the present. This can be expressed in the following question: how could a "new" present emerge if each present is thought of as distinct from every other? Because of their inability to explain this both thinkers fail to grasp the critical nettle with any real authority - that is, they fail to offer an account of how the present functions to create possibilities in and for the future. Because their theoretical constructions rely upon a transcendental present each approach mirrors the paradox that lies at the heart of the other.

⁶¹ See "Baudrillard Shrugs: A Seminar on Terrorism and the Media, with Sylvere Lotringer and Jean Baudrillard". Jean Baudrillard: The Disappearance of Art and Politics, W. Stearns and W. Chaloupka (eds), Macmillan, London, 1992, p298.

⁶² Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p191.

In concluding this discussion I shall briefly outline an alternative (non-transcendental) account of the present that treats it as a thoroughly "temporalised" moment.

The Temporal Present

It may seem surprising that the work of Henri Bergson can offer a critical perspective on Marxist grand narratives and postmodern nihilism. Matter and Memory, the primary text for present purposes, was originally published in 1896 (though I shall refer to a translation of the fifth edition of 1908). Indeed the concerns of the book are, at first glance, very different from those discussed above. However, the inclusion of Bergson in this debate is not as peculiar as it may initially appear. It is worth recalling the tenor and momentum of the argument. My initial problem was to recast the traditional debates between those who favour a "return" to Marxist narratives and those who deny that any foundation exists upon which such narratives could be based. This has led to a "polarisation" of the debates on a different axis: those who treat the present as a "spatialised" moment, discrete from the past and the future, and those who think of the present in an alternative manner. Around this alternative axis, Bergson's analysis of the present seems entirely at home. Of course, like all major philosophical figures, Bergson's thought has generated a variety of interpretations, not all of them compatible. In the following I shall rely heavily on the interpretation of his work offered by Deleuze.⁶³

The "leading idea" of Bergson's work was, he suggested, "to see in mobility the only reality that is given".⁶⁴ Movement is the ontological principle of

⁶³ Deleuze, Bergsonism, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Zone Press, New York, 1991.

Bergsonism, movement in all its appearances; from the moment that grounds becoming, to the illusion of immobility that is such a persistent image.⁶⁵ This principle can be viewed in Bergson's approach to Zeno's paradoxes; for example, the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. Zeno pointed out that, if the tortoise is moving and at any given moment ahead of Achilles, then Achilles will never be able to catch up with the animal because by the time he reaches the point where the tortoise was the tortoise will always have moved on to the next point. Achilles may get infinitely close, but will not get past the animal. It is a proposition that we know to be false. Yet, asks Bergson, what is the source of this paradox?

It is, he suggests, a category mistake to confuse the divisible character of space with the indivisibility of movement in that space. Considering the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise it is a confusion of categories to assume "that their movement coincides with their path and that we may divide it, like the path itself, in any way we please".⁶⁶ Space may be infinitely divisible but that does not mean that movement through space is similarly divisible. Instead, movement is never at one specific point in space and this must be made an ontological presupposition if Zeno's paradoxes are to be avoided.

The importance of this position becomes apparent when we take this reasoning and examine how it challenges our traditional understanding of time. To conceive of time as an abstract phenomenon, in principle reducible to a series of spatialised points, is to confuse our representation of time with real time (the

⁶⁴ Quoted in Bergson, L. Kolakowski, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985, pp12-13.

⁶⁵ This general statement does need to be tempered by an account of the subtleties Bergson assigns to the matter of "illusions" and the related issue of perception; see for example, Matter and Memory, p32, where he formulates the "law", that "perception is master of space in the exact measure in which action is master of time". Deleuze's discussion is illuminating on this issue, Bergsonism, pp33-35.

⁶⁶ Bergson, Matter and Memory, p192.

divisibility of space with our temporality in space). Our experience of time is not consistent with the abstraction that we use as a "sign" of it; clocks for example. In place of this confusion we must think of time as "duration".⁶⁷ The spatial, abstract, conception of time rests upon the idea that time is constituted by a series of *quantitative distinctions of degree*; that time is similar to a numerical series, for example. Bergson argues that to think of time as ontologically distinct from space, as duration, is to regard time as consisting of *qualitative distinctions of kind*. Time, in this sense, is analogous to a melody characterised as a fluid modulating movement incapable of being serialised (without doing damage to the melody). This conception of time has important consequences for our understanding of the philosophical character of the present.

Jameson and Baudrillard presuppose that the present must be thought of as a discrete moment; that is, the discreteness of the present takes the role of a transcendental condition of their analyses. It is a transcendental account because it rests upon a "spatialised" conception of the present - it abstracts "real" time in order that a discrete present may function as the condition of possibility of their analyses. It is not enough to assume the temporality of the present in a manner that ultimately forgets the role of the present - that fails the present - by treating it as a discrete, spatialised, series of events. As was shown, this surfaced in their work as problematic assertions regarding the homogeneity and "the subject's" ignorance of the present.

In order to grasp a non-transcendental conception of the present it is necessary to "temporalise" the present. This is the only way that the present can be examined without introducing an abstract, transcendental notion of the present into the

⁶⁷ It is important, though, not to think of duration as essentially harmonious and homogeneous. It constitutes the same error to think in terms of the one true duration, as to think of time as an adjunct to space, its fourth dimension; for example, Matter and Memory, p207.

analysis. More positively, thinking through the implications of a thoroughly temporal present leads to the realisation that the present can function as an ontological grounding for social criticism. It is this claim that will be explored, through Foucault's later writings, in the last chapter.

Conclusion

It might be objected that this discussion has nothing to do with Foucault. Or, if it does that I have not spelt it out. Indeed, it might be thought that Foucault, and other (post)structuralists, were seeking to undermine the "continuist" themes (apparent in concepts like "duration") established by Bergson. Am I not simply falling back into "old" ways of thinking about the relationship between the past, the present and the future? Is it possible to champion Foucault *and* Bergson?

There are two issues at stake in such criticisms. Firstly, the relationship between the above discussion and the previous chapter can be summarised in the following manner. Foucault's theoretical construction of the genealogical present, it was argued, acted as a transcendental condition of his analyses - in a manner analogous to the analytic of finitude that underpins the human sciences. The reason for the limiting effect of the genealogical present was that it could not transgress its own logic of the present. In other words, Foucault's analysis assumed a discrete transcendental present that conditioned the limits - the finitude - of his own enquiry. As a means of overcoming this, I suggested that the present in Foucault's genealogies ought to be reconfigured as a moment of transition; that is, as a liminal present. Considering the character of a "temporal present" - a present that is located in the on-going movement between the past, present and future - is, therefore, the first step in this reinterpretation of Foucault. In introducing Bergson, then, I am not returning to a discredited approach, but

looking anew at the limits of Foucault's method in order to step through them. However, it is also clear that much remains to be said about the details of this approach. Chapters three and four, therefore, will elaborate further on the relationship between liminality, temporality and the present. The task of bringing this discussion back directly to Foucault is the aim of the last chapter which examines Foucault's later writings.

On the second potential criticism - that Foucault and Bergson outline fundamentally incompatible theories - it is important to be clear that continuity and duration are not equivalent to progress and linearity.⁶⁸ It was the latter themes that Foucault was attacking. It is one thing to criticise the constructions historians and philosophers have placed on to history, it is another thing to question the ontological qualities of time - though, as I have just suggested, Foucault would have done well to have done just that. The use of Bergsonian concepts does not, therefore, constitute a necessary breach with Foucault's approach to history.

A concern of a different order may also be raised. Is it not possible that I have chosen "easy" targets for criticism in this chapter? In constructing an argument around the poles of Marxism and postmodernism has the more interesting and subtle work that lies "in-between" these options been neglected? However, the reason for looking to these extremes has been to display as clearly as possible the critical gains achieved in problematising the traditional debates. In the following chapter a more subtle account of the relationship between narratives and the

⁶⁸ For a reading of Foucault's genealogy that does treat these concepts as equivalents see, E. G. Noujain, "History as Genealogy: An Exploration of Foucault's Approach to History", in Contemporary French Philosophy. Yet in this essay Noujain seems confused about the relationship between difference and discreteness (citing Bergson as a thinker of "continua" suggesting that this constitutes sameness, p159) and this resurfaces in his uncritical appreciation of Foucault's "serial" view of history. Deleuze, Foucault, pp13-14, argues more persuasively that Bergson is a precursor to Foucault's thought, not a thinker that Foucault was reacting against.

present is explored. Through a critical examination of narrative identity and the self, as it appears in the work of Taylor and Ricoeur, the interplay between limits, liminality and the present can be elaborated.

CHAPTER THREE
NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND THE IPSEITY OF PRESENCE

Introduction

As I have portrayed it, much of contemporary political theory is concerned with finding a middle path, or third way, between traditional theory and postmodernism. The same is true of accounts of the self. The self, of course, has always occupied a central place in the history of political thought. Recently, however, with the disavowal of any attempt at producing a grand and universal account of human nature, there has been a new urgency about the debates. Must we give up the claim that human beings share certain essential features? Or, is there a way to conceive of human characteristics that can embody both the universalism of traditional theory and the fragmentation of the self as presented by postmodernism? Can we respect otherness, driving out the ethnocentric and patriarchal structures of traditional accounts of human existence, while preserving the rational kernel at the heart of the modern project, thus clinging to the belief in an enlightened and redeemed self?

In recent years a new way of approaching these issues has emerged. It has its roots in communitarian and hermeneutic accounts of the self and its most forceful and commanding proponents are Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur. It is no surprise that Taylor and Ricoeur have converged on many theoretical issues as their thought has developed. Coming from different educational and philosophical traditions both thinkers, nonetheless, have displayed a constant willingness to embrace different elements across the "continental divide".

This is particularly true of the view Taylor and Ricoeur have of the self. Central to their concept of the self, and indicative of their theoretical alliance, is the notion of

narrative identity. Before examining their arguments in depth, it is important to be clear on the status of such an investigation. While narrative identity constitutes only one facet of their work on the self (and therefore a relatively small part of their work as a whole) it nonetheless occupies centre stage. This is not to say that the following critique of narrative identity undermines their whole philosophical outlook, but it is to say that an important weakness exists in their overall account. Furthermore, placing narrative identity centre stage is not a rhetorical device on my part. Taylor and Ricoeur repeatedly emphasise the impossibility of conceiving of a human life that does not fit the frames of narrative understanding. Moreover, on several occasions they confirm the centrality of narrative by reference to each others work. Regardless, therefore, of the wider insights offered by Taylor and Ricoeur, the narrative construction of selfhood is worthy of study in itself.

Taylor's Project

With Sources of the Self¹ Charles Taylor offers us his *magnum opus*. It is a massive work in many senses. It is physically a very long book - some 600 pages - yet more importantly it is massive in its scope of information and material. It covers philosophy in nearly all of its manifestations; from moral philosophical debates on the "range of legitimate moral descriptions" to a very detailed discussion of "The Self in Moral Space"; through debates on the nature of the relationship of the individual to the community, on to a fascinating (if at times controversial)² account of the history of philosophy through the key figures of Plato, Augustine, Descartes and Locke; from discussions of Deism, Enlightenment, Romanticism and Modernity to contemporary debates surrounding Critical Theory, poststructuralism

¹ Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

² See E.J. Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self", Political Theory, volume 20, number 1, 1992, pp86-104; Q. Skinner, "Who Are 'We'? Ambiguities of the Modern Self", Inquiry, volume 34, pp133-153, 1991.

and postmodernism. Even this is to name only a small fraction of Taylor's philosophical range.

In other areas Taylor's grasp seems equally encyclopaedic. From literature Taylor draws upon a vast array of sources including Sade, Proust and Joyce. In poetry Taylor relies heavily upon the Romantics, notably Wordsworth, though he seems similarly at home with Whitman and Yeats. His sweep through the sources of the modern self also takes on board an appreciation of artists and art movements, from Pissaro and Van Gogh to the Dadaists, Fauvism and Surrealism. Music is also no stranger to Taylor's thought with, for example, Mahler and Wagner assuming the role of visionaries of a "post-Romantic" age.

Yet this mass of intellectual eclecticism is not without a pattern, or a "story" as Taylor prefers to call it.³ Indeed it is a story that can be put quite simply. Taylor's project can be broken into two parts. On the one hand there is a historical account of the emergence of the modern notion of identity. On the other hand there is a polemical attack on current attempts to account for the modern self which Taylor characterises as "one-sided" and as failing to grasp the "unique combination of greatness and danger... which characterises the modern age".⁴ As Judith Shklar has pointed out, these two aspects "are joined in the end".⁵ It is worth briefly examining this idea in order to get an overall perspective on the main arguments of the book.

In Part 1 of Sources of the Self Taylor suggests that the individual cannot be thought of as disengaged from society in any meaningful way and that we must

³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, px.

⁴ Taylor, Sources of the Self, px.

⁵ J. Shklar, "Review of Sources of the Self", Political Theory, volume 19, number 1, 1991, pp105-109.

conceive of four terms relating to the self as intimately connected; "a) our notions of the good...b) our understandings of the self...c) the kinds of narrative in which we make sense of our lives and d) conceptions of society"⁶. In the main section of this chapter I shall concentrate on "the kinds of narrative in which we make sense of our lives", yet it is important that we don't forget Taylor's wish to think of the self as constituted by all these aspects which "evolve together in loose packages". However, throughout Part 1 this contextualisation remains abstract. It is in Parts 2-5 that Taylor offers a "picture of the developing modern identity" that is both "analytical and chronological"; putting flesh on the philosophical bones sketched out in Part 1. The main figure that runs through this section of the book is St. Augustine. The argument suggesting that Augustine is the prime instigator of our modern notion of the self is one of the most significant aspects of the book, in terms of the history of philosophy. Briefly, for Taylor Augustine's inner battle of will as presented in the Confessions becomes, as Hundert notes, a motif for "post-Reformation self-awareness and post-Cartesian epistemology".⁷ Augustine's importance lies in his assertion of the continuity between the narrator and the protagonist of the Confessions, a continuity which signifies for Taylor the beginnings of many of the ideas that still dominate Western notions of self-understanding, ideas that "sought the certainty of God within".⁸ To be sure, Taylor assigns central roles to many other thinkers, for example Nietzsche, yet it is Augustine that Taylor returns to again and again.

Moreover, we can now begin to understand why the two halves of Taylor's project - the historical account and the polemic - are ultimately joined. For Taylor the importance of St. Augustine's Confessions is not simply historical. Rather it

⁶ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p105.

⁷ Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Modern Self", p87.

⁸ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p140.

contains a message. While Augustine recognised confession as the re-establishment of a unified subjectivity over the traumas of a scattered sense of self, so Taylor sees in this a sign that, in our quest to find the good, we must dispense with the typically fragmented sense of modern subjecthood and avert our moral identity crisis by way of a retrieval of the hidden goods of hyper-Augustinianism;⁹ "to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit".¹⁰ Thus Taylor's account of the emergence of the modern self relies heavily on the influence of Augustine, while his polemic calls for a return to a more unified approach to subjecthood as expressed in Augustine's idea of confession. As Shklar has pointed out, "the hero of Taylor's genealogy is St. Augustine".¹¹

It is illuminating to briefly contrast Taylor's account of the self and related concepts with that of Foucault. Throughout the book Taylor makes many references to Foucault, and to the "neo-Nietzscheans" in general. It is clear that he has certain sympathies with Foucault's approach. Initially, for example, we can see the similarity of Taylor's account of the emergence of the modern self and Foucault's notion that "man is an invention of recent date".¹² Both Taylor and Foucault agree that modern subjectivity is quite distinct from earlier forms. Taylor's insistence that "[t]alk about 'identity' in the modern sense would have been incomprehensible to our forebears of a couple of centuries ago"¹³ is reminiscent of Foucault's conception of discursively constituted subjectivity. Both writers point to the vast gulf that exists between the modern subject and subjects of a previous age.

⁹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p246.

¹⁰ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p520.

¹¹ Shklar, "Review", p105.

¹² Foucault, The Order of Things, p387.

¹³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p28.

Moreover, Foucault and Taylor share a belief in the power of history to unmask moral positions that contain "implicit" sources of domination;

The neo-Nietzschean position attacks the procedural ethic mainly for its implicit moral inspirations; for the conception of freedom it defends, and for its attachment to a hypergood and consequent radical revisionism. In this it resembles my critique.¹⁴

Furthermore, Taylor and Foucault share the view that there can be no ultimate grounding for our "articulations" and "interpretations". For Taylor, "full articulacy is an impossibility...We clarify one language with another, which in turn can be further unpacked and so on".¹⁵ This bears a certain similarity to Foucault's idea that "everything is already interpretation".

Of course, the differences are as important as the similarities. For instance, Foucault and Taylor operate with different time periods. More importantly they differ as to the kind of material they study. Taylor, by his own admission, is primarily concerned with the large philosophical and artistic movements of modernity and before. Foucault tended to examine the minutiae of historical texts and situations looking quite deliberately for "the other" of the major discourses as well as the dominant regimes that constituted received opinion. This, in part, contributes to their disagreement over the status of the subject. While they may agree that the modern subject is an invention of recent date, this discovery does not for Taylor mean that "the subject is dead". On the contrary, in a footnote Taylor labels the proponents of such a view "confused and dramatic".¹⁶ He prefers to talk of the subject as located within "webs of interlocution". The difference between

¹⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p99.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p34.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p525.

this idea and Foucault's notion that the subject is constituted in discourse will become clearer as we look into Taylor's notion of narrative identity below.

This brings us to the main point of disagreement between Taylor and Foucault. Taylor views it as unacceptable that the neo-Nietzschean position implies the diminution of all norms and morals. He argues that any position that asserts all moral commitments as equal is "deeply implausible". This is the case because such a perspective - one in which we take no position to be superior to another one - is "just not available to us humans". He goes on; "it is a form of self-delusion to think that we do not speak from a moral orientation which we take to be right".¹⁷ In the final chapter I shall return to the issue of Foucault's "ethical commitment" and his relation to communitarianism. At present it is not my concern to directly address this criticism or engage in the many debates that surround Taylor's proposals. In what follows the emphasis is on Taylor's concept of narrative identity and the way that this emasculates issues of liminality.

Historical Explanation and Narrative

At first glance one might construe Taylor's "story" as a form of historical explanation. Indeed when Taylor summarises the task of Sources of the Self as the goal of, "illuminating the modern identity as we live it today and the understandings of moral sources it incorporates",¹⁸ it is tempting to read this as an exercise in the explanation of what brought about the modern subject. Yet, Taylor is dismissive of the idea of trying to give such an explanation, preferring to think of his own

¹⁷ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p99. See also, Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", Political Theory, vol. 12, 1984, pp152-183; William E. Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault and Otherness", Political Theory, vol. 13, 1985, pp365-376; Taylor, "Connolly, Foucault and Truth", Political Theory, vol. 13, 1985, pp377-385. For a critical theory perspective on Taylor's approach to morals see, Martin Low-Beer, "Living a Life and the Problem of Existential Impossibility", Inquiry, vol. 34, pp217-236.

¹⁸ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p319.

project as distinct from this.¹⁹ In a sense it is just this tension within Taylor's work that I shall seek to explore because it fuels his need to discuss the nature of personal, life-size, narratives.

First, it is necessary to comment on Taylor's attitude towards historical explanation of the Marxist variety. In Sources of the Self Taylor spends some time distancing himself from any form of Marxist approach to history. Broadly speaking Taylor offers three reasons for the inadequacy of the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism. Initially, argues Taylor, it gives no weight to the intrinsic power of institutions like religion or moral life through its reduction of these to purely economic factors. Secondly, traditional Marxism allows these institutions no role in the causal relations of diachronic change. Thirdly, Marxism operates with a "unilinear causal relation of base and superstructure" that Taylor views as simplistic given that the relationship is "plainly circular".²⁰

Without going into any depth regarding his criticisms of Marxism²¹ they are interesting because they point to the style of Taylor's own account. Taylor's preoccupations are not primarily economic or socio-historical, rather he is most concerned with the role of "*idees-forces*" such as religion, the moral life, art, philosophy, literature etc. It is the influence of these less tangible but nonetheless real forces on the modern subject that constitute the bulk of his thesis. This emphasis led Taylor to anticipate charges of idealism;

By and large I have been dwelling on certain developments in philosophy and religious outlook, with an odd glance at popular mentality. I have

¹⁹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p202.

²⁰ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p306.

²¹ It is important to note one of the major defences of the materialist conception of history as a counter-weight to this discussion namely; G.A. Cohen, Marx's Theory of History: A Defence, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978.

barely mentioned the great changes in political structures, economic practices and military and bureaucratic organisation which marked the period...Am I perhaps offering an idealist account?...This would be crazy.²²

It would be "crazy", suggests Taylor, because it would represent the equal but opposite absurdity to the Marxist account. It would deprive diachronic causation of the "multitude of sources" that are involved, both at the material level and the level of "*idees-forces*". Although Taylor's preference is for the world of the moral life he does not seek to deny the role of political movements or economic conditions in shaping history. Presumably, though, it would be a quite different kind of book.

Having established what Taylor is not trying to do, there is still plenty scope for confusion about the nature of his task. As previously mentioned Taylor is dismissive of the idea of giving an historical explanation of the emergence of the modern identity. In its place he offers the hermeneutic alternative of "understanding people's self-interpretations and their visions of the good".²³ He distinguishes the two in the following way. Historical explanation asks what were "the precipitating conditions" of the new form of identity, whereas an interpretive question asks "what drew people to this new identity, however it was brought into being".²⁴ The interpretive question is thus one that looks for the *affect* of a new phenomenon rather than trying to consider this phenomenon as the *effect* of prior conditions. It is important that he makes the distinction in order that his "story" does not appear as an "idealist" account of the cause of the modern subject. However, Taylor does admit that "these two orders of question cannot be easily

²² Taylor, Sources of the Self, p199.

²³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p204.

²⁴ Taylor, Sources of the Self, pp203-204.

separated"²⁵ and there are points in the text where Taylor appears to be offering the reader an account of the formation of the modern subject rather than simply the extent to which new forms of subjectivity had an affect: "the modern identity arose because changes in the self-understandings connected with a wide range of practices- religious, political, economic, familial, intellectual, artistic - converged and reinforced each other to produce it."²⁶

This has led one reviewer to write that Taylor approaches "the problems of historical explanation with some uncertainty".²⁷ However, it would be wholly inadequate to leave the matter at this. To examine further why Taylor may be uncertain over issues of historical explanation it is necessary to explore the question of why an affect could take such a strong hold at any given time. What is the mechanism offered by Taylor for the process of becoming affected? At one level Taylor's answers to this are quite general. Throughout Sources of the Self he suggests that "tradition" plays a large part in the transmission of affect. The very possibility of taking a stand on a certain issue (say individual rights) is, for Taylor "enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a tradition".²⁸ Therefore, our sense of being drawn to a cause or a moral sentiment is in part passed down to us.

Elaborating on this Taylor suggests that these traditions, or "schematic historical narratives", gain their power from their ability to "confer meaning and substance on peoples lives".²⁹ It is here that we now begin to see the importance of the personal

²⁵ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p203.

²⁶ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p206.

²⁷ Harvey Mitchell, "Charles Taylor on the Self, its Languages and its History", History of Political Thought, vol. 12, 1991, pp335-358.

²⁸ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p39.

²⁹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p97.

narrative to Taylor's project. The large scale narratives and the smaller narratives are portrayed as part of the same process. However, the precise nature of this conferral of meaning is still unclear. To get a better idea of just what is involved we should turn to Taylor's notions of a "practice" and a "web of interlocutions".

A practice is "more or less any stable configuration of shared activity, whose shape is defined by a certain pattern of do's and don'ts".³⁰ According to Taylor our moral ideals, concepts of the self etc. "*for the most part*" (my italics) are aspects of our lives to the extent that they are embedded in practices. These practices, these aspects of our life that function through practices, are articulated by our ideas within a system of regulative commands (this is similar to Foucault's definition of the *episteme* in The Archaeology of Knowledge). In other words, practices can pre-exist articulations of them, and at this point Taylor has in mind the fact that practices are learnt at a young age.³¹ Therefore, Taylor concludes: "If we articulate any rationale at all, it must involve an interpretation of current practice; it may also be projecting something new and untried".³²

Thus the relation of "large schematic narratives" to small personal narratives is quite complex. As individuals we are not wholly determined by tradition and the grand narratives of our time, rather we are able to make some innovation and we can change the structure of the meta-narratives. Yet, once again it can not be left simply at that. After all, where does the innovation come from? This points to a difficulty with Taylor's notion of practice, namely that it gives a very static picture of tradition and appears to suggest change without accounting for it. As with the Foucauldian *episteme*, there is a reformulation of stasis in the attempt to account

³⁰ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p204.

³¹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p204.

³² Taylor, Sources of the Self, p205.

for change. Where Foucault sought to overcome this problem via a turn to Nietzschean genealogy, Taylor in Sources of the Self introduces into his schema the notion of a "web of interlocutions" to help account for periods of change.

A "web of interlocutions" is defined by Taylor with reference to Wilhelm von Humboldt's model of an intersubjective speech situation which stresses that a common space must be, at least tacitly, accepted as part of a conversation. This common space requires the "recognition of individual speakers and their different perspectives" while allowing for disputes and debates to be articulated.³³ Moreover, this forum for debate is the vehicle that allows Taylor to consider the possibility of practices changing. With this mechanism set up Taylor places a lot of emphasis on the way that practices can mutate through articulation and debate. However, at one point Taylor suggests that, "ideas and practices may come out of true with each other...just through drift".³⁴

Here we can see why our lives are "for the most part" embedded in practices, and not always so - though when we come to look at the role of personal narratives in our lives Taylor will be much more strident in his claims. Taylor allows for the possibility of historical change occurring without the mediating mechanism of articulation and debate. Yet, the idea that change can occur "on its own" introduces a new element into Taylor's account. I am far from convinced, however, that his outlook can cope with this notion. If Taylor accepts that change can occur "outside" of the web of interlocutions that motivate other changes, "just through drift", then the possibility exists that such change can not be expressed in narrative form. This possibility has important ramifications for his account of narrative

³³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p524. It is interesting to note how close Taylor is to Habermas on this point.

³⁴ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p205.

identity. To explore this further it is necessary to turn to Taylor's explicit use of spatial metaphors.

Essentially from Part 1 Chapter 2 onwards, Taylor loads his work with metaphors of space. The chapter title is "The Self in Moral Space" and the primary metaphor becomes the notion of "orienting" oneself within bounded frames.³⁵ This phrasing is no co-incidence. Taylor is only too aware of his use of this metaphor: "Orientation in moral space once again turns out to be similar to orientation in physical space".³⁶ At another point he talks of "maintaining the primacy of my spatial metaphor".³⁷ Or again, "we can't distance ourselves from the issue of spatial orientation, or fail to stumble on it...or repudiate it".³⁸ Finally, he suggests, by reference to the psychologist Jerome Bruner's book Child Talk, that our spatial preoccupations are constituted by an "original, prelinguistic communion" of "sustained eye-to-eye contact" in childhood.³⁹ Taylor's insistence on the use of spatial metaphors to describe our moral world is, therefore, deliberate and well-considered.

The importance of this to the present argument (and there will be more on this in the next section) is that Taylor's notion of "drift" does not sit happily with his spatial metaphors. The idea that practices can change over time independently of mechanisms of interlocution implies that there is something about the character of time in itself that makes such change possible. Yet, Taylor's reliance on spatial metaphors when accounting for change does not facilitate the exploration of this

³⁵ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p27.

³⁶ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p48.

³⁷ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p44.

³⁸ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p31.

³⁹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, pp524-525.

possibility. Recalling the arguments of Bergson, we are reminded that the spatialisation of time, or the use of spatial analogies when referring to temporal concepts, is a highly problematic endeavour. Taylor has explicitly taken on board a language of spatial metaphors to refer to transitions over time, yet the notion of "drift", which (in this case) implies a "temporalised" understanding of time, has surreptitiously crept in to his analysis. This may be partly due to Taylor's recognition that "much of the most innovative philosophy of the last hundred years" has been an attempt to analyse our relationship to time.⁴⁰ Yet, this same sentence makes his reliance on the spatial seem odd.

For the moment I shall go no further than this, for the full thrust of the criticism can only come as Taylor himself formulates the strong thesis of narrative identity as an "inescapable framework". Presently it is enough to recognise the intimate relation that exists for Taylor between large grand narratives and personal narratives, namely that the latter represent a microcosm of the former. More strongly, personal narratives assume the role of the clear-cut example, the paradigm, for the larger historical "stories". I shall now turn to a discussion of personal narratives.

Personal Narratives and Moments of Crisis

Taylor begins his discussion of the role of personal narratives by emphasising the part played by "frameworks" in our everyday lives. The relation between these "frameworks" and the "practices" talked about above is an intriguing one. Recalling that "practices", "for the most part", structure our moral beliefs and spiritual values, it could be said that "frameworks" have a much less ambiguous standing. Frameworks are inescapable; "I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us".⁴¹

⁴⁰ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p288.

This strong thesis is not simply a more fervent conceptualisation of the notion of a practice, rather it relates more intimately to an idea of human agency. The idea of a practice is concerned with collective norms. The framework operates at a more "local level" than the practice. For example, dismissing the claim that a framework could merely be "a contingently true psychological fact" capable of being overcome some day by a Nietzschean superman, Taylor goes on to say: "...the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognise as integral, that is undamaged human personhood".⁴²

However, it is important to remember that for Taylor there is no meaningful concept of a disengaged individual and that as a consequence the relation between these levels of framework and practice is necessarily muddled in the complexities of a self that exists in a communitarian setting. The framework that orients the human agent cannot in actuality be separated from the practices and traditions that go to make up the meta-context of human belief and actions.

Yet how are we to understand these frameworks? For Taylor, the best way to think of these is by looking for the kind of answer that we require when we ask the question "who am I?". An answer based on "name and genealogy" is not really an adequate response. If, for example, I answered the question with an account of my ancestry (perhaps going back to the Gods or to single cell organisms) this for Taylor would not tell me anything about my identity as a decision making human being in a world of other similar beings; it would not give any insight into my commitment towards the good. What does constitute an answer to Taylor's question "Who am I"? At this point Taylor's spatial preoccupations reappear;

⁴¹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p27.

⁴² Taylor, Sources of the Self, p27.

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of making a stand.⁴³

The commitments can be moral or spiritual as in the case of socialists, Anglicans or anarchists; or they may be related to a nation as with many Scots, or a region that is still seeking nationhood; or they may even be defined negatively in terms of "I will do all in my power to stop that happening again", as may be the case now with many of the people of ex-communist countries; or they may arise out of a stance that is (supposedly) a-political, a-religious etc. as may be the case with the resigned, apathetic later writings of Jean Baudrillard. Moreover, one could be a socialist Scot or an anarchist from the old Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Whatever the particular "commitments and identifications" the point for Taylor is that it is this kind of orientation that provides the answer to the question "who am I?".

To back up this claim Taylor looks at the counterfactual case of "identity crisis". An identity crisis is described by Taylor as "an acute form of disorientation...a painful and frightening experience".⁴⁵ It is, he suggests, to live without frameworks; to live in a world where one is not able to situate oneself within a community that would help one to answer questions as they arise; it is a feeling of vertigo as one realises that one has no basis for belief. This, for Taylor, proves that identity cannot be located within some bodily or spiritual inner sanctum, but that it must be found in our relation to a world of other people, and the frameworks,

⁴³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p27.

⁴⁴ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p36.

⁴⁵ Taylor, Sources of the Self, pp27-28.

practices and so on that engender these relations. The counterfactual case of identity crisis, "brings to light...the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space".⁴⁶

It is important at this stage to take a slight detour. As presented so far Taylor comes across as a thorough going universalist on this issue of identity. This is slightly misleading. Taylor recognises that the very notion of identity is one that is of recent date and that it "would have been incomprehensible to our forbears of a couple of centuries ago". Moreover, the importance of the concept is that "certain developments in our self-understanding are a precondition of our putting the issue in terms of identity",⁴⁷ thereby signalling a qualitative change in the way we think about ourselves. This change brought about the revelation that to try to "solve" a crisis of identity did not require making that identity fit with a predetermined, universally accepted notion of the right way to live, as was (and in some places still is) the case in many overtly religious cultures. Thus Taylor is well aware that the question of identity cannot be put in "simply universal terms", and the frames that constitute human agency are many and varied. We shall soon see, however, that Taylor's conception of the self does in fact contain strong universalist elements. It is the limits to his universalism that shall come under scrutiny.

Returning to the example of identity crisis as it relates to Taylor's notion of our orientation in moral and spiritual space it might be suggested that a person could choose to live outside all frames and commitments "and not suffer this absence ... as a lack".⁴⁸ Yet Taylor, in a crucial passage, immediately responds that; "a person without a framework...would be outside our space of interlocution; he wouldn't

⁴⁶ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p28.

⁴⁷ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p28.

⁴⁸ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p31.

have a stand in the space where the rest of us are. We would see this as pathological."⁴⁹

A person without frameworks is, therefore, not really a person. This is as "strong" as this thesis can get. Yet there are a few specific points on this passage that need to be mentioned. First, despite his claim that the modern sense of identity is constituted as a non-universal concept, Taylor seems to group us all in the same "space". This may be a slip of the tongue. Secondly, and more importantly, Taylor appears slightly confused over the meaning of the term "pathological", suggesting that it constitutes a space outside of our capacities of discourse. Yet, if Foucault has taught us anything it is that the process of medicalisation is inherently one that is dependent upon the figuration of the taboo in discourse.

There are more stringent criticisms of Taylor's approach. I have already said that Taylor lacks a strong sense of the temporal character of life. He relies too heavily on his spatial metaphor of orientation thus producing a picture of these frames as too static and cumbersome to really account for the flow of everyday existence. It seems to lead to a notion that once you are in these frames you are there for good; once a Scottish socialist always a Scottish socialist. However this is slightly unfair and to see why it is necessary to look at the use Taylor makes of the notion of "becoming". Perhaps recognising the possibility that his use of frames as the core of identity could be restricting Taylor tries to show how, in fact, his metaphor is very sensitive to the notion of changes in belief; "the issue of our condition can never be exhausted for us by what we are, because we are always also changing and becoming".⁵⁰ This "becoming" is thought of as where we think of ourselves as going, what we think our goal (long-term or short-term) might be. If I should want

⁴⁹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p31.

⁵⁰ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p47.

to be a football player then I am able to gauge the extent to which I am fulfilling that aspect of my identity by assessing my position as it stands now relative to my aim. It is for this reason that Taylor distinguishes questions of the being of identity as relative and questions of the becoming of identity as absolute:

So the issue for us has to be not only where we are, but where we are going; and though the first may be a matter of more or less, the latter is a question of towards or away from, an issue of yes or no. That is why an absolute question frames our relative ones.⁵¹

So Taylor is aware of "becoming" as a central facet of the modern subject. However, Taylor has a quite different notion to the one that I would wish to endorse. In my usage "becoming" is precisely not an absolute question, "an issue of yes or no", and I hope to show why it is inappropriate to think of it in these terms. To facilitate this the relation Taylor posits between this notion of becoming (and of being) and narrative structure must be explored. Taylor configures narrative understanding as consisting of two parts. The first of these is associated with becoming. This narrative of what I wish to become guides my present actions; "my life always has this degree of narrative understanding, that I understand my present action in the form of an 'and then'; there was A (what I am), and then I do B (what I project to become)".⁵²

The second aspect of narrative understanding as suggested by Taylor is that of being. In this case my present situation is assessed in terms of how I got to be where I am now; "what I am has to be understood as what I have become". For example, if I want to be a football player I have to understand my present situation in terms of the fact that I smoke too much and am not really very fit. This is just the kind of narrative that according to Taylor orders all our lives "inescapably".

⁵¹ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p47.

⁵² Taylor, Sources of the Self, p47.

My critique of Taylor follows quite simply. Surely it is possible to conceive of the following, "what I am in relation to what I am"? This may appear trivial but it is not simply to fill a gap in Taylor's representation of narrative understanding. What, then, is the force of the rather simple formula, "what I am in relation to what I am"? It is fourfold. Firstly, it indicates the possibility of questioning ones life outside of a framework as a reference point. It may not matter to me, I may not know, why I am in the situation I am in, nor what I would wish to do about it, yet I am not necessarily unable to question my own position- do I stay? do I go? what lies in front of me? and so on. This is particularly important at times of identity crisis. During such transitional/liminal periods the essentially unbounded character of an agent's relation to herself requires that we think of the process of transition as outside of narrative structures (as defined by Taylor). To put it in Taylor's terms, it is possible to formulate a "locution" of the liminal experience, that captures the experience of going through the transition from the "inside". It is a mistake to conceive of people going through times of crisis as "outside our space of interlocution". Secondly, temporal duration is distinct from narrative structure, a distinction that is rarely found in Taylor. The formula, "what I am in relation to what I am", implies in its very layout a temporality that is not predetermined by the need for the "story" to unfold along arranged lines. Taylor's sense of narrative time is constituted by the emphasis he puts on becoming as a question of absolutes. At moments of transition this sense of an absolute question is missing but the sense of a temporal process is not. A self may experience transition without this being tied to what the subject has become and projects to become. This, as described in the Introduction, is the "paradoxical" element of liminality. Thirdly, becoming is no longer a question of absolutes, of yes or no, but a constant reappraisal of oneself and one's changing goals as they are affected in time, rather than a simple stock-taking of one's position in relation to a target. The "I" that experiences periods of liminality is one that is in principle unbounded. The issue of becoming, therefore,

far from validating a unified narratively structured self, creates the *possibility* for fragmented selves to emerge. Fourthly, and in sum, periods of liminality are the "outside" of Taylor's narrative, the point at which we have found and crossed the limits of his discourse. This must be the case given that Taylor has already stated that "a person without frameworks...would be outside our space of interlocution". The sense of self Taylor describes is "traditional" to the extent that it excludes certain categories of existence, in this case those that involve liminal transitions.

Taylor may respond that the temporal sense I ascribe to questions of identity is not empirically true. Perhaps the experience of asking "what I am in relation to what I am" is not an actual phenomenon. There are two replies to this. First, human experience of personal crisis and/or conversion pay testimony to periods of intense questioning that cannot (by definition) be guided through reference to established frameworks. It is precisely this temporal movement between established frames that is highlighted by "what I am in relation to what I am". Secondly, it would surely be sufficient to point Taylor to his own text where he recognises, albeit remotely, the very possibility of living through a time when the human agent may cease to be related to one set of circumstances and is yet to be configured in a whole new set; though strangely he doesn't believe it to be part of Western culture. Talking of "imagined cultures", he says:

Perhaps at some age, say forty, people go through a horrendous ritual passage, in which they go into ecstasy and then emerge as, say, the reincarnated ancestor. That is how they describe things and live them. In that culture there is a sense to treating this whole life cycle as containing two persons. But in the absence of such a cultural understanding e.g. in our world, the supposition that I could be two temporally succeeding selves is either an over dramatised image, or quite false. It runs against the structural features of a self as a being who exists in a space of concerns.⁵³

⁵³ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p51.

Taylor's example of "ritual passage", far from being a facet of an "imagined culture", is immediately recognisable as an aspect of all cultures. His unwillingness to include this possibility derives from the fact that it undermines his account of the "inescapability" of narrative structures. Indeed, in order to defend his central claim Taylor finds it necessary to adopt such a problematic phrase as "our world". Taylor may respond, though, by claiming that my emphasis on the relationship between agency and narrative structure misses the central concern of his work. The case of "ritual passage" may indeed bring the idea of a continuous narrative structure into question but the real point of Taylor's work is to show that without a narrative structure the agent is without the capacity to hold moral commitments. Such a "valueless" person, he would contend, *must* be outside of our space of interlocution. Perhaps I have over-emphasised narrative identity as an end in itself whereas I should have considered its mediating role in the construction of a moral life?

To this charge I would readily concede that this chapter has focused on Taylor's account of narrative identity in isolation from the larger moral claims he is making. However, the criticism, that a life is conceivable outside of narrative structures, retains its critical impact. To the extent that narrative structure is not inescapable, moral commitments (to the extent that Taylor views them as mediated through narrative) are also not inescapable. Therefore, at the moment of reorientation into moral space, that is at the time of aggregation, the agent draws upon moral sources that can not be mediated through narrative structures (as the narrative process has been ruptured). The reconstruction of "undamaged human personhood" through the period of crisis relies upon an agent recovering moral values which arise in a manner that does not require a narrative account of identity. It is just this move that Taylor makes in response to one of his critics.⁵⁴ Taylor posits two features of

⁵⁴ Taylor, "Comments and Replies", *Inquiry*, vol. 34, pp237-54. I am referring to his response to Martin Low-Beer, "Living a Life and the Problem of Existential Impossibility".

"the human condition" - that, a) ideals demand "a notion of what gives human life value" and b) that an undamaged human being must have at least "a modicum" of respect for others. Two points can be made about this move. First, in pursuing this line of argument Taylor seems to impute moral values independently of narrative structures. Therefore the role of narrative as an "inescapable" mediation between agency and the moral life is unnecessary. Secondly, his account leads to the problem identified by Shapiro in his review of Taylor's Philosophical Papers:

Although he tries to conceive of his moral notion of the human subject as a "philosophical anthropology", it is difficult to construe his claim that humans have an innate sense of a higher good which takes the form of Christian self-denial in many of his examples, as anything but a bald attempt to establish a synthetic, ethical a priori that will vindicate his more applied arguments about agency.⁵⁵

However, it is not my concern to engage in debate surrounding the existence (or not) of innate moral values. It is enough to recognise that Taylor's account of narrative identity is, ultimately, an unhelpful way of understanding the self. Taylor sought to deploy narrative identity as a mechanism that would give sense to human life as an on-going process of becoming while retaining universal features at the core of our self-understanding. In this he has failed. Narrative identity, when pushed to its limits, can not be sustained. Taylor has not met his own criterion of "inescapability".

This said, it does not actually disprove the validity of a narrative approach to personal crises, transitions, conversions, and other such phenomena - only that Taylor's version of it is suspect. Perhaps, "what I am in relation to what I am" (as one way of conceptualising the problem raised) is itself the very kernel of the narrative approach? If this could be shown to be the case then the role of narrative

⁵⁵ Shapiro, "Charles Taylor's Moral Subject", Political Theory, 1986, pp311-324.

identity as the mediating mechanism between the abstract agent and the moral agent could be established once more. This possibility is examined in the next section via a discussion of Paul Ricoeur's paper "Narrative Identity".⁵⁶

Ricoeur, Narrative Identity and Crises

In his three volume work Time and Narrative,⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur deals with the relationship between fictional narratives and historical narratives. At the end of the third volume he was drawn to ask if there existed a "fundamental experience capable of integrating these two great classes of narrative"?⁵⁸ In looking for an answer, Ricoeur has turned to the hypothesis that, "narrative identity, whether of an individual or a historical community, was the plane to search for this fusion between history and fiction".⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that Ricoeur makes no distinction between "an individual or a historical community" in this talk of narrative identity. Yet it seems highly improbable that the two can be so easily elided into one category. As we saw earlier Taylor, by contrast, makes some concession to a distinction when he suggests subtle differences between the ideas of a tradition, a practice, a web of interlocution, and a framework. It may be that Ricoeur is tacitly assuming Taylor's conclusion, namely that the case of individual identity acts as a paradigm for all other notions of the operation of narrative identity. Assuming this

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", Philosophy Today, 1991, pp73-81, trans. Mark S. Muldoon. For more detailed accounts of the relationship between Ricoeur's account of narrative identity and his ethical commitments see; "Self as *Iipse*", Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992, Barbara Johnson (ed), Basic Books, London, 1993; and Oneself as Another, trans. Kathleen Blamey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992. While these studies are interesting in themselves for the light they shed on Ricoeur's project I shall concentrate on the "Narrative Identity" essay as it encapsulates his position on the key relationship between agency and narrative that is at stake. Moreover, in the later works he has not significantly changed his position from that outlined in the essay.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988.

⁵⁸ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p73.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p73.

we shall look at the way Ricoeur deals with the point of fusion between fiction and history. He begins by making three "assertions":

a) knowledge of the self is an interpretation, b) the interpretation of the self, in turn, finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privileged mediation, c) this mediation borrows from history as much as fiction making life a fictive history, or if you prefer, an historical fiction, comparable to those biographies of great men where both history and fiction are found blended together.⁶⁰

In many respects, therefore, Ricoeur is starting from the same position as Taylor, a fact they both acknowledge.⁶¹ Ricoeur shares with Taylor a very strong sense of the "inescapability" of narrative in a subject's construction of identity. This is clear from his assertion that narrativity is "pre-comprehended" in the manner that we equate life with a story. Though still at a quite general level we shall see how this pre-comprehension is fixed for Ricoeur as we follow through his argument.

According to Ricoeur, there are two major uses of the concept of identity, uses that have at times been confused or conflated. These two concepts of identity are, identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as self (*ipse*). *Idem* consists of four aspects each of which can be clarified in relation to its opposite:

- 1) the re-identification of the same, opposite = plurality
- 2) resemblance, opposite = difference
- 3) the continuity of a process, opposite = discontinuity
- 4) permanence over time, opposite = diversity

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p73.

⁶¹ David Wood (ed), On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation, Routledge, London, 1991.

In marked contrast the notion of ipse cannot be so easily codified. The essence of ipse, according to Ricoeur, is the "range of responses" to the question "who?", as distinct from the questions of what, where, why etc.. Thus one can begin to delimit the range of ipse by listing the "plane of personal pronouns and all other diectics which depend on it; adjectives and possessive pronouns (my, mine, your, yours etc.) and adverbs of time and place (now, here, etc.)". It is this form of response that, for Ricoeur, constitutes the answer to "who?". This, it should be apparent, is directly analogous to Taylor's notion of a subject oriented in moral space (though Ricoeur's approach to the moral self is not directly explored here). The similarity is further apparent in the fact that Ricoeur also suggests that a person "without properties becomes at the limit unidentifiable" and that the "unidentifiable becomes the unnameable".⁶² This echoes Taylor's notion that such a person would be "outside our space of interlocution".

Ricoeur's analysis of identity takes him in to more subtle and challenging areas than Taylor's over-spatialised account. For Ricoeur, a loss of identity, an identity crisis, is not the same as being without qualities. Therefore a person experiencing a crisis can still be a person. While a crisis of identity may rob a person of their sense of sameness (*idem*) it does not, can not, rob them of their sense of self (*ipse*): "in the extreme case of loss of identity as sameness...we have not left behind the problematic of ipseity. With regard to the category of the subject, a non-subject is not nothing".⁶³

The last sentence contains the kernel of Ricoeur's position. If we remove *idem* from an identity, however, what is this ipse that is left behind? Ricoeur suggests that it can be only one thing, the question "who am I?". Not the "who?" that

⁶² Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p77.

⁶³ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p78.

demands a situation in an oriented world but the "who am I?", "simply reduced to the nakedness of the question itself".⁶⁴ Indeed the lack of response in terms of an identity as sameness "intensifies" the nature of the self as ipse; "Who is 'I' when the subject says that he or she is nothing? Precisely a private self in need of an identity as idem".⁶⁵

Thus, despite the fact that a person may not be able to situate themselves in an oriented space they must still be thought of as a self, with some form of identity captured within the very phrasing of their disavowal of identity. The "I" who is lost is still an I no matter what. It is "paradoxical" to say "I am nothing" given that "nothing would not mean anything if it were not assigned to an I".⁶⁶ Ricoeur concludes that the question "who am I?", "cannot be abolished".

Yet what is the relation between this analysis of identity and the earlier comments on the nature of narrative as a part of our everyday lives? For Ricoeur it appears to show the inescapability of the narrative form in the construction of identity. Talking of the experience of "nothingness" he suggests that, "many narratives of conversion pay witness to such nights of personal identity." He seems to be suggesting that if we can accept these narratives at such a limit case then we must accept them for all cases, including crises of collective identity. However, Ricoeur has not demonstrated how this experience could be related to a narrative, except *after the fact*. Only when one has been through a conversion, for example, could one then formulate the experience in terms of a narrative that would situate your experience in a framework, or on an ascribed plane of answers to the question "who?". This is precisely the implication of Ricoeur's talk of "narratives of

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p78.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p79.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity", p80.

conversion"; an after the fact rationalisation in terms that could not possibly have been known to the agent, by definition, during the process of conversion. His analysis of the notion of identity tries to get "inside" that moment of conversion, and to a certain extent succeeds in doing so, yet if in any way it is related to the formulation of a narrative it becomes too late. Ricoeur's account of narrative identity is in fact an account of narrative and an account of identity but fails in its ultimate aim of trying to relate the two so that they become necessarily joined. The moment of change, or of personal crisis, is not amenable to an analysis in the form of narrative, ultimately because the stories one can tell demand that one supposes the end. In the throes of a period of change the *story* itself becomes the "unidentifiable", and as Ricoeur has put it "the unidentifiable becomes the unnameable". To return to my earlier, rather crude, schematisations Ricoeur's "indestructible" question 'who am I?' becomes in fact a shorthand for 'who am I in relation to what I have become which I am now judging according to a story that I had no conception of when I was asking the original question who am I?'. This is an eminently "destructible" question, as I hope to have shown via my discussion of Taylor. In other the words, the single "I" that Ricoeur posits as indestructible becomes a plurality of I's each occupying a different moment in time. If this is the case, the potential for moments of crisis existing through this time is opened up - the different I's are not necessarily the same I. The unity of the subject that Ricoeur claims to have located in the narrative structure of subjectivity is ruptured, and the need to examine the liminal features of selfhood is created. As with the discussion in chapter two, the concept under interrogation, in this case narrative identity, must be temporalised. Starting with agency and then trying to impute a temporal dimension through narrative leads to problems. Starting with the temporality of "the self" as a means to investigate narrative identity may lead to openings and new questions surrounding "the self".

Taylor and Ricoeur: A Summary.

Implicit in the discussion thus far are two arguments - a weak and a strong version of the claim that narrative identity is mistaken. The weak version argues that, while it may be a useful approach to understand much of our sense of self, narrative identity is not as "inescapable" or "indestructible" as Taylor and Ricoeur suggest. This is particularly relevant to Taylor who seems to deliberately occlude moments of transition, crisis, conversion and liminal periods in general. In doing so his attempt to construct a communitarian self sensitive to the demands of otherness and difference is scuppered by a lurking ethnocentrism. The debate is closed off in a manner characteristic of the "traditionalist" resolve to turn a blind eye to one's own assumptions.

I am aware, however, that this could have been argued without reference to the formulation "what I am in relation to what I am". Does this obscure more than it reveals? Initially, the formulation arises out of Taylor's own insistence upon narrative structure as containing only the two elements of being and becoming mentioned above; "what I am in relation to what I project to become and what I have become". There appeared a prima facie case to look at "what I am in relation to what I am". Furthermore, this proves to be illuminating in highlighting the weaknesses of Taylor's account, particularly from the perspective of periods of liminality where the self is no longer and not yet fixed by a set of structured narratives. The formulation, therefore, elicits the potential for a conception of the self that doesn't insist upon strong narrative continuity. In other words, it is not a narratively structured formulation, it creates a problematic sense of self irrespective of a "story". If this alone is achieved then Taylor is wrong to place as much emphasis as he does on narrative frameworks. The force of the construction "what I am in relation to what I am" is also to be found in the way that it links into the discussion of Ricoeur.

Ricoeur, in contrast to Taylor, accepts that a person may experience narrative breaks (periods of liminality) but asserts that such moments should only reinforce our need to conceive of the unity of the self and the indestructibility of narrative structures. On the one hand, I argued in a vein that continued the critique of Taylor; Ricoeur, while recognising moments of liminality, doesn't construe such moments adequately. They are only thought of as "after the fact" phenomena and the essentially paradoxical character of such moments is, therefore, occluded. However, a stronger claim can be imputed regarding my critique of narrative identity. Putting it simply, the sense of narrative structure proposed by Ricoeur as integral to the unity of the self fundamentally misconstrues the nature of human existence. This claim requires that we assume the sense of temporality implicit at moments of crisis - its paradoxical and problematic character - is paradigmatic of the temporality in which we are embroiled at every moment of our lives. The narrative structure imputed by Taylor and Ricoeur, in other words, is radically out of step with the transience of each present moment. It is not merely that narrative structures exclude specific aspects of our experience but that they can not fully account for the "temporality of time". It is this claim that would open up the full effect of a discussion of liminality and the self. The self would be viewed as, to some degree, permanently in transition. This strong claim is, though, only an undercurrent in the above discussion. Without bringing the debate to a close, in the following section I shall look at another account of the self which incorporates the radical sense of temporality that this strong claim requires.

Nancy and the Ipseity of Presence

The "ipseity of presence" as a way of conceptualising the self occurs in Jean-Luc Nancy's "Introduction" to the collection of essays, Who Comes After The

Subject?⁶⁷ To begin to understand the relevance of the term one can break it down into its two constituent parts. "Ipseity" is taken in a very similar way to Ricoeur's use of the term "ipse", namely it refers to the identity of a self in distinction to a mathematical or logical identity. However, there is an important shift of emphasis in the fact that they use different grammatical forms. Ricoeur's "ipse", as he tried to suggest in his essay, is in some sense a fixed and a given that survives all crises. Nancy's "ipseity" should really be read as "ipseity of" thus indicating a motion or a point of time from which the "ipse" proceeds. The "ipse" in this sense is given as belonging to a movement, a quality or mark in time and space. Initially, therefore, "ipseity of" helps situate us in the point of crisis that had to be excluded from the narrative "ipse"; it places our thought in the time of becoming. This may not be an infinite time, but it is a time without end, or with ever shifting end; it is liminal time.

It is clear that "of" must be "of something", and in this case it is of "presence". What is this notion "of presence"? Presence, as Nancy remarks, "takes place, that is to say it comes into presence".⁶⁸ Presence is the "place" that can only "take place". It is not the site of being, its disposition is not to posit but rather "it is that which comes indefinitely to itself, never stops coming, arriving". The "of presence" indicates the origins of a never beginning process. In "the ipseity of presence" we find that the subject must never be thought of as a subject unto itself. It is folly to think that I establish "I", that I can resolve my identity in a "dialectic" of ipse and idem or that I engender myself in the "I" that is my narrative framework. The power of Nancy's construction is its ability to face the "pathological" head on, to redraw the lines of what we are allowed to speak about. Not in some ultimate sense, but in a sense that must itself be on-going.

⁶⁷ E. Cadava, P. Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds), Who Comes After the Subject?, Routledge, London, 1991.

⁶⁸ Nancy, "Introduction", p7.

This must be the case given that we can not be "presence to ourselves"; "there is no one that is One".⁶⁹ But can we be presence to itself? Is this not the way that the pathological, the crises driven, can become the centre of the frame? Is this not the way that the narrative structure of our lives can be pushed into the realm of the Other? Yes, it is. But what is the use, if the only use is to find the liminal point and exploit it. The methodology of the "ipseity of presence" does not, necessarily, lead to presence becoming presence unto itself in a circle that could only enclose and exclude. The idea of "the ipseity of presence" does not, in other words, reduce everything to the pathological. Rather it is presence not becoming anything unto itself except the simple description of "presence to". In this way presence is not seen to engender presence (as I engendered "I") rather presence exists to engender the indeterminate process of becoming. Presence is not analogous to "property".

The "property" of narrative identity is the after the fact control of the at-the-time inexplicable. Property, in this example, is the essence imbued in the question "who?". It is the "I" that is the "who?", the "who?" that is the "I". In an interview with Jacques Derrida, Nancy asks; "is not the interrogative "who?"...determinative? By which I mean that it predetermines...a response from someone, from some one."⁷⁰ The narrative property is the question "who?". It is the transcendental presupposition of their thought that is a law unto itself. It cannot be removed from their thought, Ricoeur is open about this as we saw. "Who?" is the assumption that situates the humanity of the narrative approach in this thing called a human, a describable thing, in a framework or a self referential ipse, that ultimately we can grasp.

⁶⁹ Nancy, "La Comparution/The Compearance: from the Existence of 'Communism' to the Community of Existence", trans. Tracy B. Strong, Political Theory, vol.20, 1992, pp371-398.

⁷⁰ Nancy, "'Eating Well', or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", Who Comes After the Subject? pp96-119.

Narrative identity is a lively enough concept for it still to be worth exploring,⁷¹ and therein lies the interest of the work of Taylor and Ricoeur. Yet it is not a concept that is all encompassing. It is not one that has no other, that is inescapable or predetermined in our very fabric; to think so is to make narrative the being of philosophy coming apparent in its own story; to think so is to dominate the other by placing it in the field of the pathological where it can be monitored in safety with the powerful eyes of the master concept; to think so is to forget history, or more subtly, to place history in one's own history thus excluding it from the domain; to think so is to indicate that the mark of the process can only exist in the regime of the sign.

Conclusion

Contemporary political thought places a great importance on constructing an idea of the self that captures the fragmentation of the (post)modern subject while retaining a critical and active agency. Taylor and Ricoeur, with their work on narrative identity, are part of the attempt to occupy this space. Yet, both writers ultimately fail to tread this middle path. Throughout this chapter the limits of the narrative approach have been brought to ^{the} fore; that is, the ways in which it, at least, excludes certain categories of human experience and, at most, fails to grasp the paradoxical and unbounded character of the way time bears upon "our selves". That Nancy offers a vocabulary that emphasises the immanent transience of our existence suggests a useful starting point for further investigation of "the self as ipseity". I am not wishing to suggest that Nancy has got it "right" but that his philosophical grammar of selfhood opens up new avenues within the work of Ricoeur and Taylor. In this context, such a claim can be no more than bald assertion. As I said in the introduction, though, one of my aims is to create

⁷¹ For a useful discussion of narratives in "critical psychology" see; Mark Freeman, Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative, Routledge, London, 1993.

openings for the incorporation of "obtuse" texts into current debates. Solving "the problem of the self" is not on the agenda.

In the next chapter a similar goal is intended - to criticise established conceptions of linguistic communication in contemporary political thought and suggest an alternative source of inspiration in the French tradition; in this case, the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It is also a chance to see that the concept of liminality functions not only at the level of epochal conceptions of the present, or around concepts of the self but also in the very workings of communication.

CHAPTER FOUR
UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND THE IMMANENT TRANSIENCE OF
COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Introduction

In this chapter I shall examine some current debates on the character of communication, specifically relating these debates to my earlier discussions of liminality. I shall concentrate on the thought of Jurgen Habermas and his project aimed at outlining a "universal pragmatics of communicative action". I shall examine whether or not such a conception of linguistic interaction can shed light on the processes of transition that have been highlighted in previous chapters. Or, to put it another way, is it possible that the problem of the liminal in Foucault, suggested at the end of chapter one, can be overcome by the incorporation of a Habermasian account of communication? Is it possible, as Nancy Fraser has put it, that Foucault's "empirical insights" can be retained while his "normative confusions" are reformulated?¹ Is a broadly Habermasian project the most appropriate way to achieve this, as Thomas McCarthy and Stephen White suggest?² To what extent can my critique of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical work as inquiries that lack an analytic of the liminal, be accommodated by a reconstruction of the universals of communicative action? Finally, can Foucault's history of the present be given a critical edge that will engender a "regulative ideal"³ from which to judge the present and conceive of a more rational future?

¹ See "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions" in Nancy Fraser Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Late-Capitalist Social Theory Polity Press, London, 1989, pp17-34.

² See Thomas McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School"; and Stephen White "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory", American Political Science Review, vol. 80, 1986, pp421-432. White puts the case very clearly; "Habermas's work provides a framework that can incorporate many of Foucault's key ideas without at the same time leading us into a conceptual cul de sac", p421.

³ McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason", p456.

The importance of Habermas in creating a critical discourse around Foucault's work can not be underestimated. All too often commentators sympathetic to Foucault have either ignored all together, or summarily dismissed, the impact of critical theory on his work - no doubt due to Foucault's unwillingness to enter into the debates himself.⁴ For example, in the otherwise excellent special issue of Philosophy and Social Criticism entitled "The Final Foucault: Studies on Michel Foucault's Last Works", there is only one mention of Habermas's critical response to Foucault, that is, Thomas Flynn who describes Habermas as a thinker who proposes "some kind of transcendental (re)turn", a return which lacks any credibility to those familiar with Foucault's thought.⁵ Even granting the character of Foucault's later works and the many diverse issues it invokes, such banal caricatures and omissions do nothing to enhance the debate between critical theory and poststructuralism. Moreover, where careful debate has taken place it has proved to be revealing,⁶ and where Foucauldian responses to this set of critics has occurred they are similarly illuminating⁷.

⁴ See, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview" and "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault", both in The Foucault Reader, for brief discussions by Foucault of his relation to Habermas and his approach to engaging in "polemics".

⁵ See, Thomas Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France (1984)", in Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 12, 1987, p229. I would also like to mention Foucault by Gilles Deleuze as an excellent reconstruction of the various Foucauldian problematics, but one that omits explicit reference to Foucault's Anglo-American reception (much of which is inspired by Habermas). As I hope to show, however, Deleuze's thought (through Foucault) offers a promising challenge to Habermasian criticisms; a challenge that contains an immanent political project that I shall explore at the end of this chapter and in the last chapter via Foucault.

⁶ I am thinking here of the exchange between Habermas and Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in Foucault: A Critical Reader, David Couzens Hoy (ed), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, where the discussion of Foucault's reading of Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" helps clarify many points of contact. I say this despite McCarthy's suggestion that Dreyfus and Rabinow are "misleading on key points" of Habermas's position; "The Critique of Impure Reason" p466 n34. I shall return to this debate towards the end of the next chapter. For a different perspective, Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, gives a sound overview of the debates with an important discussion of the implications for feminist discourses.

⁷ A useful book in this respect is Domination and Power, Peter Miller, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987. Two good articles are, Jon Simmons, "From Resistance to Polaesthetics: Politics After Foucault", Philosophy and Social Criticism vol. 17, 1991, pp41-56; and T Carlos Jaques, "Whence Does the Critic Speak? A Study of Foucault's Genealogy", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 17, 1991, pp325-344.

With this context mapped out, I wish to return to the specific problem examined below: can we give a universal pragmatic account of experiences of transition and becoming, the experience of liminality? If this can be shown to be the case then the critique of Foucault in the first chapter, and the explorations of liminality that followed in the subsequent chapters, would have to be viewed, to some extent, as a derivation of the Habermasian critique. I hope to show, however, that this is not the case. To explore the issues I shall first elucidate the context and content of Habermas's theory, noting some general criticisms and his replies along the way. Secondly, the idea of the immanent transience of communicative action will be introduced. Thirdly, the critical impact of this conception will be highlighted in the context of the debate between Habermas and Searle on the requirements of a general theory of communication. Fourthly, the idea of "immanent transience" is explored through Deleuze and Guattari's work on linguistics.⁸ Lastly, I shall relate the discussion back to the larger critical context mentioned above; that is, the issues involved in conceptualising a basis for social criticism.⁹

⁸ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, especially section four.

⁹ At this point I feel driven to explain the relation between Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault. Why is it that in framing the debates of this section around Foucault and Habermas I have now turned to the work of Deleuze and Guattari? On this three points can be raised. First, the works of Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault exhibit many similarities, similarities that they themselves frequently acknowledged. For example, Foucault's "Preface" to Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia trans. Robert Huxley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, is very generous in its praise of their work. Moreover, Foucault has gone so far as to suggest that philosophically speaking the end of this century will be known as "Deleuzian". In the work of Deleuze and Guattari the compliments have been reciprocated; for example, see "Intellectuals and Power", Language, Counter-Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault. Secondly, and more specifically regarding the character of language, we find Deleuze and Guattari explicitly citing Foucault as an influence (A Thousand Plateaus, p66, p530-531 n39, p536-537 n16). Massumi, in A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari M.I.T. Press, London, 1992, p46, states: "As the frequent references to Foucault were meant to indicate, Deleuze and Guattari's theories of language are closer to Foucault's than to any other thinkers". In this context, however, the arguments of Deleuze and Guattari are more useful than Foucault's because they come into more direct contact with those of Habermas and Searle. Finally, and more generally, I would suggest that to broaden out the terms of the interaction between the differing schools of thought at issue is a productive step in the all too often polarised philosophical community.

Habermas and Critical Theory

Thomas McCarthy, in his introduction to Communication and the Evolution of Society¹⁰, succinctly summarises the Habermasian "research project". He claims it has three levels:

The ground level consists of a general theory of communication - or as Habermas calls it a universal pragmatics - at the next level this theory serves as the foundation for a general theory of socialisation in the form of a theory of the acquisition of communicative competence; finally at the highest level, which builds on those below it, Habermas sketches a theory of social evolution which he views as a reconstruction of historical materialism.¹¹

My primary concern is with the first of these levels, the level of communicative action, of a universal pragmatics.¹² To begin though, I must briefly explain why Habermas came to make his "linguistic turn", and the importance of this manoeuvre in the context of critical theory.

The Frankfurt School for Social Research was established in 1923, and the leading members of this institute were to become known as the Frankfurt School.¹³ One of these thinkers, Max Horkheimer, coined the term "critical theory" to account for their

¹⁰ See Jurgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, Heinemann, London, 1979, trans. Thomas McCarthy. "Translators Introduction" ppvii-xxiv.

¹¹ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, pxvii.

¹² Habermas refers interchangeably to universal pragmatics and formal pragmatics. In more recent works he has taken to referring to formal (rather than universal) pragmatics presumably because of the possible misinterpretations raised by the term "universal". I shall use the terms interchangeably below though with the recognition that "universal" is understood in the "post-conventional" sense Habermas places on this term.

¹³ For a full account of the history of the Frankfurt School there is M Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950, Heinemann, London, 1973.

approach, and he opposed it to the "traditional theory" that had preceded it.¹⁴ Briefly, the innovative character of Frankfurt School critical theory emerged in the way that it distanced itself from contemporary Marxist orthodoxies.¹⁵ First, they sought to rethink and explore Marx's writings from a philosophical perspective, a perspective that firmly rooted his thought in the German philosophical tradition. In this way the Frankfurt theorists tried to avoid the "economism" of the classical Marxist approach, one that reduces social/cultural/political spheres to superstructural effects of the economic relations of production. A clear example of this non-reductionist attitude can be found in Horkheimer's essay "Authority and the Family":

To understand why a society functions in a certain way, why it is unstable or dissolves...demands a knowledge of the contemporary psychic make-up of men in various social groups. This in turn requires a knowledge of how their character has been formed in interaction with all the shaping cultural forces of the time.¹⁶

Such an explicit appeal to the autonomous role of cultural spheres, and the character of a human agent's interaction with them, is a markedly non-Marxist account (if we take Marxism to involve the premise of economic reductionism). It was an attitude that also manifested itself in the work of Adorno on the aesthetic. Adorno refused to apply "a systematic position already established to problems of art and of the aesthetic judgement", preferring instead to allow the aesthetic an autonomous role in a shifting philosophical analysis.¹⁷

¹⁴See M. Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", trans. Matthew J O'Connell, Critical Theory: Selected Essays, Seabury, New York, 1972, p188-243.

¹⁵ See, R. Bubner's Modern German Philosophy Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981. See also J.B. Thompson's Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981.

¹⁶ M. Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family" trans. Matthew J O'Connell, in Horkheimer, Critical Theory pp54-55.

¹⁷ See Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p182. This must, of course, be tempered by the fact that both Horkheimer and Adorno still gave a vast importance to the role of the economy in the modern forms of alienation that they studied.

Partly as a consequence of their conception of autonomous social and political spheres, the second break with orthodox Marxism came with their critique of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and the corresponding assertion of a critical and enlightened self-emancipatory process. They no longer viewed the transition to a more rational social order as an inevitable product of contradictions within the economic base. They proposed instead that self-reflection in an expressly philosophical manner can overcome the totalising effects of alienation in the modern world. Of course, this must take the form of *critical* self-reflection (as opposed to the self-reflection of a Cartesian cogito).¹⁸ Talking of this type of critical reflective agent, Horkheimer outlines the characteristics required:

He exercises an aggressive critique not only against the conscious defenders of the status quo but also against distracting, conformist or utopian tendencies within his own household¹⁹

In this way the Marxist problem of how to simultaneously account for the inexorable march of history towards revolution and the need to endow the proletariat with a revolutionary consciousness that must be developed, is transcended into the concept of critical self-emancipation and enlightenment. It is in terms of this debate, the debate over the relation of theory and practice, that Habermas's place in the tradition of critical theory can be outlined.

In his inaugural address at Frankfurt entitled "Knowledge and Human Interests",²⁰ Habermas sought to reconstitute critical theory as a project that disavows the claims

¹⁸ Horkheimer, Critical Theory, cites the beginning of traditional philosophy, in its modern form, with Descartes' Discourse on Method.

¹⁹ Horkheimer, Critical Theory, p216.

²⁰ J. Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective", appendix to Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. J. Shapiro, Heinemann, London, 1971, pp301-317.

of pure theory, recognises the practical intent of all theoretical claims (as Horkheimer had done before him) yet also seeks to create a new conception of critique that differs in some essential aspects from Horkheimer's approach. Responding to Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological grounding of an "interest free" scientific approach to understanding (which he characterises as a modern variant of the Cartesian traditional theory criticised by Horkheimer) Habermas restates his position as a thinker firmly within the tradition of critical theory. However, in criticising Husserl's search for "pure theory", Habermas also begins to explicate a more complex model of the relations between theory and interests than that offered by Horkheimer's dichotomy of traditional and critical theory. To this end, Habermas conceptualises three differing "knowledge-constitutive interests", the technical, practical and emancipatory. There is no need to go into the details of these concepts,²¹ except to say that in outlining a more subtle approach Habermas illustrates the weakness of Horkheimer and Adorno's original formulation which he viewed as tending inevitably towards pessimism and resignation in the face of modern forms of power. The sharp dichotomy of traditional and critical theory offered no way of adequately relating critique to the dominatory and totalising forces they described so well. The divorce of the two seemed so thorough that it paradoxically lacked a grounding in anything but philosophy and theory, thus placing it on the margins of the traditional thought they tried to get away from.²² It required a new conceptualisation, one that situated critical theory at the very nub of differing interests and that could bring to light an emancipatory project, rather than a "resignative" one.

Although Habermas's reconceptualisation of the relation between knowledge and interests allowed a greater subtlety than Horkheimer and Adorno's account, the

²¹ Apart from the text itself, Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, an excellent commentary can be found in T. McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984.

²² A useful account of this paradox is given in A. Honneth, The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in Critical Social Theory, trans. K. Baynes, M.I.T. Press, London, 1991, pp99-103.

problem of trying to justify an emancipatory project still remained. Was it not the case that Habermas's critical attitude entailed a simple restatement of a meta-language which he claimed was "beyond" the oppressive interests that dominate other forms of knowledge? As White has put it, Habermas was still open to the criticism that "his scheme constitutes a mode of philosophical foundationalism"; that is, a form of traditional theory.²³ In this case the enlightened self-reflection of critical theory was no further on, still caught in rarefied philosophical discussions unable to gain a practical intent. Habermas, of course, realised this. As a way to deal with these problems he turned to an analysis of contemporary theories of language. In this respect he hoped to provide a grounding for the unity of theory and practice:

The interest in emancipation is not merely before the mind, it can be understood a priori. What elevates us out of nature, that is to say, is the one fact that we can be acquainted with in its nature; language. With its structure emancipation is posited for us. With the first sentence, the intention of a universal and unconstrained consensus is unambiguously articulated.²⁴

Language, in its very internal structure, offers a way to go beyond "the illusions of pure theory" in maintaining the "actuality" of critical thought in such a manner that unfettered consensual communication independent of external constraints is "universally and at all times possible". This very early formulation of Habermas's linguistic turn was to grow immeasurably in its subtlety. I shall try to map out these changes in what follows.

Work and Interaction

²³ S. White, The Recent Work of Jurgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p27.

²⁴ I have used the translation offered by Bubner in Modern German Philosophy. For Shapiro's translation, where "autonomy and responsibility" is used in place of emancipation, see Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, p312.

At the root of Habermas's reconstitution of critical theory is the distinction he makes between work and interaction. For Habermas, and in distinction to the early Marx who dwelt upon the creative potential of labour, work is constituted solely by the instrumental domination of nature; "governed technical rules based on empirical knowledge".²⁵ In this respect, work is the means of fulfilling the continuation of humanity through the appropriation of an objective, external nature. Similarly, communication is also a form of activity necessary for the reproduction of humanity as a social species. Yet, in contrast to his conception of labour, Habermas views communication as a broadly hermeneutic-interpretative act that operates on an intersubjective level of social praxis, a level which aims at finding the inherent meaning in a given system of rules and norms of behaviour. He sums up the distinction, in an early form, in "Technology and Science as Ideology":

While the acceptance of technical rules and strategies depends upon the validity of empirically true or analytically correct statements, the validity of social norms is grounded only in the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding of intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations.²⁶

In this irreducible dichotomy lies the root of the critical standard that Habermas aims to bring to bear on present ideologies. In distinguishing instrumental and communicative action he has laid "the foundation" for a critical response to the all embracing dominatory forces outlined by Horkheimer and Adorno. It is the character of this foundation that I shall examine below.²⁷ As a preliminary, however, I wish to mention Bubner's critique of Habermas's distinction between labour and interaction.

²⁵ See Habermas's "Technology and Science as Ideology", Toward a Rational Society trans. J. Shapiro, Beacon Press, 1970, pp91-92. Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p191, gives a genealogy of this concept of labour. He describes it as "developed by the early Hegel and reinterpreted by Marx in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" then contaminated "with Weber's theory of purposive rational action". McCarthy also elaborates the subtleties of the labour/interaction distinction; McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p24.

²⁶ Habermas, Toward A Rational Society, p92.

In Modern German Philosophy, Bubner criticises Habermas's account of the distinction between labour and interaction as "essentially idealist abbreviations" of the reality that he seeks to describe.²⁸ Tracing the origin of the distinction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and the discussion of the master/slave dialectic, Bubner suggests that Hegel realised that the intersubjectivity generated by the growing self-consciousness of the slave (as a result of labour) is of a *qualitatively* different basis than "the uncertain acceptance of the temporary roles by temporary partners".²⁹ Habermas, by contrast, "avoids the decisive difference of level"³⁰ because the transition from labour to communicative interaction is insufficiently thought through.

It looks very much as if the self-same subjects who initially came under the law of external determination and object-relations have the possibility of going over to a social condition defined in terms of self-determination and subject-relations...I am concerned with the question whether in the transition the subjects remain *the same subjects* to whom, quite simply, two alternative forms of self-activity and development of powers are open...Habermas to a large extent suppresses these differences because he is seeking a *single* all embracing social model.³¹

Bubner's criticism greatly under-estimates the subtlety of Habermas's approach. As is demonstrated by some of Habermas's more sensitive critics, for example Honneth and McCarthy,³² Bubner presents an incomplete picture of the issues at stake. Moreover, regardless of the validity of this criticism, as it stands it would require significant

²⁷ The term "foundation" is used here as a short-hand for Habermas's "post-metaphysical" grounding of universalism in the social sciences. I do not propose to explicitly enter into this debate.

²⁸ Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p192.

²⁹ Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p194.

³⁰ Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p195.

³¹ Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p195 (Bubner's italics).

³² See Honneth, The Critique of Power, pp250-251 and 291-293 and McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p29 for a more thorough examination of this distinction in Habermas.

modification given Habermas's recent work in which the labour/interaction dichotomy is substantially re-worked (as we shall see). However, Bubner's approach can begin to shed light on a major flaw in Habermas's thought. The central claim of Bubner's argument, namely that Habermas is ill-equipped to conceptualise the theoretical implications involved in transition, is valid. Although Bubner's accusation is of a very sweeping character and linked very closely to interpretations of the German philosophical tradition, I hope to show how a criticism of this kind can also be applied to Habermas's recent work on the universal pragmatics of communication. In this regard the critical stance that opens up the possibility of a transition to a more rational future shall be questioned on the basis that Habermas's "reconstruction" of a linguistic foundation for critical transitions is problematic. Thus, I shall try to explore how Bubner's very broad claim can function in a very specific sense in Habermas's later work. I shall return to this idea below. Before this can be carried out, we must examine the shift in Habermas's work from the labour/interaction dichotomy to the distinction between purposive-rational action and communicative action.

The Linguistic Turn

Accepting McCarthy's clarification of the terms "purposive-rational" and "communicative",³³ one can elaborate these concepts as follows. Purposive-rational action, closely defined, refers to forms of action where systems of instrumental, means-end, technological reason are the predominant principles in operation. Such action is typified by the technical domination that humans exert over objective nature. On a broader scale, however, purposive-rational action also includes strategic action, that is, action that occurs at an intersubjective level within norms or rules of behaviour, but that is also determined by the pursuit of individual interest over consensual agreement. Social interaction, thinly defined by Habermas, is

³³ McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, pp24-25.

communicative action; action oriented towards mutual understanding and consensus. Of course, on a broader scale, strategic action is also social interaction, with certain qualifications.³⁴

With this reconceptualisation of the work/interaction model the innovative aspect of Habermas's approach, the linguistic turn in his critical theory, becomes apparent. Moreover, the critical nub of his approach is now evident. It is crucial for the Habermasian project of reconstruction that each of these domains is thoroughly and self-reflexively investigated. More specifically, as a critical perspective on the historical development of knowledge in the modern period, it is imperative that Habermas delineates the boundaries of communicative action. In this way he is able to formulate a standard - the regulative ideal that McCarthy argues is missing from Foucault - from which to judge forms of strategic action and domination. As Habermas puts it, if critical theory "accepts as its task the explanation of systematically distorted communication, then it must have the mastery of the idea of undistorted communication or reasonable discourse".³⁵ Stressing the importance of this, McCarthy suggests that "the success or failure of such an effort cannot be a matter of indifference to a social theory defined with a practical intent".³⁶

In turning to outline the characteristics of such "reasonable discourse", it is first necessary to show the need for a *pragmatic* approach to this task. The linguistic turn in philosophy has taken many forms, yet one of its most persistent aspects has been the search for the components of language that would allow a logical analysis of

³⁴ I have used the typology outlined clearly by McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p29-

30. This is repeated by Habermas in The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society, Heinnemann, London, 1984, p285.

³⁵ Quoted in J. Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics", Habermas: Critical Debates J.B. Thompson and D. Held (eds), MacMillan Press, London, 1982.

³⁶ McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p273.

language. The discipline of semantics is a typical expression of this desire to delimit the "object-domain" of linguistics by abstracting the "performative" features of speech. The idea, developed by Chomsky, that to speak a language one must know the formal rules of that language before one subsequently speaks it, is an example of the reductionist tendency in much of modern linguistics. It is a tendency that Habermas wishes to argue against:

This abstraction of language from the use of language in speech (langue versus parole), which is made in both the logical and structuralist analysis of language, is meaningful. Nonetheless, this methodological step is not sufficient reason for the view that the pragmatic dimension of language from which one abstracts is beyond formal analysis.³⁷

Habermas is concerned that many approaches to language and communication reduce the performance aspect of speech to an empirical side-show, while simultaneously privileging only one aspect of language, namely the ability to follow certain rules of that language. It is part of the Habermasian project to redress the balance between language and speech in the study of communication: "like the elementary units of language (sentences), the elementary units of speech (utterances) can be analysed in the methodological attitude of a reconstructive science."³⁸

The most promising starting point for such a reconstruction, suggests Habermas, is the work of Austin and Searle.³⁹ The importance of this "ordinary language approach" is the emphasis it places on the speech act as the primary unit of linguistic interaction. As Austin pointed out, "to say something is also to do something". This realisation balances the need for a logical analysis of the means of representation in

³⁷ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p6.

³⁸ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p6.

³⁹ The primary texts here are Austin, How to do Things with Words, Blackwell, London, 1962, and Searle Speech Acts., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969.

language with the need for a pragmatic perspective on the act of speaking. Even if the speaker appears to be describing a state of affairs, a situation that might suggest a logical analysis, Austin claims that in also *doing* something the speaker is performing an utterance irreducible to the formal structure of the sentence spoken.

For Habermas, this move to an examination of speech acts is crucial in the formulation of a pragmatic analysis of language, and also distances his approach from the "abstractive fallacy" of logical semantics. Yet, he is equally careful to distance his work from the empirical analysis of Austin and Searle. Their concern with particular speech acts does not, he suggests, "push through the level of accidental contexts to general and unavoidable presuppositions".⁴⁰ Thus in trying to tread the thin line between the logical and the empirical approach he suggests that we view his project as a universal pragmatics, an attempt to reconstruct the pragmatic elements of speech in such a way that it will bring to light the universal presuppositions of all everyday speech acts.⁴¹

To be clear, a speech act is "not a symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of a symbol, word or sentence; it is the 'production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions', the employment of a sentence in an utterance".⁴² Moreover, the "standard form" of speech acts can be examined in terms of their "illocutionary force" and their "propositional component".⁴³ The illocutionary force of a speech act is

⁴⁰ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p8.

⁴¹ A further distinction of some importance here is that between a universal approach and a transcendental one. Habermas, while holding an enormous amount of respect for the work of Karl-Otto Apel, does make a keen distinction between Apel's transcendental analysis and his own. For the distinction see Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, pp21-25. In the following discussion the possibility that Habermas fails to offer a non-transcendental account of everyday communication will be raised.

⁴² McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p275. The quote within the quote is taken from Searle, Speech Acts, p16.

⁴³ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p36.

exhibited when, for example, a person makes a promise by uttering a promise, puts forward an assertion by uttering an assertion, issues a warning in uttering a warning.⁴⁴ This is the foundation of our conception that to say something is to do something; a foundation, moreover, for all forms of speech acts. This may not be immediately apparent in the "surface structure" of the speech act but, claims Habermas, can always be unearthed in the "deep structure" that underlies it.⁴⁵

The propositional component of a speech act is the part of the utterance that, first, names or refers to an object about which the speaker wants to say something and secondly, contains a "predicative expression" that places the speaker in a relation to that object.⁴⁶ The importance of this distinction for Habermas is that the propositional content of a speech act can be "differentiated out" from the illocutionary force of the same utterance. For example, I may utter "This is my chair", in which case the propositional components of reference and predication are easily recognisable ("chair" and "my"), yet the illocutionary force of the utterance is indeterminate until it is put in the context of a speech act; I may be asserting, joking, commanding and so on. The conclusion Habermas draws from this is that there must, therefore, exist two levels on which a speaker and a hearer can interact in any given speech situation, namely the level of objects referred to and the level of intersubjectivity which generates the communication between speaker and hearer.

Yet, with this conception of a speech act comes the question of how exactly the speaker and hearer come to form an intersubjective relationship which allows them to communicate? Once again distancing himself from Austin, who he characterises as stopping at the "trivial" distinction of illocutionary force and propositional content,

⁴⁴ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p34.

⁴⁵ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p36.

⁴⁶ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p36.

Habermas wishes to look further towards the "peculiarly generative power of speech acts". This power, he goes on, "consists in the fact that the speaker, in performing a speech act, can influence the hearer in such a way that the latter can take up an interpersonal relation with him."⁴⁷ Yet, how does this generative power implicit in all speech acts operate to forge a relationship between the speaker and hearer? What, as Habermas puts it in The Theory of Communicative Action, is the "binding force" inherent in an utterance?⁴⁸ Moreover, can this illocutionary aspect be given a universal grounding and a "rational motivation" that will serve as the foundation for a new form of critical theory? This pragmatic analysis is in mind when Habermas says:

I have proposed that we do not set illocutionary role over against propositional content as an irrational force, but conceive of it as the component that specifies which validity claim a speaker is raising with his utterance, how he is raising it, and for what.⁴⁹

On the one hand, Habermas's account of the source of the binding force of many speech acts is straightforward, that is, in the case of "institutionally bound speech acts". In this case the generative power of speech acts is located in the context of other norms and routines that constitute the "normative background" of the speech act. An example of this is the utterance "I do" in a marriage ceremony, which gains its binding force from being part of a larger series of conventions that surround the ritual of marriage. Yet, such an account of the binding force of speech is clearly insufficient for Habermas if he wants to move beyond Austin's empiricism towards a universal theory. Thus Habermas turns in more detail "to paradigmatic cases of

⁴⁷ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, pp34-35. In Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p295 he accuses Austin of being "fixated on the model of institutionally bound speech acts" and therefore unable to conceptualise the bond inherent in all speech acts". I shall say more on this below.

⁴⁸ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, pp278 and 302, for example.

⁴⁹ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p278.

linguistically explicit action that is oriented to reaching understanding", that is, to the paradigm case of communicative action.⁵⁰

In this respect we can delimit the question more clearly; in the case of institutionally unbound speech acts⁵¹ what is the source of the binding force that forges the intersubjective relation between speaker and hearer? In his own words, "in the case of institutionally unbound speech acts...illocutionary force cannot be traced back directly to the binding force of the normative context".⁵² In the paradigm case, suggests Habermas, the binding force of intersubjectivity is located in the validity-claims generated in every speech act:

In the final analysis, the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice-versa, because speech-act-typical commitments are connected with cognitively testable validity claims - that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a rational basis.⁵³

⁵⁰ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p35.

⁵¹ The distinction invoked here between institutionally bound and unbound speech acts is far from unproblematic. I shall briefly examine this distinction via a discussion of White's analysis of the debate between Habermas and Derrida on serious and unserious utterances (White, The Recent Work of Jurgen Habermas, pp34-35). White is in "no doubt that a clever Derridean could discover a way to deconstruct Habermas' position" [that there is a distinction between serious and unserious utterances], however "there are good reasons for suspecting that deconstructionism, rather than being simply the revealer of all forms of metaphysics, is itself a concealed form of metaphysics". He goes on to argue that the Habermasian account gives "stronger insights into social action". I wish to suggest that the line of this argument seems peculiar in its retreat. In arguing that no ground can be given to eliminate deconstructionist approaches other than "stronger insights into social action", White is relying upon a concept of social action that is empirically/conceptually very dubious. Or to put it another way, what ground does White (or Habermas) have for a critical theory if the only ground that can be produced is that for the distinction of serious and unserious utterances to stand we must assume that we need a critical theory of society? The circularity of this argument is quite remarkable. Thus it seems that the only way of distinguishing institutionally bound and unbound utterances would be to rely on the argument that this is the only way we can achieve a critical stance on society. A similarly circular approach. Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, pp199-202 also recognised the circularity of Habermas's argument. I shall say more on this below; for the moment I shall accept the distinction. Yet, on the subject of Habermas and Derrida, I feel it is appropriate to mention that Christopher Norris has persuasively argued that Habermas (and thus to my mind White) have gravely mis-interpreted Derrida as a Rortyan pragmatist, while in fact he is in a long philosophical tradition of post-Kantian thought; see Norris, "Deconstruction, Post-modernism and Philosophy: Habermas on Derrida", What's Wrong with Post-modernism, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1990, pp46-76.

⁵² Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p62.

In Habermas's scheme there are four such testable validity claims inherent in all speech acts.⁵⁴ First, the speaker claims that the issued utterance is intelligible to the hearer. Secondly, it is claimed that the propositional content is true. Thirdly, a speaker implies that the performative element of the utterance is correct. Lastly, all speech acts imply a claim to sincerity on behalf of the speaker. These four validity claims constitute the background consensus, the implicit presuppositions of a "happy employment" of speech acts. For example, to return to my earlier example of a speech act, the utterance "This is my chair", we can conceive of this utterance "engaging" a hearer by its intelligibility, truth, correctness and on the basis of the speaker's sincerity. Conversely, the hearer may challenge any of these claims in the following way. First, the speaker's intelligibility can be challenged by asking, "What does that (utterance) mean?". Secondly, the speaker's claim to the truthfulness of the content can be raised by asking, "Is it really a (or your) chair?". Thirdly, the performative component of the utterance can be brought to the fore by questions like "Is it right to say this?". Lastly the sincerity of the speaker is at stake if the hearer asks, "Why should I believe that this is your chair?". To be clear, Habermas is not trying to examine the empirical contexts of speech acts, rather he is hoping to demonstrate that all speech acts exhibit the four-fold structure of validity claims just outlined. Moreover, the "reconstruction" of these universals provides the framework for the critical approach to society that he seeks. Any competent speaker⁵⁵ engages

⁵³ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p63 (italics removed).

⁵⁴ This refers to the project of formal pragmatics outlined in "What is Universal Pragmatics?", Communication and the Evolution of Society. In subsequent discussions Habermas has tended to refer to the validity claim to intelligibility as "grammatical well-formedness". This change may reflect Habermas's awareness that intelligibility is largely a matter of context - an utterance may be ungrammatical but intelligible in a given context. It may be, as Maeve Cooke has suggested, that Habermas does not take well-formedness to be "a condition that has to be met if understanding is to be possible, but that it is a strong idealization implicit in everyday communicative action"; Maeve Cooke, Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1994, n.90, p187. In the following discussion I shall adhere to the formulation of "What is Universal Pragmatics?" as the modifications do not affect the major thrust of the argument.

⁵⁵ On linguistic competence see Habermas, "Toward a theory of Communicative Competence", Recent Sociology, no.2, Hans Peter Dreitzel (ed), Macmillan, New York, 1970, pp114-48.

another by way of this common grounding, although the subtleties of his approach can not be gone into here.⁵⁶ Presently my concern is to show how this generates the Habermasian idea of an "ideal speech situation".

The ideal speech situation is the communicative arena defined by "pure intersubjectivity", that is, an arena where the engagement of the interlocutors is simply on the basis of an equal chance to contest the validity claims implicit in every discursive act.⁵⁷ All external forces such as institutional constraints are removed and "the unforced force of the better argument" is all that remains. In this way a "rationally motivated" agreement can be secured, an agreement, that is, that relies upon the mutual comprehension and consensus of not only those involved but that also warrants "that at all times and at all places, if only we enter into a discourse, a consensus can be arrived at under conditions which show the consensus to be grounded".⁵⁸

However, it is important to be clear on the status of this "symmetrical" communication. It is an "ideal"; that is, Habermas is fully aware that this description of communicative action is counterfactual to our everyday experiences of communication. Yet it is certainly not an ideal generated by a solipsistic reflection on the character of language, nor is it a utopian ideal. For Habermas, the ideal speech situation is "presupposed" in the very structure of communication:

⁵⁶ Habermas spends a lot of time in "What is Universal Pragmatics?" detailing the various "domains of reality", "modes of communication", types of speech act", "themes" and "general functions" of speech. A useful summary is given in Thompson and Held, Habermas: Critical Debates, table 6.1.

⁵⁷ It is important at this stage to distinguish between speech acts and discourse, as defined by Habermas. He suggests that the participants of a dialogue move into the discursive realm when they begin to question the validity claims inherent in their speech acts. Thus the discursive realm is a break with normal communication, in that the validity claims are regarded as problematic. As Habermas puts it: discourse consists in the "virtualisation of validity claims".

⁵⁸ Quoted in McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p308.

The ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor a mere construct, but rather an unavoidable supposition reciprocally made in discourse. The supposition can, but need not be, counterfactual; but even if it is made counterfactually, it is a fiction that is operatively effective in the process of communication⁵⁹

By way of summing up this introduction to Habermas's universal pragmatics, and to present it in its most recent formulation, I shall turn to explicitly examine perhaps the central claim involved, namely:

it can be shown that the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the original mode of language use, upon which indirect understanding, giving something to understand or letting something be understood, and the instrumental use of language in general are parasitic.⁶⁰

In order to demonstrate this Habermas turns to Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to the way that each speaker "expresses states of affairs; he says something".⁶¹ The illocutionary act is the performance of uttering a speech act. The perlocutionary act is the effect of the speaker on the hearer by uttering a speech act. Habermas sums up the distinctions with "the following catch phrases; to say something, to act in saying something, to bring about something through acting in saying something".⁶² The crucial distinction for Habermas is between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. While recognising that the distinction "has given rise to an extended controversy" he summarises the main points of difference in the following four ways.⁶³ Firstly, the illocutionary aspect of a speech act only suggests that the hearer "understand the

⁵⁹ Quoted in McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p310.

⁶⁰ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p288.

⁶¹ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p288.

⁶² Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p289.

⁶³ My aim here is simply to summarise his thought. More detail can be found in Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, pp290-293.

manifest content" of the speaker's utterance, whereas the perlocutionary aspect does not follow from the content of the utterance (it will be recognised here that we are reworking the distinction made above regarding illocutionary force and performative component). Secondly, any given speech act can yield the information for the success of an illocutionary act but not the success of a perlocutionary act which "goes beyond the speech act". Thirdly, and as a consequence of the previous two points, we can conceive of illocutionary acts as internal to speech, and perlocutionary acts as external to it. Lastly, it can thus be inferred that perlocutionary acts can be hidden in any given speech act, while an illocutionary act, to be successful, must be expressed. Taken together these arguments help confirm for Habermas that:

Perlocutionary effects, like the results of teleological actions generally, are intended under the description of states of affairs brought about through intervention in the world. By contrast, illocutionary results are achieved at the level of interpersonal relations on which participants in communication come to an understanding with one another about something in the world. In this sense they are not inner worldly but extra mundane. Illocutionary results appear in the life world to which the participants belong and which forms the background for their processes of reaching understanding. They cannot be intended under the description of causally produced effects.⁶⁴

In this way, Habermas argues that the illocutionary aspect of a speech act has priority over the perlocutionary effect. The teleological, perlocutionary, component of a speech act is only possible if the illocutionary background has been established. Thus it only remains for Habermas to make the following connection in order to show the priority of communicative action: "I have called the type of interaction in which all participants harmonise their individual plans of action with one another and thus pursue their illocutionary aims without reservation, communicative action."⁶⁵ In this

⁶⁴ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p293.

⁶⁵ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p294. Once again, however it is important to realise the differences between Austin and Habermas. Habermas accuses Austin of not recognising that the illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts were "different in type", confusing them instead with the context of the speech act. For Habermas, "the difference between a speech act and the

way Habermas is able to claim that the task of providing a critical ground upon which to overcome the difficulties of the early Frankfurt school theorists is well on the way.⁶⁶ The claim that we can reconstruct the purely intersubjective character of everyday speech is central to the idea that we can then spot the systematic distortions that Horkheimer and Adorno detailed so well. However, it is not a theory without its critics.

Abstractions and Standards

In turning to a critical appraisal of Habermas's universal pragmatics, I must first point out that many thinkers have criticised his conception of communication.⁶⁷ My aim is not to chart all of the possible lines of reply to Habermas but to follow one particular line that for my purposes proves illuminating. The key protagonists that I shall draw upon are Bubner (as mentioned already), Thompson and Searle.

In Modern German Philosophy, Bubner articulates a clear criticism of Habermas's reconstructive project. He chides Habermas for proposing an ideal dialogue with no grounding at all in actual discourse; "the counterfactual postulate of ideal conditions is nothing more than an abstract antithesis to the actual situation".⁶⁸ In this way, suggests Bubner, Habermas has robbed his project of the very foundation he sought to give it. The "abstractness" of this universal pragmatic approach, the necessary "fiction" of an ideal speech situation, remove "those substantive criteria on which a

context of interaction that it constitutes through achieving a co-ordination of the plans of different actors can be recognised the more easily if one is not fixated on the model of institutionally bound speech acts, as Austin was", p295.

⁶⁶ I say this with some reservation, given that there is much more to the Habermasian project than the reconstruction of a universal pragmatic of communication, as I pointed out above.

⁶⁷ It would be impractical to give a list of these criticisms; one can follow them through the literature. However, I can point to the range of criticism which goes from the sympathetic work of Apel and McCarthy to the wholly unsympathetic, and unargued responses of some post-structuralists. In the middle are liberals, linguists, Marxists etc..

⁶⁸ Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p190.

critique would have to be based".⁶⁹ Thus any "serious" questions which emerge in an actual dialogue can not really be dealt with because "the ideal dialogue turns out to be superfluous".⁷⁰ Bubner repeats this criticism in his essay "Habermas's Concept of Critical Theory":

Not with every sentence that we speak do we imply the 'general and unforced consensus'. Not all intersubjective relations in the medium of language lose their meaning if they do not conform to the pattern of equality. Habermas continually invokes the pragmatics of language as a starting point; but in compressing the entire spectrum of practical communication in society into the model of the seminar discussion in Humboldt's sketch for university reform, he is essentially abandoning his starting point.⁷¹

For Bubner the Habermasian project is not a reconstruction of actual pragmatic speech but simply the construction of an ideal intersubjective dialogue that cannot possibly be related to the practice of speech and discourse. Bubner is, in effect, charging Habermas with the Habermasian criticism of the early Frankfurt School - the critical yardstick proposed is a mere echo of traditional theoretical approaches to normative social criticism. As it stands, however, Bubner's criticism is off the point.

In his reply to Bubner, Habermas claims to be very "nervous" about such assertions. This nervousness springs from the fact that he has, on several occasions, denied that he is creating an abstract ideal which serves as a basis for a "rationalistic utopian society". Habermas argues, as I pointed out earlier, that "discourses are islands in the sea of practice, that is, improbable forms of communication; the everyday appeal to validity-claims implicitly points, however, to their possibility".⁷² Habermas is well

⁶⁹Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p190.

⁷⁰Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p190.

⁷¹ Thompson and Held, Habermas: Critical Debates, p52.

⁷² Thompson and Held, Habermas: Critical Debates, p235.

aware that communication based on the ideal of intersubjectivity is "diffuse, fleeting, occasional and fragile", yet it is precisely this recognition that gives the counterfactual element a "central place in everyday action", thus in Habermas's reconstruction of them. To accuse Habermas of proposing an idealisation is to neglect the amount of importance he gives to describing *everyday* language use. In this respect, Bubner is wide of the mark in his criticism. Yet, the intuition that Habermas's project is in some way abstractive of actual communication can be refined to make the critique more plausible. The first step on the way is to turn to Thompson's view of universal pragmatics.⁷³

Thompson, who accepts that Habermas is engaged in a reconstructive project as opposed to a process of idealisation, questions Habermas's claim that the universal presuppositions of actual speech acts can be deciphered through an analysis of the "standard form" of a speech act. We can recall that for Habermas every speech act involves raising four validity-claims, that is, truth, correctness, sincerity and intelligibility. It is this claim which bolsters Habermas's thesis that he can restrict formal pragmatic reconstructions to a standard form that incorporates these validity claims. However, it is also this claim that Thompson finds "implausible and misleading". Is it not the case, asks Thompson, that "reading a poem, telling a joke or greeting a friend" do not raise a validity claim to truth? Is not the "light-hearted activity of 'taking the mickey'" a case where the claim to sincerity is suspended? Indeed such an activity, argues Thompson, can only be operative when it is suspended. Thus, we can surmise that the required universality of Habermas's project is seriously in question:

So far as the justification for restricting the analysis to speech acts in the standard form remains problematic, then so to the extent to which

⁷³ Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics", J.B. Thompson and D. Held (eds), Habermas: Critical Debates, pp116-133.

Habermas's programme qualifies as a universal pragmatics must be held in doubt.⁷⁴

The same point is made by Thompson in his book Critical Hermeneutics, when he questions the need for an ideal speech situation. This is not because he feels that it operates outside actual discourse, but that it is not implicit in every speech act. This seems a more pertinent criticism than Bubner's, beginning as it does to find the core of Habermasian universal pragmatics.

Habermas's reply to these charges can be reconstructed as follows. First, in The Theory of Communicative Action Habermas suggests that one of the reasons for concentrating on the standard form of a speech act was that it was "expedient" to do so: "considerations of expediency suggest beginning analysis with idealised or pure cases of speech acts".⁷⁵ Of course, this on its own hardly constitutes sufficient reason for this decision. Thus Habermas argues that the "pure cases" that he analyses contain precisely the salient elements of speech acts necessary for the examination of communication. In this way, his "methodological decision to begin...analysis with the speech acts in the standard form"⁷⁶ is not merely expedient but a necessary requirement towards a pragmatics of everyday speech:

I am assuming only that the standard form explicitly calls attention to just those features that are essential for the rational binding effect of using symbolic expressions with an orientation to reaching understanding.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics", p126.

⁷⁵ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p309.

⁷⁶ Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", Thompson and Held, Habermas: Critical Debates, p270.

⁷⁷ Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", p270. See also Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p298 on essential conditions.

Thus Habermas contends that we can view the mechanisms of linguistic engagement, the rational binding force, most clearly when we remove the dimensions of actual speech from the equation. The illocutionary force of an utterance can be analysed on its own terms, far away from the institutional complexities of everyday communication. As we saw earlier, it is precisely this aspect of communication that is the key for an intersubjective understanding of speech.

Yet, to be able to back-up this claim Habermas must be able to accommodate Thompson's counter-examples, the jokes, poetry and "taking the mickey" that Thompson suggests are equally primary in our use of language. To deal with this criticism Habermas asserts that one can only comprehend a joke, as a joke, if one has already come to a prior understanding of the rules and claims inherent in all speech acts. They are thus secondary elements of communication;

Jokes, fictional representations, irony, games and so on, rest on intentionally using categorical confusions which in the wake of the differentiation of validity claims and corresponding modes (being/illusion, is/ought, essence/appearance), are seen through as category mistakes.⁷⁸

In The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas further explains this propensity for the "linguistic construction of a fictive reality" as part of the "training" of the "growing child".⁷⁹ However, if we accept, for the moment, Habermas's explanation of such linguistic constructions as secondary derivations of the standard form there may still remain a puzzle. Is it not the case that one characteristic of poetry, for example, is that it accepts that certain phenomena are unsayable and can only be written *around*; that language is a tool for delimiting the unsayable?⁸⁰ Is it not

⁷⁸ Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", p271.

⁷⁹ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, pp331-332

⁸⁰ I am grateful to Robert MacKenzie for this suggestion.

possible that the power of poetry is in its recognition that the inexpressible is meaningful as a communicative act, that is, that meaning can be communicated without recourse to the standard form of a speech act? Is there a way of engaging with an other person that is not reducible to the standard form of the speech act?

Alive to this possibility, Habermas utilises a slightly "weakened" version of Searle's "principle of expressibility". This principle requires "that in a given language, for every interpersonal relation that a speaker wants to take up explicitly with another member of his language community, a suitable performative expression is either available or, if necessary, can be introduced through a specification of available expressions".⁸¹ Thus, any attempt to assert "body language" as a counter-example to Habermas's standard form of a speech act falls flat, he argues, because such forms of expression can be "expanded into explicit speech acts" in a linguistic form, so that "symbolic forms like dance, music, painting, etc. drop out of consideration".⁸² In short, if it cannot be turned into a speech act then it does not constitute communication at all.

In criticising Habermasian universal pragmatics as a counter-factual ideal or as resting on an inadequate account of the standard form, both Bubner and Thompson highlight the fact that language and communication appear to be more complex phenomena than Habermas envisages. This view certainly has intuitive appeal. Yet, it falls short of the target. In questioning the priority of communicative action over other forms neither Bubner nor Thompson is able to give an *immanent* critique of communicative action. In characterising it as an ideal, or producing counter-examples, the question of priority can, as we saw, be dealt with by Habermas. Given the tremendous subtlety of Habermas's position it is important to engage Habermas on his own

⁸¹ Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p40.

⁸² Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", p270.

territory - that is, on his characterisation of communicative action. My aim is not to debate about the variety of speech acts - it is not to pit different speech acts against each other, for example the perspicuous versus the ironic. Rather, I shall discuss an immanent characteristic of speech acts that Habermas elides in his reconstruction. This elided aspect can be labelled the "immanent transience" of speech acts, a factor that points us towards a different conception of the paradigmatic conditions of communication than that offered by Habermas. Of course, the transience of speech acts is not always an *extant* feature of communication - Habermas's account of institutionally bound speech acts is a clear discussion of the appropriation of our speech in fixed networks of power - yet, the transience of communication is immanent to (or presupposed in, to use Habermas's formulation) every act of communication. The effect of this presupposition is to problematise Habermas's position that every speech act contains redeemable validity claims.

A useful starting point for the discussion is to examine some key moments in Habermas's texts which refer to time and its relation with language and communication. The first instance to cite is Habermas's admission in "A Reply To My Critics":

I readily admit that the formal-pragmatic analyses I have carried out so far neglect the dimension of time and thus do not take account of phenomena having to do with linguistic creativity, with creative ways of dealing with language.⁸³

The implication of this is clear. Habermas readily admits to eliding a factor in the process of communication, yet at the same time feels no threat exists in the analysis of this unthought component. One can reconstruct Habermas's reasons for feeling secure. Firstly, he would surely assert the "expediency" of having to start somewhere, and secondly, he would claim that his starting point contained all the

⁸³ Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", p272.

essential elements to allow further development on topics such as the temporality of the communicative process. Is it not the case that the relation of time to communication can be similarly derived from the basic presuppositions of universal pragmatics as in the analysis of secondary forms of language use, like painting, jokes, dance and poetry? In this respect, it is simply a question of having the time to carry out such a reconstruction; it is a technical application of already grounded principles. This line of response is apparent in a later reference to the temporality of communication.

In The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas makes explicit reference to a number of "linguists and socio-linguists" who present an "empirical pragmatics" that situates communicative acts in "social spaces and historical times".⁸⁴ Such an approach seeks to contextualise actual-empirical communication rather than delimit the formal-pragmatic presuppositions of speech acts, and to this extent they can claim to account for "a linguistic creativity that gives new forms of expression to the innovative mastery of unforeseen situations".⁸⁵ Thus, as Habermas recognises, the temporal dimension of communication is given a high priority in their work. For example, are participants in a communicative situation orienting to the past, present or future? Habermas suggests that the "advantage" of such an empirical approach is the insights it brings to specific linguistic situations, and the "complexity of natural scenes" that engender the communicative process.⁸⁶ However, it is also important for Habermas to distance himself from this overtly empirical project. Thus, he argues that:

They pay for this advantage by relinquishing the intuitive evidence of classifications that link up with semantic analyses and take account of

⁸⁴ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p321.

⁸⁵ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action , p321.

⁸⁶ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p332.

the elementary functions of language (such as the representation of states of affairs, the expression of experiences and the establishment of interpersonal relations)...they lack the theoretical power to illuminate our intuitions.⁸⁷

In this we can recall the similar reasons Habermas gives for distancing his approach from that of Austin. And as a criticism of empirical pragmatics and the way that it accounts for the temporal dimension of communication, I broadly agree with Habermas. In trying to contextualise the qualities of a given speech act situation the empirical approach misses the *immanence* of the temporality of speech acts, resting as it does on the particularity of an institutional setting. This is not, of course, to suggest that such empirical work is not fruitful - it surely is - but that it overlooks time as a quality of speech acts in themselves.

However, the irony is that in dismissing such an empirical approach Habermas throws out the baby with the bath water. Habermas seems to suggest, in the absence of any further material on the topic, that having seen off the problems of the temporality of communication as presented by the empirical approach that he can go on to ignore the temporal dimension all together. As I have just indicated this is not necessarily the case; that is, there is at least one other option for conceiving of the temporality of speech acts, namely as an immanent aspect of communication (not simply as a contingent institutional arrangement). This omission by Habermas is all the more curious given his particular interest in the immanent presuppositions or "fictions" of communication.

What is meant by the immanent transience of communication? Initially, when considering the transience of communicative acts, we must recognise that the process of formulation of an utterance implies a past that moves into the present as a seamless construction. The speaker draws upon past utterances in the production of a wholly

⁸⁷Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, pp322-323.

unique/present one. Secondly, the hearer ensures that this "virtual" past is pragmatically actualised, that is, the hearer participates in formulating a temporal interaction between the interlocutors. Thirdly, the fact that the past and present of the utterance cannot but coexist in the present ensures that the distinctions of the first two moments are recoverable as a harmony of the process of communication. The speaker and hearer, as communicators in the present, help gel the past and the present. Finally, the hearer's reply ensures the "performance" (the continued presence, in other words) of the utterance as a present act. In replying to the speaker the hearer acknowledges the speaker's presence/present. Thus the performance of a speech act would appear to be complete. In this detailing of the temporality of linguistic interaction there is little to worry Habermas's universal-pragmatic account of speech acts. It seems to confirm the possibility of a closed temporality that can be effectively removed from the equation, leaving speech acts atemporal in terms of their essential reconstruction. Yet, we must also take into account the presentness of the hearer's utterance in reply, which is of a quite different order - it must be to support our intuition of the present as an on-going process. Thus we are left with the displacement of the speech act as a "present that is different from that which has been". This difference, this displacement, is the immanent temporality, or transience, of linguistic interaction. In the next section the implications of this shall be explored.

Debating the Transience of Communicative Action

Why is the transience of communicative action a problem for Habermas? Habermas is aware that the process of communication takes time. It seems bizarre to assert that he has ignored this component of communicative action. As I have endeavoured to show in previous chapters, however, neglecting the temporal dimension can take the form of treating it as a homogenous background or theoretical constant. To explore how this affects Habermas's attempt to ground a critical project on the formal-pragmatic universals of speech it is necessary to take a look at expressive speech acts.

For Habermas, expressive speech acts are those that directly raise the validity claim to truthfulness.⁸⁸ More specifically, expressive speech acts raise the possibility of questioning the speaker's "inner experience". Typically they are defined by the appearance of the first person in an utterance; "I long for...", "I wish that..." and so on. To the extent that they are validated by reference to the speaker's subjective truthfulness they should (initially at least) be thought of as distinct from speech acts that, for example, assert the existence of things in the world. Nevertheless, we can redeem the validity claim to subjective truthfulness by reference to the speaker's consistency of action. If a speaker utters "I long for a drink" and then appears to make no effort to get one the truthfulness of the speaker's intentions can be legitimately raised.

However, problems occur with this account when considering evaluative and aesthetic speech acts. As Maeve Cooke points out, in making an evaluation - of the kind, "I enjoy the rich river-smell of mud" - it is possible that a speaker may be "perfectly truthful yet wrong".⁸⁹ The mud may not have a river-smell nor be enjoyable. Evaluative utterances, therefore, do not sit easily with Habermas's discussion of the validity claims implicit in expressive speech acts.⁹⁰ A similar problem arises with aesthetic utterances. It is not clear that contestable validity claims are raised by the utterance, "This is a good painting". The claim to subjective truthfulness would appear to be inappropriate in this case - what criteria for the testing of subjective truthfulness could be applied? The problem in both cases (evaluative and aesthetic utterances) is, according to Cooke, that these utterances

⁸⁸ While each speech act raises one direct validity claim, the other validity claims are indirectly raised in the same speech act. The following discussion assumes, therefore, that the other validity claims are raised indirectly.

⁸⁹ M. Cooke, Language and Reason, p74.

⁹⁰ I am assuming that such utterances can not be wholly redeemed by reference to the validity claims inherent in other forms of communication. I shall say more on this below.

disclose states of affairs rather than referring directly to validity claims. Yet, if these forms of utterance do not refer directly to validity claims then, by Habermas's own definition, they can not constitute core elements of communicative action. To put it another way, evaluative and aesthetic claims, for Habermas, are not oriented towards reaching understanding and must therefore be excluded from the category of communicative action.

This need not be a problem for Habermas if we take the aesthetic and evaluative aspects of language as exceptional cases of everyday language use. Yet it seems highly plausible to consider the disclosing role of language as one that occupies a central place in everyday communication. If this can be shown to be the case then the scope of Habermas's formal pragmatics would appear to be curtailed. Maeve Cooke addresses this possibility.⁹¹ She characterises the difference between the validity claims raised by communicative action and those raised by aesthetic utterances as follows: communicative action raises a claim to truthfulness implicit in the speech act while aesthetic and evaluative acts "refer to a potential for *disclosing* truth". By way of the work of Mary Pratt, Charles Taylor and Martin Seel, she examines the different ways in which everyday (not just aesthetic or evaluative) utterances "function to disclose". Charles Taylor, for example, highlights the act of "formulating something" as a common feature of language. As Cooke characterises it:

In this dimension language often functions to open up reality: it leads to my seeing something that I had not seen up to now, or to my seeing something in a new way. It can also, of course, have this effect on others. In such instances, therefore, acts of formulating fall into the category of speech acts that function to disclose.⁹²

⁹¹ Cooke, Language and Reason, chapter three, especially section six.

⁹² Cooke, Language and Reason, p81.

Without going into further detail, the idea that speech acts which function to disclose are a central feature of everyday language use seems (at the very least) plausible. There is, therefore, a need to account for such utterances. Two strategies are of interest in this regard. First, there is Cooke's attempt to show that the inclusion of disclosing utterances in Habermas's account poses no substantial problems for his overall critical project (if a few modifications are accepted in his account of communicative action). Secondly, there is the possibility that the disclosing function of language points to a fundamental flaw in Habermas's account. I shall look at each in turn.

Cooke maintains that the inclusion of evaluative, aesthetic and disclosing utterances poses no substantial problem to Habermas's project. She argues that if we define the realm of communicative action as consisting of utterances that "raise a claim to the validity of *what is said*" - rather than speech acts that solely raise a claim to understanding - then a broader and more flexible account of the different kinds of validity claim raised in everyday language can be formulated. While this requires a broader conception of the validity claims raised in communicative action than Habermas's original account it does not lose sight of the trajectory of Habermas's argument as it still relates speech acts to redeemable validity claims. Indeed, she argues that increasing the flexibility of the communicative realm adds to Habermas's aim of redressing the "logocentric balance of traditional philosophy".⁹³

However, there is another trajectory that can be taken regarding the character of disclosing utterances. The act of disclosure is more properly thought of as an act of *creation* (Cooke recognises this but does not explore the consequences of such a position).⁹⁴ In uttering "I enjoy the rich river-smell of mud" a speaker is (potentially)

⁹³ Cooke, Language and Reason, pp82-83.

⁹⁴ See Language and Reason, especially chapter three, sections 4 to 6, where Cooke conflates speech acts that disclose with speech acts that are "world-creating". The difference in emphasis is important.

involved in the creation of a state of affairs - for example, the creation of a new linguistic expression or the formulation of a new relation to oneself. Upon what grounds, though, can such an act of creation be subject to validity claims? This problem is recognised by Habermas when he discusses literary discourse (as discourse explicitly involved in linguistic creation). In literary discourse:

The neutralization of the binding/bonding power frees the illocutionary acts (now robbed of their power) from the pressure to reach a decision which obtains in everyday communicative praxis; it removes them from the sphere of normal speech and reduces their role to that of the playful creation of new worlds - or rather, to a pure demonstration of the world-disclosing power of innovative linguistic expressions.⁹⁵

This is consistent with my claim that the utterance "I enjoy the rich river-smell of mud" could not be subject to validity claims (assuming its "creative" quality). However, if all speech acts could be shown to be "acts of creation" then the link between everyday speech and validity claims would be broken. It is just this claim that the immanent transience of communication facilitates.

The seemingly banal point that speech acts take time to perform and that the transience of communication is given by the displacement that always already exists in the communicative process leads to the possibility that every utterance is an act of creation. As every utterance comes into being in a permanently displaced present, every utterance is *immanently* singular. Each utterance, to put the same point another way, immanently creates a new set of relations between speaker, world and hearer. Yet, if this is the case, the rational link between everyday utterances and redeemable validity claims collapses. If every utterance is immanently transient then it makes no sense to seek to affirm or deny it - utterances simply exist in the transience of their performance.

Disclosure implies revealing something previously hidden where creation refers to bringing something new into existence.

⁹⁵ Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p201.

It is granted that this account is profoundly counter-intuitive. How is communication possible if every utterance is taken to be a unique moment of linguistic creation? Two points are relevant here. First, in stressing the *immanent* transience of communication it is admitted that actual speech acts do not, for the most part, display their transience - that is, they operate in a system of rules and regulations that curtail their displacement. Yet, as Habermas's own project makes clear, this does not preclude the recognition of features immanent to communication. Secondly, the question - how is communication possible if every utterance is taken to be a unique moment of linguistic creation? - makes sense. The phenomenon to be explained is communication; communication, on this account, is not taken as a primordial given but this does not preclude an explanation of the communicative process. Habermas (and Cooke's reconstruction) presupposes that the structure of language can operate as a foundation while it is the transition from unique utterances to communicative structures that must be explained. Thus, when Habermas counters the criticism that his formal-pragmatic approach offers no insight into actual speech - "reversing" the abstractive process - he is making a category mistake in the very first step by eliding the transience of communicative action.⁹⁶ Temporality is not something that can be added to communication in order that it can regain its "empirical" character - though in his reversal Habermas doesn't even mention the need to account for the relation between temporality and communication. A consideration of the role of time in communication must be present from the very outset of the investigation in its most immanent form. That this is not the case makes Habermas's "reconstruction" a technical-instrumental appropriation of actual speech rather than a genuine pragmatics of the *processes* of engagement.

⁹⁶ The details of this reversal can be found in Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, p330.

In the following section I shall explore the idea that Habermas presupposes what he has to prove by way of the debate between Habermas and Searle. In the penultimate section the "collective pragmatics" of Deleuze and Guattari are offered as an informative account of the ways in which the transience of an utterance can be combined with an account of the pragmatic features of communication.

Habermas and Searle

The debate between Habermas and Searle can be succinctly summarised. Habermas in his article, "Comments on John Searle: Meaning, Communication and Representation",⁹⁷ contrasts two differing "intuitions" on "the processes of linguistic communication"; the intentionalist approach of Searle and the intersubjective view that he proposes. The intentionalist intuition is that a speaker is successful in any given speech if the hearer recognises the speaker's intention in the utterance; "S makes H understand something by means of X".⁹⁸ The intersubjective intuition, which we have examined in more detail above, is summarised by Habermas:

The expression X is not a device used by an individual to communicate something by making the addressee recognise his belief or intention; rather the expression X is an element from a common repertoire which enables the participants to understand the same matter in the same way.⁹⁹

This distinction may appear strange given the reliance of Habermas on specific aspects of Searle's formulation of speech acts. In explaining the relation of his thought to Searle's, Habermas also explains the major criticism he has of Searle now:

⁹⁷ In John Searle and His Critics, pp17-29.

⁹⁸ Habermas, "Comments on John Searle: 'Meaning, Communication and Representation'", John Searle and His Critics, p17.

⁹⁹Habermas, "Comments on John Searle", p17.

Searle originally analysed such conditions [for a correctly performed speech act] on the basis of sentences which typically occur in standard speech acts and in doing so he proposed that both speaker and hearer speak the same language, that is, they share an understanding of the same language. However, more recently he believes that he can renounce such a strong presupposition, and that he can treat the common language itself as a phenomenon which needs to be explained. On these grounds he revives the intentionalist approach.¹⁰⁰

This revival is a mistake for Habermas who suggests that the concept of validity claims inherent in all speech acts cannot be given a sufficient grounding if they are thought of as the product of an intentionalist monologue existing prior to the dialogical setting; "validity claims open to criticism and designed for intersubjective recognition constitute the rails without which the speaker could not reach his illocutionary purpose".¹⁰¹ For Habermas, Searle presupposes what he ought to be trying to prove, namely the (inter)subjectivity of a linguistic agent. This presupposition, he argues further, rests on a misappropriation of the metaphor that language is an institution, and that therefore the illocutionary forces that bind speaker and hearer must be thought of as "institutional forces", i.e. a normative background that legitimates speech acts in an extralinguistic manner. While this may be true in some cases, admits Habermas, it certainly does not account for all illocutionary effects, or binding forces. A truly universal approach to linguistic pragmatics must rest on the immanent illocutionary force of all speech acts, not the external factors of contingent backgrounds. He sums up:

Searle elucidates the intrinsically linguistic force of the very act of raising a claim to validity with the force of an institution that enables a speaker, via his social roles, literally to call something into existence. In order to turn the elucidation into an explanation, Searle has to assimilate language to institutions. Language, however, is an institution only in the metaphorical sense.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Habermas, "Comments on John Searle", p18.

¹⁰¹ Habermas, "Comments on John Searle", p27.

¹⁰² Habermas, "Comments on John Searle", p28.

Searle's response to this charge is illuminating. Initially he suggests that the difference of approach outlined by Habermas is "not as great as he thinks", suggesting that they offer "non-competing answers to quite different questions".¹⁰³ Yet, he quickly goes on to a detailed point by point rebuttal of all Habermas's major claims. He suggests that Habermas is, in the end, "deeply flawed". The following two quotes put it succinctly;

Habermas takes the existence of the validity claims as a primitive given. I think they require explanation. I think my analysis enables me to explain them, whereas his analysis precludes their explanation.¹⁰⁴

Or again:

It is philosophically back to front to suppose that the validity claims provide a basis for the understanding of the phenomena of speech acts rather it is the theory of speech acts that has to explain the validity claims.¹⁰⁵

The reason for Habermas's mistake, argues Searle, is due to his conception of illocutionary force, that is not "just an alternative use of technical terms".¹⁰⁶ Habermas has failed to see that action oriented towards understanding cannot even begin to take place until an intentional meaning has been communicated; "the attempt to achieve consensus cannot constitute meaning, understanding, communication etc., because it presupposes all these phenomena."¹⁰⁷ Thus, the "onus" is firmly on the side of Habermas to prove that language is not an institution. Indeed, argues Searle,

¹⁰³ Searle, "Response", p89.

¹⁰⁴ Searle, "Response", p92.

¹⁰⁵ Searle, "Response", p93-94.

¹⁰⁶ Searle, "Response", p92.

¹⁰⁷ Searle, "Response", p92.

is it not the case that language is "the paradigm" institution. To claim otherwise is to make a number of presuppositions that find no pragmatic grounding in the analysis of speech acts. In this respect Searle implies that Habermasian formal-pragmatics does not significantly differ from the transcendental-pragmatics of Apel.¹⁰⁸

The previous discussion of the transience of communicative acts can add a third voice to the conversation. This can take two related forms. First, it has been noted that for Searle, expression X communicates the intention of the speaker to the hearer, while for Habermas it is an "element in a common repertoire" which facilitates understanding. On the principle of the immanent singularity of expression X both the speaker's intention and the background consensus must be explained. Importantly the explanation could allow for both options to be viable elements of language use. Intentionality and common understandings are not mutually exclusive if they are thought of as features that serve to "make the link" between the singularity of an utterance and the structures of communication. This has a consequence that we can view through the second intervention in the debate. While Habermas gives priority to the redemption of validity claims as a defining feature of a speech act, Searle argues that a theory of speech acts must be prior to an explanation of validity claims *in* speech acts. While Habermas accuses Searle of basing communicative structures on extralinguistic backgrounds to subjectivity, Searle accuses Habermas of having no extralinguistic basis to account for the formation of speech. A third option, implicit in the account of the transience of communication, is that the elementary units of language function precisely to bridge the gap between the linguistic and the extralinguistic. In this sense language is an institution (*contra* Habermas) but one whose structures can only be understood as emanating from collective structures (*contra* Searle). To give this claim some weight, however, it is necessary to examine the account of collective pragmatics given by Deleuze and Guattari.

¹⁰⁸Searle, "Response", pp96-99 discusses Apel's criticism of his intentionalist approach and compares this with Habermas's point of view.

Deleuze and Guattari: Collective Pragmatics

Throughout *plateau* no.4 of A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari engage in criticising, and offering alternatives to, the "postulates of linguistics". It is not possible to examine each step of their approach in detail, though I shall extract a series of arguments that bear upon the discussion of a pragmatic conception of language. Furthermore, the approach of Deleuze and Guattari can illuminate the presuppositions implicit in the earlier account of the transience immanent to communication.

Initially, it is important to recognise the similarities between Habermas, Searle and Deleuze and Guattari. All these theorists reject the empirical-scientific view of language, that is, the view that language is a structure for the transmission of information that can be analysed by means of abstract logical-semantic rules. Deleuze and Guattari begin *plateau* no.4 with a broad-side against the idea that "language is informational and communicational". Their primary source for this criticism is Austin:

Austin's famous theses clearly demonstrate that the various extrinsic relations between action and speech by which a statement can describe an action in an indicative mode or incite it in an imperative mode, etc., are not all there is. There are also intrinsic relations between speech and certain actions that are accomplished by saying them (the performative: I swear by saying 'I swear') and more generally between speech and certain actions that are accomplished in speaking (the illocutionary: I ask a question by saying 'Is...?'; I make a promise by saying 'I love you...'; I give a command by using the imperative, etc.). These acts internal to speech, these immanent relations between statements and acts, have been termed *implicit or nondiscursive presuppositions*, as opposed to potentially explicit assumptions by which a statement refers to other statements or an external action.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p77.

Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, share the aim of Habermas and Searle of finding a *pragmatics* of language. This, they go on, was the great insight of Austin and "it has made it impossible to define semantics, syntactics, or even phonematics as scientific zones of language". In speaking we act and this "performative" component to speech has been elided by linguists in their search for a science of codes that underpins communication. Rather than pragmatics being the "trash heap" of linguistics - a secondary feature of grammaticality - Deleuze and Guattari suggest (in common with Habermas and Searle), that "pragmatics becomes the presupposition behind all of the other dimensions and insinuates itself into everything".¹¹⁰ As witnessed above, though, sharing a belief in the need for a pragmatic approach to language does not guarantee a similar outlook. While they are all heavily inspired by the work of Austin the various appropriations of his work are, to borrow a term from Lecerle, "misprised".¹¹¹

The novel interpretation of Austin offered by Deleuze and Guattari can be best viewed from the perspective of their critique of intentionality as the cornerstone of communication. We can recall that for Searle communication is to be considered in terms of "primitive underlying forms of intentionality". In making a statement a speaker is essentially expressing a belief in a given state of affairs and any validity claims that then arise are a secondary condition of communication. Deleuze and Guattari, in criticising this approach adopt a position similar to that of Habermas's critique. For Deleuze and Guattari, Searle, in trying to ground language in "self-referentiality" - by making the "I" and "You" of language the defining characteristic of performativity - is missing the essentially social character of language. This social

¹¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p78.

¹¹¹ J. J. Lecerle, "The Misprision of Pragmatics: Conceptions of Language in Contemporary French Philosophy", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series: 21. Supplement to *Philosophy* 1987*, A. Phillips Griffiths (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

character is not considered as the empirical context of language, that is, the secondary effects of intentional statements in social settings, but as a factor intrinsic to language itself. Drawing on the work of Oswald Ducrot, Deleuze and Guattari argue that intentionality can only be adequately explained as an effect of more fundamental and intrinsic "collective assemblages of enunciation". As Habermas criticised Searle for displacing the intersubjectivity of communicative acts into the realm of intentionality, so Deleuze and Guattari argue that Searle's approach fails to grasp certain primordial and "collective" relations effective in language.

Yet, it is important not to over stress the relationship between Habermas and Deleuze and Guattari. To see why Deleuze and Guattari may be able to bring new perspectives to the debate on pragmatics it is important to reconstruct their critique of Habermas (I say reconstruct because they don't mention Habermas at all in their book). Initially we can view their critique of Habermas as a continuation of the position taken against Searle. For Deleuze and Guattari, the question of intentionality is not adequately overcome by adopting the notion of intersubjectivity; "intersubjectivity gets us no further". They argue that even complex intersubjective relations are effects of the "assemblages" intrinsic to language. The attempt to place intersubjectivity at the core of communication ignores the fact that "subjectifications are not primary". For Deleuze and Guattari the theory of intersubjective communication may represent a subtler version of Searle's approach but it is, nonetheless, driven by similar assumptions; namely, that universals of communication can be traced to the notion of subjectivity (however complexly reconstructed as intersubjectivity). It is this that is the mistake. From a different philosophical point of view, Wagner and Zipprian also demonstrate that the attempt to locate communication in an intersubjective realm "remains committed to the overextended doctrines of the philosophy of consciousness".¹¹² Habermas, in other words, has not

¹¹² G. Wagner and H. Zipprian, "Intersubjectivity and Critical Consciousness: Remarks on Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action", *Inquiry*, vol. 34, pp49-62.

sufficiently shaken off the traces of individualism and intentionality in his universal pragmatics. In pointing to the reasons Deleuze and Guattari give for this view the outlines of their alternative conception can be discerned.

Central to their understanding of a pragmatic understanding of language is the notion that, while they recognise the relationship between saying and doing as "internal and immanent", this relation is not "one of identity. Rather, it is a relation of redundancy".¹¹³ To appreciate the concept of redundancy, however, we must trace back the steps of their argument. The starting point of the critique of linguistics offered by Deleuze and Guattari is in their reconceptualisation of the content of a statement. The statement, which is the primary unit of language, is usually thought of as a container of information, a capsule of data about the world ready to be moulded into complex utterances and sentences. For Deleuze and Guattari, the statement is most fruitfully thought of as an "order-word", for example, "Go!", "Ready?", "Yes" and so on. Language, they argue, is not about the flow of information, rather it is premised on primitive commands and orders: "language is not made to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience". Alternatively: "a rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker". One example given by Deleuze and Guattari is the teacher who, in teaching children rules of grammar, is not communicating information but "imposing" on the children "all of the dual foundations of grammar (masculine-feminine, singular-plural, noun-verb, subject of the statement-subject of the enunciation, etc)". Language is embroiled in power before it is embroiled in communicating information; "Language is not life; it gives life orders".¹¹⁴ Another example draws upon their antipathy to capitalism as well as hinting at the scepticism that Deleuze and Guattari have of Marxist accounts of human production: "words are not tools, but we give children language, pens and

¹¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p79.

¹¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p75-76.

notebooks as we give workers shovels and pickaxes".¹¹⁵ Language is, therefore, to be understood in terms of the relations of power it embodies. As Massumi puts it, the "order" implicit in language is to be considered in both senses of the word; that is, as a command and as "positioning in a social field".¹¹⁶ The "redundancy" implicit in language is a function of the power relations inherent in communication. To pursue this further, though, requires an examination of the notion of "collective assemblage".

In defining language as primarily an expression of power relations Deleuze and Guattari point to the "social character of enunciation". As stated above, though, this is not merely the context of a given enunciation but an *intrinsic* aspect of every enunciation. This intrinsically social element of language is labelled the "collective assemblage". Broadly speaking it can be defined as the *impersonal* series of connections existing between order-words (these do, of course, exhibit varying degrees of fluidity). Yet having defined language as necessarily a function of order/power the connections that exist in language are outside of language itself. For example, it is in language that the judge labels a person a criminal, but this ordering is only possible in the framework of a collective assemblage of power relations designated as judicial. It is in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari state that the place to look to comprehend language is in the "acts immanent to language that are in redundancy with statements or constitute order-words".¹¹⁷

In this way we can see why they talk of the relation between saying and doing as containing a necessary redundancy - a necessary non-linguistic relation. Yet as it stands this idea of redundancy would not in itself upset the Habermasian notion of a universal pragmatics. That comes as we pursue the idea of redundancy through the

¹¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p76.

¹¹⁶ Massumi, A User's Guide, p31.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p80.

notion of the collective assemblage. At present I have defined both language and the collective assemblage of language in terms of the notion of redundancy. This smacks of circularity. Therefore, we need to ask exactly what it is that is made redundant in language. On this point, Deleuze and Guattari state that it is "the set of incorporeal transformations current in a given society"; the moment the accused becomes the perpetrator; the man and woman become the husband and wife in saying "I do". These "incorporeal transformations", recognisable by their "simultaneousness and immediacy", by the "simultaneity of the statement expressing the transformation and the effect the transformation produces",¹¹⁸ are driven by the "order-words" that are the unexpressed element of that which is expressed. As Massumi puts it, "It is the unsaid doing of a saying".¹¹⁹ In other words, the performative element of language is to be characterised by the re-ordering of people in power relations - "every utterance is struck, however faintly, with the redundancy of an anonymous murmur", the murmur of the social imperative.

This brief account of Deleuze and Guattari's "collective pragmatics" suggests two concluding points. First, in relation to Habermasian universal pragmatics, accepting the analysis given by Deleuze and Guattari would be sufficient to dislocate the structure of intersubjective validity claims Habermas posits. Emphasising the power relations immanent to language shatters the consensus that Habermas believes is presupposed as a facet of the validity-claims inherent in communication. Consensus can never, in principle, be achieved because each utterance contains an irredeemable element; an element intrinsic to the assemblage that enunciates language, the "unsaid doing of a saying". Secondly, the stress Deleuze and Guattari place on this redundant element of speech as an "incorporeal transformation" suggests an opening in which to situate the earlier discussion of the transience of communicative acts. By focusing on

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p80-81.

¹¹⁹ Massumi, A User's Guide, p33.

the immediate and immanent condition of such transformations in relation to the expression of them, Deleuze and Guattari place the micro-level analysis of transience in a macro-level framework of the collective assemblage of enunciation. The transience of communicative acts, in other words, does not curtail the need for an account of the way in which language functions. On the contrary, it treats utterances as essentially transient in order to raise the question of how language operates in a given social field; be it the school, the factory, the hospital and so on. Of course, to follow through this analysis would require a major departure into the work of Deleuze and Guattari that is beyond the scope of this piece. For the present I merely wish to argue that an opening exists for further fruitful work in the area.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I related the above discussion to the quest for grounds of social criticism. It was suggested that Habermasian universal pragmatics may offer a way of grounding a critical perspective while accommodating the theme of liminality that has run through the thesis. If this was the case then the critique made of Foucault in the first chapter would amount to no more than a version of the Habermasian position. It would suggest a turn to Habermas's theory as the most insightful on offer. However, it has been shown that Habermas's theory is open to criticism on the grounds that his universal pragmatics ignores the transience immanent to the communicative process. It remains to assert that the immanent transience of communicative acts displays a core feature of liminality in order to argue that Habermas's project cannot account for the earlier criticism of Foucault's approach.

In this and earlier chapters various applications of the concept of liminality have been explored; from the epochal character of a liminal present, to the construction of the self in liminal periods, to the micro-level operation of liminality in processes of communication. The function of these chapters has been primarily critical. It remains

to follow through the discussion by looking at a constructive use of the concept. Can the concept of liminality help to illuminate the character of social criticism? If it does not then the discussion of liminality would seem to lead towards crippling relativism - and a turn to Habermasian critical theory may be the most fruitful (though flawed) option. However, if the outlines of a critical foundation which incorporates liminality can be presented then there is good reason to believe that a distinctive poststructuralist account of social criticism is worthy of pursuit. This will be the focus of the last chapter through an examination of Foucault's later works.

CHAPTER FIVE
LIMINALITY AND THE ETHICAL LIFE

Introduction

Michel Foucault is a philosopher of the limit not the liminal.

The echo of this slogan appears far removed from the initial sounding. It is certainly not a simple return, a naive revocalisation, of my preparatory motif. The walls from which it has rebounded are not in an easy alliance. Nor are they smooth and flat - they do not return each phonic unit intact. Alternatively, we may imagine Foucault's decaying body. Or, not decaying but radiating its energies - literally the diffusion of his biological energy - into new outcrops that appear here and there; then, now and in the future. Foucault becoming plant and animal through the dissipation of his body into the ecosystem. Is it this that Massumi talks of when he claims that "deaths...breathe new life into our lungs"?¹

The slogan at the head of this chapter is an attempt to reassemble a small number of Foucault's bodily parts into a new monster, a monster whose primary purpose is to abuse the body of Foucault. We can recall that it was Foucault's wish to abuse the body of Nietzsche.² The mechanism for my abuse of Foucault is the concept of liminality. It is liminality that has served to undermine the limits of a "history of the present" in chapter one. Furthermore, it corroded the shared logic of neo-Marxism and postmodernism in chapter two. In the third chapter the relationship between moments of crisis and liminality challenged the account of narrative identity given by Taylor and Ricoeur. In the previous chapter the search for a grounding of social

¹ Brian Massumi, A User's Guide, p41.

² Foucault, Power/Knowledge, pp53-54.

criticism in a universal pragmatics of language was challenged by way of an examination of the transience immanent to speech acts - transience being an essential component of liminality. In this chapter some of the disassembled parts will be remoulded through Foucault's later work.

Prior to this, it is important to reconsider the concept of liminality. Judging by the general application of the concept in previous chapters it may be contended that the concept has become vague and ill-defined. Does the idea of liminality occlude hidden tensions in the discussion? Would I have been better to employ a range of different terms rather than stretch this concept to its limits? As stated in the Introduction, though, the aim has been precisely to employ a range of different terms *within* the discussion of liminality - "temporality", "crisis", "transience", "becoming" and so on. The need to relate these concepts to the umbrella category of liminality is due to the insight it affords to the critique of Foucault (a theorist of the limit). In other words, I am not suggesting that liminality carries a pre-eminence over these other concepts, except to the extent that it is expedient in relation to the overall discussion. Every concept is, after all, multiple.³

A more substantive problem is generated by the relationship between liminality and the present. Anthropologically defined, liminality has tended to refer to the period of marginality after separation and before aggregation (though Turner broadened the scope of this definition). It is a time of transition between social fields. This would appear to be inapplicable to the concept of the present. My intention, however, has been to analyse the present precisely as a time of transition between the past and the future. It is in this sense that I refer to "the liminal present". In the current chapter, though, confusion may emerge when I refer to the need to

³ To phrase the argument in Deleuzian terms, liminality functions as a conceptual persona on a plane of immanence engendered by Foucauldian problematics. See, Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?.

engender a liminal present. If the liminal present exists what is the need to engender it? The discussion in the previous chapter is relevant here. The liminal present is more properly thought of as an *immanent* feature of the present. In other words, the potential of marginality is presupposed in the idea of the present. Lastly, if this is the case what is the link between the idea of liminality as traditionally conceived and the liminal present? It is no more or no less than the connection Foucault sought between a history of the limits of regimes and a history of the present. To put it another way, I am assuming the need for a critical position situated in the present which *in addition* presupposes liminality as an immanent feature of the present.

Foucault the archaeologist/genealogist sought a point of critique in a "history of the present", a history that brought knowledge and "local memories" together in an attempt to "make use of this knowledge tacitly today". Yet at the end of chapter one this attempt to situate critique in "the present" appeared to be floundering in an awareness that this condition of genealogical thought could not cope with its own immediacy. Genealogy could not become anything Other; anything other than a transcendental thought of the present defined by the diffuse operations of power and knowledge. One can think of this another way. Foucault's genealogy presents the future as a void, a nothingness that occupies a space outside of our thought. The future is not simply unknowable, but in a real sense does not exist. Our relation to it is qualitatively different from our relation to the past or the present, in that it lies beyond the barrier of relations of knowledge and power.

This is the Foucault that is so often the target of Frankfurt School inspired critical theory. This is the Foucault that offers us no hope, no way to make things "better", no possibility for a normative source of critique to right the wrongs of our lives. Surely, they claim, we can and do criticise things? Surely there must be a value, or values, that we can use to judge the inequalities and injustices of our present

society? Is language not based on presuppositions that we can tease out and use as a source of these critiques? When pursued, such criticisms create an image of Foucault the nihilist; Foucault the neo-conservative; Foucault with no sense of individual autonomy; Foucault the individualist; Foucault who robs us of our freedom, who sees nothing but power.

This is the charge. Shall I open the court and let session begin? No, I shall not. The task of this chapter is not to rebut these charges and in doing so erect a saintly Foucault devoid of paradox and contradiction. I am not defending Foucault - whatever that could mean - but abusing his remains; necrophilosophy. My principal aim is to examine the effect of thinking about liminality as a continuation of thought within a space defined by Foucault. No, not a space. To think of Foucault in terms of space is to situate him in the discourse of critical theory as just suggested, namely to ask of Foucault what is the other side of the present? how do we get there? and how can we make it better than the present? Rather we must think of the temporal in Foucault. In this way the liminal, as a means of conceptualising the temporality immanent to transgression, can be used to flood the void of the future. By excavating the liminality immanent to the present the future is not barred by the immediate (genealogical) present but opened up by the processes of becoming X.Y.Z.A...; that is, it becomes possible to identify the field of possibilities implicit in the present. The limit of the present is folded back upon itself and a critical arena is displayed, an arena that reveals openings. It is a critique facilitated by the virtuality of our passage in(to) time.

In presenting elements of Foucault's later writings I shall argue that the ethical axis he sought to develop contains within it an appreciation of liminality that serves to ground his thought. In excavating this aspect of his work I shall maintain that it opens up new lines of inquiry into Foucault's approach to social criticism. It is to shift the emphasis away from the view that Foucault was introducing "the subject"

into his analyses as an end in itself towards the idea that this new axis represents an attempt to locate the *ontological* grounds of social criticism. In this way the notion of poststructuralism as a body of ideas that rests upon foundations that provide an alternative to the *normative* grounds of neo-enlightenment positions will be suggested. I shall return to this theme towards the end of this chapter and in the conclusion.

Many Silences

I think that any child who has been educated in a Catholic milieu just before or during the second world war had the experience that there were many different ways of speaking as well as many forms of silence.⁴

Deleuze; "What happened during the fairly long silence following The History of Sexuality?"⁵ He is right to talk of a silence, yet we must be aware of its specificity, as one of the "many forms" of silence. It was certainly not a traditional silence. Foucault did not appear gagged - though in one interview he appeared masked.⁶ He did not stop talking to interviewers, nor giving lectures or writing essays. Yet we can still talk of Foucault's silence. It was not the brash silence that Foucault himself talked about in his first look into the problematisation of sexuality. It was not the kind of silence that proclaims itself from the rooftops; the silence that talked sexuality "out of" the discursive domain. Rather it was a quite different silence. It was the silence that one experiences lying half-asleep in a sleeping house. The silence that is constituted by the little noises, creaks and rumblings that randomly punctuate the air. This was the silence of Foucault's last years, shaped by his numerous interviews, the newspaper articles, the lecture courses, and so on.

⁴ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p3.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, p94.

⁶ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, pp323-330.

Yet, "there is always thought even in silent habits".⁷ As the silence drifted on towards his death (Foucault's last two major books, The Use of Pleasure and Care of the Self, were published, in French, just days before his death), one could begin to hear the formulation of a new tone, a new sound to Foucault's words that was not exactly unknown to his previous work but, nevertheless, was being constituted afresh out of the disparate silence. Foucault began to talk of "a new axis" to his thought. Where power and knowledge had been Foucault's concerns before, he now added a new dimension, subjectivity: "I now had to undertake a third shift in order to analyse what is termed the subject. It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes himself *qua* subject."⁸

Did this theoretical move constitute a break from his previous works? Although this new axis constituted a change of emphasis in Foucault's later writings, he did not abandon his earlier thoughts on power and knowledge. We can recall from chapter one that, in changing his emphasis from the archaeological to the genealogical, Foucault did not abandon his research into the discursive practices that constitute the social sciences. Rather his genealogy of power functioned as a complementary approach to the earlier archaeology of the human sciences. In turn, Foucault's examination of subjectivity is most fruitfully viewed as a complement to his previous projects. It required, however, a new way of looking at historical phenomena:

It seems to me that in Madness and Civilisation, The Order of Things and also in Discipline and Punish a lot of things which were implicit could not be rendered explicit due to the manner in which I posed the problems. I tried to locate three major types of problems: the problem of truth, the

⁷ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p155.

⁸ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p6.

problem of power, and the problem of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can only be understood in relation to each other, not independently. What bothered me about the previous books is that I considered the first two experiences (the problematisations of truth and power) without taking the third (the problematisation of individual conduct) into account.⁹

The introduction of this new set of problems, therefore, does not constitute a radical break with his earlier work. Rather, it is an investigation of already implicit themes. Of course, it is not necessary to take Foucault's self-assessment at face value. Was Foucault not constantly defending his work by reference to his current concerns? It doesn't mean that we have to accept these self-assessments. McCarthy provides a useful example of this line of argument. For McCarthy, Foucault's earlier works are characterised by a "holistic bias" which neglects the emancipatory capacity of individuals while his later works tend towards a "desocialised aesthetics of existence".¹⁰ In other words, the earlier Foucault was not sufficiently concerned with the role of individuals in shaping social norms whereas the later Foucault forgot social norms altogether and concentrated solely on individual self-expression. While fitting into McCarthy's Habermasian position on Foucault, this criticism is wide of the mark. Though Foucault goes into a lot of detail regarding individual "aesthetics of existence" and the mechanisms that facilitate these, it does not mean that Foucault neglects the wider social sphere in which the individual operated. To take one example, Foucault is clear that the analysis offered in the later works is "situated at the point where an archaeology of problematizations and a genealogy of practices of the self intersect".¹¹ Throughout The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, this promise is adhered to in the way that Foucault always defines the aesthetics of existence in terms of norms of

⁹ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p243.

¹⁰ McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School".

¹¹ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p13.

behaviour and "systems of morality". Making one's life a work of art, as Foucault suggested, does not mean that the social forces that prevail upon such an act must be ignored. Thinking of Foucault as caught between the poles of "holism" and "individualism" is to construct a "straw man". Taking Foucault seriously is to assume the continuity of his work but also recognise the differences that emerged.

Yet, in thinking of Foucault's work as a whole we must not think of it as being complete. The editors of Technologies of the Self suggest that we view Foucault's later work on the subject as the "logical conclusion" of his historical inquiries.¹² This characterisation is misleading. It suggests that Foucault's later works "solved" the problems of his earlier inquiries. Rather we must think of Foucault as permanently "straying afield of himself" by way of his investigations.¹³ Foucault was constantly trying to "cross the line, to pass over to the other side"¹⁴ and operate on his historical material in new and different ways.

Assuming the investigation of subjectivity to be a new axis in an on-going project, what is it that Foucault is examining? It cannot be a new look at the relation between knowledge and power, as subjectivity constitutes a new axis to his thought. However, in as much as it is related to power and knowledge, Foucault opens up a new field of interactions between subjectivity and the power/knowledge relation. Nor does subjectivity claim to be a more basic concept (or a secondary concept) in relation to the power/knowledge axis. Instead, these concepts come together to form a "cluster".¹⁵ Yet we must still ask what Foucault is actually studying *via* his analysis of these three related notions. The answer is that the

¹² Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (eds), Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, Tavistock Publications, London, 1988, p3.

¹³ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p8.

¹⁴ Deleuze, Foucault, p94.

¹⁵ See The Foucault Reader, p12.

object of Foucault's thought is thought itself. If there is a Foucauldian question it asks: "what are the ways that thought is brought to bear upon itself?". How can thought fold back on itself and create an arena that thinks thought; that places thought in the domain of thought; that looks for the traces left by thought on the surfaces of life? Tracing thought through history is Foucault's speciality. He locates the knots of thought that call themselves institutions, and the ruptures of thought that thought often tries to hide. Foucault's project is to chart and interrogate these "indefinite knots".¹⁶ In this respect his project is similar to that of the Frankfurt School. However, where the Frankfurt School construe the institutionalisation of thought as the bifurcation of reason into technical and "authentic" reason, Foucault sees each manifestation of thought in practice as containing its own logic (which may be related to "reason", and may be related to other manifestations of thought).

The cathartic engagement of thought with itself that drives Foucault's work is not, however, analogous to the "playfulness" apparent in postmodern bracketing and formatting (though this kind of playfulness can help to destabilise established patterns of thought - for example the simple point being made by (his)story). To think that the theorist can "play" with thought is simply to emphasise our difference from the past to such a degree that the present can only be defined negatively and the future not at all (see chapter two). It is to think that one can distance oneself from the implications of the past. It is to place "lack" at the centre of the frame of the present, making the past and the future wholly Other. This is Baudrillard's reading of Foucault. It opposes any interpretation of Foucault except that which "forgets Foucault" - which takes Foucault to such an extreme that he is no longer visible.¹⁷ In general terms, it is to refuse to acknowledge that thought takes the

¹⁶ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p187.

¹⁷ Baudrillard, Forget Foucault, Semiotext(e), New York, 1987.

form of concrete realities. In other words, thought becomes embroiled in relations of power, knowledge and subjectivity that always undermine the art of theoretical "seduction". Baudrillard makes apathy a way of life: Foucault reveals the theoretical lifelessness of apathy.

Returning to the question at the head of this section - "what happened during the fairly long silence following The History of Sexuality?" - Deleuze provides his own answer. He claims that from 1975/6 onwards Foucault "went through a crisis of all orders, political, vital, philosophical."¹⁸ This crisis instigated the new approach that would dominate his later work. Yet, the crisis not only enabled Foucault to "stray afield of himself" it was also accompanied by an appreciation of the role of crises in the formulation of an ethical commitment. More specifically, the later work is premised upon an understanding of the character of liminality that is absent from his earlier theoretical justifications of his work. While the analysis of subjectivity is of great importance, the later writings begin to delineate a "fourth axis" to Foucault's thought, an axis captured by the idea of liminality. I am not suggesting that the analysis of subjectivity and ethics offered by Foucault in the later works is not worthy of study in itself. For many feminists, to take one example, it is precisely this aspect of his work that is crucial to their interpretation of Foucault.¹⁹ For my purposes, however, the debates around subjectivity are secondary to the question of transgression and liminality in Foucault. As such I shall focus on the later work as containing a new conceptualisation of transgression - one that overcomes the paralysing conception of "lightning transgression" he had employed in earlier work. The remainder of this chapter shall excavate this novel axis *via* a discussion of his investigation of subjectivity.

¹⁸ Quoted in Rajchman, Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics, Routledge, London, 1991, p5.

¹⁹ See, for example, Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism.

Individuality, Subjectivity and Subjectivisation

In the following sections it is important that we are clear on the meaning of the terms individuality, subjectivity and subjectivisation. To put it simply, individuality is a modern configuration of our subjectivity. It is the way in which "we" (Occidental moderns) think of ourselves, and create ourselves, in relation to who we are. It is historically specific and dependent upon a whole host of factors, including the individuating affects of Protestantism and modern capital as well as the disciplinary procedures of modern government. In this respect, Foucault is aligning himself with a school of thought broadly descended from Hegel and Marx. To put it another way, Foucault is critical of the liberal notion of an autonomous self as the primary site of freedom and source of moral worth - "the individual...is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects".²⁰ However, the difference Foucault, and other post-structuralists, bring to the classical debates concerning individuality is in their conception of subjectivity.

This is clearly illustrated by comparison to Marxist accounts of the self. For Marxists the idea of the liberal individual is a product of "false consciousness" - it is an ideological construction of human agency that supports the dominant economic class. This Marxist approach, however, relies upon a correlate conception of a "true consciousness". The features of this true self are usually defined in terms of humans as social and creatively productive beings. In other words, the true subjectivity that is obscured by the ideology of individuality can be ascertained by way of a Marxist analysis. Foucault, in contrast, radicalises the idea of subjectivity by calling into question the whole idea of a "true account of subjectivity". Not only is individuality contingent but subjectivity is also contingent.

²⁰ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p98.

Subjectivisation, is the interplay of this double contingency: "I will call subjectivisation the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more precisely, of a subjectivity which is of course only one of the given possibilities of organisation of a self-consciousness".²¹ In his earlier works, Foucault analysed this procedure via institutions such as hospitals and prisons. In the later works that are the subject of this chapter Foucault examines subjectivisation as a facet of the ethical and moral spheres. As the earlier work looked at techniques of knowledge and power the later work involved Foucault in an examination of "techniques of the self".²²

The Genealogy of Desire

Foucault's interest in the processes of subjectivisation can be used to shed light on his view of social criticism as the experimentation into new forms of life. In order to establish the connections between these areas it is necessary to examine, following Foucault's own genealogy, the different ways in which subjectivity has constituted itself in thought; "How did we directly constitute our identity through some ethical techniques of the self which developed through antiquity down to now?".²³ The specific aspect of our identity that Foucault investigates is our relations to ourselves as subjects of desire. By focusing on the character of "the desiring subject" Foucault is not proposing this aspect of our identity as definitive of our relations to ourselves. Rather, it is to be viewed as only one avenue through which to examine the notion of "techniques of the self". Perhaps Foucault's choice was influenced by

²¹ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p253.

²² In, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth', Political Theory, volume 21, 1993, pp198-227 Foucault refers to 'techniques of the self' as a fourth 'type' of technique alongside Habermas's categories of labour, communication and emancipation. While worthy of further study it is inappropriate to pursue this idea at present.

²³ Foucault, Technologies of the Self, p146.

his own sexuality and desires, as his biographers suggest?²⁴ While sexuality may have proved a pertinent example for Foucault's research into techniques of the self, this does not mean that techniques of the self revolve solely around matters of sexuality and desire.²⁵ Such a view is reinforced by considering Foucault's work on "governmentality".²⁶ In his researches into the practice of government Foucault began to develop the idea that one of the major features of Western societies was the way in which the government of all was secured by the internalisation of rules in single individuals. In these studies we can witness Foucault's emergent interest in techniques of the self. Two points follow from this: first, Foucault does not equate techniques of the self with the domains of sexuality and desire - even though it was these areas that formed the focus of his later work. Secondly, techniques of the self are concerned with the relationship between the macro-political operations of power and the micro-political internalisation of these processes as ethical practices and commitments. Techniques of the self are not concerned with disembodied autonomous individuals.

Anticipating further confusion, Foucault suggests that a "genealogy" of the desiring subject:

does not mean that I proposed to write a history of the successive conceptions of desire, of concupiscence or of libido, but rather to analyse the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves a certain

²⁴ See, James Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault, Harper Collins, London, 1993; David Macey, The Lives of Michel Foucault, Hutchinson, London, 1993; Didier Eribon, Michel Foucault, trans. Betsy Wing, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1992.

²⁵ O'Farrel, Foucault: Philosopher or Historian?, p118, makes a similar point.

²⁶ A useful collection of essays including reprints of Foucault's work in this area is, The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, G. Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1991.

relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being be it natural or fallen.²⁷

As with his studies of madness, medicalisation or imprisonment Foucault is not concerned with the truth of desire but with the discourses and regimes that require people to search for the truth of desire. The question is not, "what is desire?" but "how is the idea of desire operationalised in discourse?". Foucault's aim is to debunk theoretical approaches to the self that focus on the universality of desire (and its structures). He seeks to reveal the specificity of each invention of desire; that is, to show that relations of desire are always intricately bound up with regimes of power-knowledge. In this later work, though, the regimes of power-knowledge function alongside a new realm, the realm of subjectivisation.

Broadly speaking, Foucault traces the following dominant conceptions of desire and its relation to subjectivity. Most recently, the Freudian revolution in psychoanalysis has made it commonplace to think that one must be faithful to one's true desires, that is, not sublimate or repress any of one's emotions. Before Freud, in the Christian tradition, the dominant view was St. Augustine's notion that we think of our lives as made up of signs that must be decoded in order to understand our selves as fundamentally fallen and desiring beings. For example, Adam's desire wrapped around ourselves in a multitude of different ways that we must strive to unravel and understand. Biting the forbidden fruit was a sign of our inherent desire for things that we constitute as *outside* of our "good" selves - not a sublimated desire within us, as Freud may surmise. In antiquity, desire was constructed as an excessive act operating within a controlled economy of self-mastery. Desire was not constructed as a semiotic of the sins of the flesh nor a principal operating at the heart of a science, but as a specific set of practices bound up with the actions of everyday life and the forum. This three-fold history provides the merest hint of the

²⁷ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p5.

different constructions of desire that have, according to Foucault, permeated Western culture. The nuances of each historical period - for example, the differences between the Greek and the Roman conception - are important but not in the present context.²⁸

Foucault refers to the practices of desire as "games of truth". These games are the means through which people constitute themselves as objects of thought. They are the means "through which being is historically constituted as experience, that is, as something that can and must be thought".²⁹ In antiquity these "games" were inextricably linked to a free man's relation to the household economy, to the civic life and to relations with young boys.³⁰ The relation of games of truth to the actuality of living out a life in accordance with these other practices, Foucault calls "the arts of existence":

What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.³¹

Thus, arts of existence were thought of in two different ways in antiquity, as "rules of conduct" and as a style of living. This is an important distinction for Foucault and he generally refers to it in terms of the distinction between morality and ethics.

²⁸ James Bernauer offers an insightful and detailed of the development of Foucault's later writings; Bernauer, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethic for Thought, Humanities Press International, New Jersey and London, 1990.

²⁹ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p7.

³⁰ It is noticeable that Foucault's investigations into antiquity don't explicitly address the role of women during this time. Some commentators have taken this as a sign that Foucault is not sensitive to feminist issues and interpretations. For the debates surrounding Foucault's work and its relation to feminism see; McNay, Foucault and Feminism; J. Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body, Routledge, London, 1991; Diamond and Quinby (eds), Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Northeastern University Press, Boston, Mass., 1988.

³¹ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p10.

For a person to lead a moral life that person must submit themselves to a set of preordained rules and prescriptions, as may be found in a text or in the commandments of a guru. An ethical life, by contrast, is constituted by the relations one has to oneself rather than the relation one has to a code. Rajchman puts it as follows: "There are thus moral problems about the code, its principles and its applications: and then there are ethical problems about how to turn oneself into the right kind of person".³² Or, as Foucault puts it, a person can "practice" the same moral code in many different ways.³³ Furthermore, different historical epochs may be characterised by a preponderance of moral codes over "practices of the self" or vice versa. For Foucault, the Christian era was one dominated by the applications of moral codes whereas antiquity was more concerned with ethical techniques of existence. While one type may be dominant, however, moral codes and ethical practices can not, according to Foucault, be separated. Understanding technologies of the self, therefore, demands an examination of the *relation* between the moral code and the ethical practice. Foucault summarises it like this:

In short, for an action to be moral, it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law or a value....There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without 'modes of subjectivation' and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them. Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity, and they do not differ any less from one morality to another than do the systems of values, rules and interdictions.³⁴

This reinforces the interpretation, suggested earlier, of Foucault's later works as being concerned with more than an abstract subject devoid of social bonds. This is equally apparent when Foucault refers to the ways in which "individuals are urged

³² Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p90.

³³ Foucault, The Care of the Self, Penguin, London, 1986, p16.

³⁴ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p28.

to constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct".³⁵ In both cases, the ambiguity surrounding the character of subjectivisation is deliberate - our identity is self-constructed but our sense of self is itself a product of discursive strategies and relations of power. It is the relationship between the ethical and the moral, the technique and the code, that occupies many of Foucault's later works.

Yet, there is still room for confusion regarding Foucault's object of study. In pursuing his research into the desiring subject Foucault is not concerned with the re-establishment of a humanist discourse of the self; this much is clear from the emphasis he puts on the relationship between the macro and micro level operations of power constitutive of the techniques of the self. It is not the case, though, that Foucault's later writings, are *only* concerned with the processes of subjectivisation that constitute the self. It is in the later writings, through his analysis of subjectivisation, that Foucault begins to elaborate a concept of transition that incorporates the 'limit-attitude' present in his earlier writings while not becoming trapped by the 'finitude' of his own position in a "spatialised" transcendental present. In other words, the later writings forsake the present as an absolute limit of his genealogies and point towards a concept of the present that is sensitive to the process of transgression - a liminal present. Foucault, in his later writings, is searching for the inside of the outside of (his) thought - the interior of transgression that eluded the earlier (genealogical) works. I shall explore this further below.

Perhaps my emphasis on transition in Foucault's later work is unjustified? That this is not the case is clear from the weight Foucault gives to the character of the transition between pagan and Christian ethico-moral practices. Broadly speaking, there are two positions that seem intuitively plausible when one thinks of how sexual morality was transformed between antiquity and Christianity. The first is to

³⁵ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p29.

say that the two eras were characterised by such different moral systems that they form wholly incommensurable paradigms. Pagan antiquity could be looked upon as a society that was lax on moral issues; that Greek and Roman law allowed for a vast array of licence and permissiveness. It could be argued that Christian morality, being dictated by codified and universal rules, was qualitatively different from the "arts of existence" that formed the informal pagan ethic. A second view might suggest that there are in fact amazing similarities between the moral and ethical practices of pagan antiquity and the Christian era. Foucault himself points to four areas where strong continuities can be found. There was, for example, a common fear of the sexual act, should it go out of control. Secondly, both epochs held in common the view that the ideal sexual relationship was one that was monogamous. Thirdly, the image of effeminate men as problematic was common to antiquity and Christianity - regardless of the fact that relations with young boys were positively encouraged in early antiquity. Lastly, the Christian model of abstention from the sexual act had its precursors in the Greek "athletes of self restraint" who would renounce pleasure from sexual activity.³⁶ In general, therefore, it may be thought that these features prove the continuity of pagan and Christian attitudes to the desiring subject. Is it not the case that the Christian doctrines were just the same ideas but dressed up in a different garb?

For Foucault, both these positions miss the point; it is neither one nor the other but both. In looking at the transition from pagan to Christian morality "it is possible to see clear-cut continuities and discontinuities".³⁷ Or, paraphrasing P. Brown: "the parting of the waters is hard to pin down".³⁸ On the face of it this may appear trivial and obvious. Indeed, Foucault's investigations have always sought to reveal

³⁶ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp14-20.

³⁷ Foucault, Technologies of the Self, p39.

³⁸ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, pp240-241.

the lines of similarity and divergence between discourses. Madness and Civilization, for example, gives a detailed account of the transitions between Renaissance and Classical conceptions of madness. It includes thorough investigations into the precise elements that comprised each discourse, revealing just the kind of "continuities and discontinuities" that occupy his study of pagan and Christian discourses of desire. Furthermore, in the interview "On The Genealogy of Ethics", Foucault argued that, although there are some "very striking" continuities between pagan and Christian Morality, "behind, below this continuity there were some changes that I have tried to acknowledge".³⁹ This suggests that Foucault's notion of transition is no different from that presented in The Archaeology of Knowledge (see the end of chapter one). Perhaps Foucault is more willing to talk of continuities but revealing the ruptures of thought by way of genealogy remains his primary critical intent? If this is the case, then my claim that Foucault's later works contain (to some, yet to be defined, extent) a more refined concept of transition that surpasses the finitude of his previous work, would stumble at the first hurdle.

In order to clarify my position it is necessary to restate the dual operation of transition that operates in Foucault's writings. First, there is the idea of transition as the movement from one regime or discourse to the next. To the extent that the argument refers to, what could be labelled, "historical transition" Foucault's concept of continuity and discontinuity between regimes is no different from his earlier work. From the very beginning he has sought to display the lines of continuity and discontinuity between discursive structures. However, if this is our understanding of Foucault's genealogy it is no different from the attitude of a conventional historian. It would be to forget Foucault's attempt to rework the relationship between history and philosophy - to forget, in other words, that genealogy is

³⁹ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p341.

distinct from conventional history. To reclaim the distinctiveness of genealogy is to remember that it is a process of unmasking that operates in the present; with an active awareness of the role of the present in the analysis. In this context genealogy is involved with the critical transition into the future. It is this second feature of transition that we must consider in order to comprehend the change inaugurated by the later works regarding Foucault's rethinking of the limit-attitude. The point is this; Foucault has always been concerned with excavating the intricacies of transition between discourses and regimes but it is only with the advent of his later work that the theoretical framework for a conceptual understanding of transition can fully emerge. This theoretical framework is intimately bound up with, but not reducible to, his ethical investigations. To see why this is the case we must consider the genealogical implications of his foray into antiquity; that is, the way in which his investigations bear upon the present.

In this section I have argued that Foucault's genealogy of desire is not solely concerned with the character of subjectivity and the ethical practices surrounding subjects. The later works are also concerned with the nature of transition - as all Foucault's works have been - yet in the investigation of subjectivity and ethics we shall find a new approach to transition that shall overcome the problems presented by the earlier work. In the next section I shall look in more detail at the relationship between the transition from pagan to Christian ethico-moral practices and how this impinges upon the present.

The Transition to the Present

The evolution that occurred - quite slowly at that - between paganism and Christianity did not consist in a gradual interiorisation of rules, acts and transgressions; rather it carried out a restructuration of the forms of self-relationship and a transformation of the practices and techniques on which this relationship was based.⁴⁰

In the previous sections I have argued that although Foucault's later works revolve around the interplay of desire and subjectivity these themes do not exhaust the topics for analysis that we can glean from his work. Indeed the later writings can be considered as developing the analytic of transition, the analytic of the limit-attitude, that was present in the earlier writings. It is further claimed that this development may overcome the problems, highlighted in chapter one, regarding the finitude of the genealogical present. In this section I shall look more closely at how Foucault's concept of "techniques of the self" may achieve this aim. Furthermore, in assessing this issue I shall be driven to ask two questions; first, "what is the intellectual's relation to the present?" and secondly, "what is the nature of a critique of the present?". It is to these two questions that I shall return in the following sections of this chapter. To be clear on these issues, however, we must first be clear on the nature of the transition from a pagan ethics to a Christian one.

We can begin this process by considering Foucault's claim that the transition from paganism to Christianity is not "a gradual interiorisation of rules, acts and transgressions". Foucault has two reasons for criticising this position. First, to think of the transition in this way is to suggest that the code, the moral law and the dictates enshrined in a revered text, are all that is worthy of study. Foucault, in contrast, argues that "rules, acts and transgressions" do not in themselves constitute the experience of a moral and ethical subject. The internalisation of moral codes through ethical practice, discussed in the previous section, can not be accounted for by reference to the codes alone. Despite the continuity of the moral codes of paganism and Christianity, "we should not let this apparent continuity obscure the fact that the ethical subject was no longer constituted in the same manner".⁴¹ Secondly, and as a corollary of the first argument, Foucault views the notion of a

⁴⁰ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p63.

⁴¹ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p92.

"gradual interiorisation" as suggesting an already ethically constituted subject that absorbs the moral code. It is Foucault's aim, by way of contrast, to look at the constitution of the ethical subject and the mechanisms of its transformations. The difference can be expressed in terms of Foucault's relation to Sartre. Foucault accepts Sartre's notion of the self to the extent that Sartre refuses the idea that the self is a natural given. However, Foucault disagrees with Sartre's insistence that "we have to be ourselves", that the key to understanding the self lies in the notion of authenticity. Rather than focusing on an authentic self - a self based on being true to oneself - Foucault suggests that the self should be considered in relation to the concept of creativity: "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".⁴² In other words, the self is not discovered to be authentic or inauthentic but emerges in the act of self-creation - a more dynamic understanding of the self that does not dictate the parameters of the true self. In relation to the discussion of the transition between paganism and Christianity the point is this; in examining the transition Foucault avoids the reification of the moral code or the ethical subject. In place of this he focuses on the ethical practices that constitute the relationship between the code and the subject. It is in this ethical arena that the techniques of the self operate. This must always be understood, though, in the context elaborated above, namely that self-creation/techniques of the self are intertwined with operations of power and knowledge.

Thus, for Foucault, the transition between pagan and Christian ethico-moral practices is qualitatively different to the notion of a moral code bearing down upon an existential subject. To understand the transition one must address how techniques of the self were reworked and transformed:

⁴² Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p351.

Instead of asking what were the code elements that Christianity may have borrowed from ancient thought, and what were those that it added in its own right, in order to define what was permitted and what forbidden within a sexuality assumed to be constant, it seemed more pertinent to ask how given the continuity, transfer or modifications of codes, the forms of self-relationship (and the practices of the self associated with them) were defined, modified, recast and diversified.

The importance of this examination into the transition period between paganism and Christianity is that it necessitates a look at a new domain of inquiry, the domain of the forms of self-relationship. Foucault's aim is to show how the Greek art of "governing oneself" is a domain that marks itself outside of the relations of knowledge and of power. Why, while examining the transition between pagan and Christian ethics, did Foucault come to delineate this new arena of thought? Why could his inquiry into techniques of the self not be contained by the analysis of power-knowledge he had used to such effect before?

Knowledge, as characterised by Foucault, is most usefully understood as a series of relations that have become "stratified" into discursive formations. It operates through the definition of specific codes - establishing relations between words and things - which enable the production of statements. These codes and formations may overlap and change but nonetheless they function through the formalisation of contingent properties into sedentary structures. Power, as discussed in the first chapter, is a relation between different forces. The operation of power is defined by the ways in which one force may affect, or be affected by, another force. Power, furthermore, functions diagrammatically; that is, the workings of power may be similar across different stratified relations of knowledge. This is the lesson of Panopticism which operates on school-children, madmen and hospital patients (to name a few) as well as on prisoners. Yet, in attempting to understand the transition

from pagan to Christian ethics, Foucault required a third, new, domain. How does Foucault characterise this new arena?

The relations characteristic of subjectivity, of the "arts" of self-relationship, are those whereby force affects itself. Where diagrams of power invoke relations of differing forces - the relation between warder and prisoner, for example - the relation one has with oneself is an act of force on itself. The realm of self-governance lies in the creation of an "internal" regulatory principle that does not depend upon the stratification of a moral code. Yet, this relation of force to itself does not constitute an escape from the domains of power and knowledge, nor an arena that can be subsumed by (or subsumes) these other axes. Subjectivity is in relation to power and knowledge. But what is the nature of this relation? It is possible to glean one response to this by looking at Foucault's use of the classical Greek concept of "*enkrateia*": "the dynamics of a domination of oneself by oneself and the effort that this demands".⁴³

According to Foucault, the dynamics of this "domination of oneself by oneself" - in the domain of desire/*aphrodisia* - consists of five different aspects. First, it implies an "agonistic" relation with the pleasures one feels. Ethical behaviour required that one battle against one's own pleasures; it was "contingent on a battle for power". Secondly, this battle was an agonism of the self. In later, Christian, times the battle represented a microcosm of the battle between heaven and hell, and as such the pleasures that one sought to eradicate were essentially contained in an "other". In antiquity this battle was fought on the combat zone of the self; "one had to cross swords with oneself".⁴⁴ Thirdly, and as a result of the previous notion, victory in this battle was not conceived as the expulsion of desire but of its control. Fourthly,

⁴³ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p65.

⁴⁴ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p68.

this agonism was integrally linked to the battle for control of one's domestic life and one's life as a member of a civic group; "ideal virtue had to be structured like a city".⁴⁵ Lastly, all of this required *askesis*, or training. This *askesis* was originally part of the general training in civic life - if one wanted to dominate others one must be able to dominate oneself - but later on it became a more autonomous part of one's life.

The lesson Foucault draws from the Greek notion of *enkrateia* is that the relation of forces constitutive of self-governance can embody the possibility of freedom and self-control but only at the price of integrating self-control in regimes of power/knowledge. To control others one must control oneself and vice versa. In this sense, subjectivity is not "outside" of power and knowledge, it does not constitute a realm devoid of these relations, though subjectivity is a novel configuration of these relations. It is this novelty which marks it out as the third axis of Foucault's work. Power, knowledge and subjectivity - all related to each other but all differentiated by their internal configurations of force and form/strata.

But this domain of subjectivity and sexuality is antiquated. What relation does it have to contemporary discussions? What are the genealogical implications of Foucault's investigation? Is Foucault arguing that we should recover an "art of existence" in today's world to mimic pagan ethics? In response to this question Foucault distinguishes between the relevance of pagan society to our present culture and the importance of studying an historical epoch and its transitions into an other culture. On the relevance of pagan society to contemporary culture Foucault is extremely dismissive:

Q; "The Greeks, do you find them admirable?"

F; "No"

⁴⁵ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p72.

Q; "Neither exemplary nor admirable?"

F; "No"

Q; "What did you think of them?"

F; "Not very much".⁴⁶

The reason for this attitude is clear. The operation of self-governance in antiquity applied only to free men. It was a society based on slavery and the subordination of women, one that in general "rested on a harsh system of inequalities and constraints".⁴⁷ Thus the nature of ethical life in antiquity is not one that ought to be recreated for the present: "I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at an other moment by other people".⁴⁸ What the Greeks offer is something wholly different,

From antiquity to Christianity we pass from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules. And if I was interested in antiquity it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules, is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence.⁴⁹

Foucault is not concerned with returning to a pagan ethic. Rather, he is interested in analysing the idea of subjectivity in relation to moments of transition; the present being one such moment. While his analysis of the operations of power and knowledge play a part in the analysis of liminal periods, in order to get "inside" the moment of transition Foucault turned to the new axis of subjectivity. Foucault's self-proclaimed task of articulating a "politics of ourselves" relies upon a recognition of the importance of understanding moments of transition. The ethico-political attitude that derives from the later work has subjectivity as its focus but

⁴⁶ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p253.

⁴⁷ Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p25.

⁴⁸ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p343.

⁴⁹ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p49.

contains the elements to unearth a fourth axis in Foucault's thought, the axis of transition, transgression and liminality. This is only possible, however, by rethinking the character of the present to allow for an open (temporal) present, as discussed in chapter two. In the following section the idea of the present in Foucault's later work will be examined through a discussion of the essay, "What is Enlightenment?".

Foucault, Enlightenment and the Present

In 1784 Kant responded to the challenge of a Berlin newspaper to discuss the question "What is Enlightenment?", by writing an essay of that title. Foucault sees the resulting essay as an attempt to answer the question: "what is it in the present that produces meaning now for philosophical reflection?".⁵⁰ In other words, Kant is offering a critical reflection on the contemporaneity of his own Enlightenment project. "What is Enlightenment?" becomes, therefore, an analysis of the relation thought has with its own present. This form of critical self reflection Foucault calls "modern".⁵¹

Modernity is an attitude characterised by the notion of difference: "what difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?". It is a way of relating to contemporary reality that problematises our relation to the present in terms of the difference that being in the present makes to established ways of thinking. As formulated by Kant, modernity is not a rigid "faithfulness to doctrinal elements", but rather it is the critique of the present in terms of the present. It is, suggests Foucault, similar to the Greek notion, discussed briefly above, of an ethos.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p87.

⁵¹ For Foucault's brief discussion of pre-modern conceptions of the present see, *The Foucault Reader*, pp33-34.

Moreover, the ethos of Enlightenment inaugurated by Kant can be characterised in negative and positive terms.

Negatively, this Enlightenment ethos implies that we do not fall prey to the "blackmail" of the Enlightenment. Foucault is suggesting that it does not make sense to be either "for" or "against" the Enlightenment. To do so is to go against the very ethos that Foucault sees in Kant; the ethos of a permanent critique of the present. Indeed the only projects that Foucault argues one can be for or against are projects that present themselves as such: that is, projects that claim to have located the essence of the Enlightenment or those that decry it as "dead". Both these options Foucault finds paradoxical given his reading of Kant who, at the very beginning of the Enlightenment, stressed the need for a continuously critical position in terms of our relation with the present. Both these options reify the Enlightenment in some strange wish to either "preserve it" or declare its bankruptcy. Those who seek to put the Enlightenment on trial and prove its innocence or guilt simply miss the point for Foucault: "Let us leave in their piety those who want to keep the *Aufklärung* living and intact. Such piety is of course the most touching of treasons".⁵² This piety is also the piety of those who think that the Enlightenment can be easily dismissed. They do not realise the beginnings of the Enlightenment are rooted in a tradition of permanent critique, an attitude whose only "judge" can be on-going engagement with the present.

Positively, this ethos of Enlightenment is characterised by Foucault as containing two major elements. First, there is Enlightenment as a "limit-attitude". Eschewing the blackmail of the Enlightenment it is no longer sufficient to be an intellectual on the "outside" or "inside" of modernity, "we have to be at the frontiers".⁵³ For

⁵² Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p94.

⁵³ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment", *The Foucault Reader*, pp32-50, p45.

Foucault this involves the redefinition of the epistemological problem posed by Kant: "If the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing...today...the point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression".⁵⁴ Kantian epistemology is turned into a critical ontology of the present.

Secondly, the analytic Kant outlined in relation to his present must now be rethought in relation to our present, a position that is firmly within the Enlightenment ethos of permanent critique offered by Kant. Foucault, therefore, addresses the relation of the contemporary intellectual to the present. What is the role of the intellectual in current society? Foucault defines it as follows: it is to rethink the limits of knowledge that Kant defined and seek "a new impetus, as far and as wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom".⁵⁵ Where the Kantian search for rational foundations of knowledge had helped liberate people from the prejudices of feudal society, the current task is to pursue this liberatory role to its utmost extent. This includes, though, a thorough investigation of the dominatory tendencies of rationalism itself.

However, realising that this talk of freedom may be no more than an "empty dream", Foucault substantiates his view in reference to the experimental attitude of the Enlightenment:

I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry, and on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take. This means that the historical ontology of ourselves

⁵⁴ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p45.

⁵⁵ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p46.

must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality...has led to the return of the most dangerous traditions.⁵⁶

In place of projects of global transformation, for example Marxism, Foucault stresses the importance of specific struggles with clearly defined local sites of resistance. Experience informs us, though, that even local struggles are never finalised and must constantly engage with the present: "we are always in the position of beginning again". Examples of local struggles would be elements of the gay movement, feminism, the travellers, the black movement and so on; elements that don't seek to universalise their struggle on to all aspects of our diverse experience; elements that seek to form new, but never finalised, ways of living in the present. In this way one can seek to reclaim the present in the tradition of the Enlightenment as formulated by its first, and possibly greatest exponent, Kant. In this way Foucault situates his work in the long tradition that has sought to keep this critique of the present alive and vital; "it is this form of philosophy that from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School has founded a form of reflection in which I have tried to work".⁵⁷ To think of the Enlightenment as an ethos that characterises itself as a relation to the present is to see the importance of all these thinkers in carrying on that tradition:

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating: it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p46.

⁵⁷ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p95.

⁵⁸ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p50.

Foucault's version of Enlightenment social criticism, therefore, is based on the need to cross the limits of the present. It emphasises constant refusal of the present by way of a perpetual crossing of the limits of established ways of thinking. But how is this different from the genealogical "limit-attitude" that I criticised in the first chapter? Do the later works really reflect a new Foucauldian attitude to the present, one that will open it up to the features of liminality discussed in previous chapters? How has Foucault's foray into the transition between pagan and Christian ethics affected his conception of "going beyond" the present? The point is this: while examining the effects of regimes of power/knowledge Foucault was unable to get inside the moment of transition between discursive practices which meant that the approach he took to the present (itself an immanent site of transition) was limited by his own thought. In undertaking a genealogy of the desiring subject Foucault examined the character of transition and transgression through the new axis of subjectivity. Moreover, it was an analysis driven by a recognition that the present is characterised by an "absence of morality" (see above). At such a moment the possibility for reconceiving subjectivity, for enacting the arts of existence, comes into play as the practice of ethics assumes precedence over the formal requirements of the moral code. The "freedom" implicit in ethical practices of self-creation (understood with the provisos mentioned above) can then be realised. If we couple this with Foucault's reinvigoration of Kant's Enlightenment project, with the ideal of permanent critique, then it is possible to discern in Foucault a new concept of the present that eschews the limits of his archaeological/genealogical account. The present, on this new account, becomes a potential site for transition and transgression rather than a barrier to thought. An "open" present, a present conceived as being permanently in transition, allows for the possibility of creative and active subjectivisations in sustaining a constant critique of that present; that is, of fulfilling the Enlightenment ideal as described by Foucault's reading of Kant's concept of *Aufklärung*.

In the next section I shall further examine how this notion of transgression does not fall into the same trap as the "histories of the present" described in chapter one. I shall do this by way of examples regarding some of the political implications of this interpretation of Foucault's later works: an interpretation that places the concept of an immanently transient present at the heart of his thought.

Liminality, Virtuality and Politics

One of the most harmful habits in contemporary thought...is the analysis of the present as being precisely, in history, a present of rupture, or of high point, or of completion or of a returning dawn etc. The solemnity with which everyone who engages in philosophical discourse reflects on his own times strikes me as a flaw. I can say so all the more firmly since it is something I have done myself.⁵⁹

This admission is telling. It tells of a thinker who failed to find a history of the present, an analytic of "ourselves in the present", as a series of relations conditioned by power and knowledge. The product of this futile present was a concept of the future as an absolute void. By rethinking the character of transition between regimes and discourses as periods of liminality, however, the present itself becomes liminal. In other words, by analysing the inside of transition (through his investigation of subjectivity) Foucault can also get inside the present, into the past-present-future of the present. This reveals the importance of Bergson to Foucault. Bergson, as explained in chapter two, analysed the present in its essential temporality; as a moment of duration that contains traces of that which has been and that which is becoming. The liminal present is also the "virtual" present:

I would like to say something about the function of any diagnosis concerning the nature of the present. It does not consist in a simple characterisation of what we are, but instead - by following lines of fragility in the present - in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is. In this sense, any description must always be

⁵⁹ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p35.

made in accordance with these kinds of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, i.e. of possible transformation.⁶⁰

These "virtual fractures" are consistent with the Bergsonian "virtual". The present is thought of as a continuous moment in which past, present and future can not be separated from each other. This is a view of the present which is no longer thought of as a limit to genealogical analysis. Importantly, though, this does not mean the theme of discontinuity disappears from Foucault's work. Rather, it is precisely by emphasising the virtuality of the present that one can maintain the possibility of discontinuity - the present-as-limit condemns the analysis to a repetition of the same, whereas the present-as-virtual allows for the transformations that make discontinuity possible.⁶¹ The future is no longer closed off; no longer the site of rupture; no longer the limit to theoretical knowledge; no longer trapped by the present. Rather, the future is brought into focus by the duration of our existence, our experience of constantly becoming. Becoming, that is, in the sense described in chapter three; becoming as the inescapable immanent temporality of our lives, becoming as always coming to presence. The "fractures" in the present of power and knowledge, the liminal points of crisis and change, create the possibility of radical subjectivisation. Foucauldian ethics, in other words, offers an alternative ontology to that which underpins the narrative account of the self - an open material ontology as opposed to a transcendental one.⁶² The hope that we may gain a critical subjectivity through analysis of intersubjective dialogue, as attempted by Habermas, is also fractured by the immanent transience of everyday speech. The virtuality of each present moment of dialogue disrupts the attempt to universalise

⁶⁰ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p36.

⁶¹ Recall the discussion in chapter two which emphasised that only when the present is "temporalised" can the qualitative distinctions of kind that engender discontinuity be thought through.

⁶² I shall elaborate upon this distinction in the conclusion.

the content of speech - except to say, of course, that transience subsists at all moments (even if the rules of language may lead us to forget this). Radical, critical, theory must always recognise that transition, transience, transformation, transgression and liminality are the immanent ontological conditions of "concrete freedom" (more about this in the conclusion). Moreover, the work of intellectuals is to describe that-which-is by making it appear as something that might not be, or that might not be as it is. Which is why this designation or description of the real never has a prescriptive value of the kind, "because this is, that will be".⁶³ Virtual becoming does not prescribe an actual form of being - except, of course, that which is defined as "agonistic". The practical task of theory is refuse theoretical constructions that create a repetitive present. The theoretical task of practice is to engender the immanence of continuous transition.

Rajchman's interpretation of the concepts "community" and "freedom" in Foucault provides a useful starting point to examine the political consequences of thinking through an immanent liminal present. This will be complemented, towards the end of this section, by considering the debate generated by Habermas's essay, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present".⁶⁴

On the issue of community Foucault's thought is quite clear. He made no claims to be a communitarian and his thought is, in many respects, antithetical to such an approach. While Foucault agreed that one can not conceive of an individual outside of the context in which the individual is created he also maintained that to replace individualism with communitarianism amounts to replicating the problem of individualism: it essentialises one form of human existence to the detriment of alternatives. The attempt to prioritise certain values by reference to their

⁶³ Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, pp36-37.

⁶⁴ Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", David Couzens Hoy (ed), Foucault: A Critical Reader, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, pp103-108.

embeddedness in a community neglects the multiplicity of forms of existence. Communitarianism, like individualism, is concerned with locating the core elements of human nature; Foucault is concerned with unmasking the concept of "human nature" itself. He is neither a liberal individualist nor a communitarian.

However to the extent that we experience living in communities, be they nations, linguistic communities, small groups or whatever, Rajchman argues that, for Foucault, each community could be viewed as consisting of three parts. First, there is the "given community". This consists of the system of relations that are available to each member of the community in terms of the self-defining code that it employs. Put simply it is the explicit recognition of each member as part of the larger community as encapsulated, for example, in the phrase "I am an X". Secondly, there is the "tacit community" which is the "materially rooted system of thought that makes X a possible object of identification".⁶⁵ In other words, whereas the given community is constituted by the discursive practices invested in structures and institutions, the tacit community is the enactment and reinforcement of these discourses through everyday practices. I may say, "I am a Scot" and identify myself as such with reference to the distinct legal, religious and educational institutions of Scotland. Yet, this identification relies upon my tacit acceptance of the legitimacy of these institutions by way of my participation in them. Thirdly there is the "critical community". This aspect of community arises when the links between the given community and the tacit one are fractured. It comes from the problematisation of the self-evidentness of any community. It is this element of community that is most interesting for the present discussion.

It is Rajchman's contention, one with which I agree, that the importance of the critical community for Foucault is that at moments of fracture between the

⁶⁵ Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p102.

discourse of community (the given community) and the practices that sustain the discourse (the tacit community) we find the conditions for freedom. This is not freedom in the sense that once we dispel the bonds of community freedom ensues - that would amount to a broadly liberal position whereby the individual is prioritised over the community. Rather, "it is the community that problematises identity and thus makes our subjectivity an open and endless question, at once individual and collective".⁶⁶ Neither liberal conceptions of autonomous individuals (as in Rawls) nor presupposed communitarian values (as in Taylor) are structural features of this critical position. In this respect, it superficially resembles the dialogical character of Habermas's ideal speech situation. However, Habermas's attempt to ground critical discussion on a presupposed consensus embedded in communication is markedly different from the presupposition of "agonism" that lies at the heart of the Foucauldian account. For Foucault, consensus may well be the result of the operationalisation of a critical community but it is not presupposed in the argumentative process. The reasons for this are apparent from the discussion in chapter four. Of course, in reality the fracture between the given and the tacit community is never likely to be total. It is more plausible to imagine different elements of a community experiencing fracture at different times. This does not, though, substantially alter the claim being made. Putting it simply, the poststructuralist invites the suspension of both substantive values and procedural presuppositions.

The critical community, furthermore, implies a condition of "concrete freedom": "the passion of the critical bond is a passion of being free".⁶⁷ Rajchman continues:

The existence of freedom (that we are not under the sign of a unique necessity) resides in the fact that no historical determination of our being

⁶⁶ Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p102.

⁶⁷ Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p109.

is absolute, that any such determination is exposed to events that interrupt it, transform it, and reinterpret what it is. The *experience* of freedom is an experience of such an event that frees our relation to the practices and the thinking that have historically limited our experience. And the *practices* of freedom are what people try to make of themselves when they experience the existence of freedom in the history that has formed them.⁶⁸

I would add that the *condition* of the existence of freedom is the temporal discontinuity implied by a liminal present - the continuity, that is, of past-present-future which gives rise to the possibility of discontinuity and fracture. The liminal present, the immanently paradoxical present between the past and future, entails the on-going potential of freedom. Freedom is not the end point of struggle but the condition of the very existence of struggle: it is "a permanent provocation".⁶⁹ The condition of freedom is the liminality of the present; that is, the eternal potential for the openness of the present. The liminality of the present resides in the ontological condition of our lives as temporal beings:

Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics; but ethics is the deliberative form assumed by freedom. If the existence of freedom in history conditions the elaboration of an ethics, that ethics is the attempt to endow this existence with a specific practical form.⁷⁰

An ethical life, therefore, is one that strives towards freedom as a practice of living at the limits of the present. This may take the form of "individual" or "collective" action but neither approach is given priority. In Foucault's view, we are not free individuals coming together to form a community, nor communal beings whose freedom lies in their social relations; rather the potential for both is implicit in the present. In other words, we are that-which-is with the potential for that-which-is-

⁶⁸ Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p110.

⁶⁹ Foucault, "The Subject and Power", H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, pp208-226, p222.

⁷⁰ Foucault, "The Ethic of the Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 12, 1987, pp112-131.

not-yet. We are in a position of virtuality, of becoming liminal, that offers no solutions but never stops asking questions about our condition. This is a critical position, it must always invoke criticism, not in the name of some absolute, nor some logically implied consensus of reason, nor in the postmodern "free play" of sheer negativity; but in the "future-past" of the crisis situation, the liminal forever beginning, that can not but arise in the present. Time in its virtuality, recalling Wood (chapter three), is permanently gathering its forces to undermine the many ^estas s of time that order our lives - the working day, day and night, the calendar of seasons, the shrinking time of communications, shopping time, family time and much more. In this undermining of the "spatialisation" of time (chapter two) Foucault locates freedom. Social criticism, in this sense, must be ongoing; it creates "a plurality of questions posed to politics rather than a reinscription of the act of questioning within the framework of a political doctrine".⁷¹

It may seem that this account of social criticism presents a futile picture of social relations. The possibility for social criticism may well exist in a liminal present but this tells us nothing about how we ought to live our lives. To the extent that such a criticism implies the need for a normative approach to social criticism it is wide of the mark. Three points are relevant. Firstly, the search for normative foundations is theoretically futile. More cautiously, the most adequate account to date of the normative approach, that of Habermas's discourse ethics, has been shown to rest upon a dubious "reconstruction" of everyday speech. Secondly, the task of analysing the ontological conditions of the present - of patriarchy, capitalism, postmodernity and so on - is constituted as a vital and on-going project. Thirdly, the role of political philosophy is one of creation and invitation; that is, the creation of fractures in the present and the invitation to experiment within them (always remembering that these fractures are local but not localised). To extend that role

⁷¹ Foucault, The Foucault Reader, p386.

into the normative task of describing what ought to be done once the fractures are revealed is fraught with dangers (even if that "ought" is construed in a "weak" procedural sense). It is not that values can not be deployed in an act of social criticism but that the critic must see those values for what they are - contingent and based upon the "will to power". Taking these factors together, Foucauldian criticism becomes a "positive" exercise in the opening up of the present to critical apprehension, but one that is ever vigilant about over-reaching its scope. Poststructuralism is concerned with creating the eternal potential of freedom but at the expense of the potential of eternal freedom. In this respect the charge that poststructuralism leaves very little for political philosophy "to do" is misguided.

In "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present" Habermas addresses Foucault's interpretation of Kant and the claim that the ideal of Enlightenment is best served by the permanent critique of the present. Habermas recognises that "Foucault discovers in Kant the contemporary who transforms esoteric philosophy into a critique of the present to answer the challenge of the historical moment".⁷² Yet, Habermas contends that this reading of Kant's essay does not fit into Foucault's overall programme of a critique of modernity. The question arises: "how can Foucault's self-understanding as a thinker in the tradition of the Enlightenment be compatible with his unmistakable criticism of this very form of knowledge of modernity?".⁷³ This paradox, suggests Habermas, is symptomatic of a general "contradiction" in Foucault's work: "He contrasts his critique of power with 'the analysis of truth' in such a fashion that the former becomes deprived of the normative yardsticks that it would have to borrow from the latter".⁷⁴

⁷² Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", p104.

⁷³ Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", p107.

⁷⁴ Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", p108. See also, Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again" in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.

Habermas's critique, however, does not amount to a persuasive challenge to the Foucauldian position, as has been pointed out by Dreyfus and Rabinow.⁷⁵ I shall briefly recap their defence of the Foucauldian reading of Kant and then at the close of this section relate their essay to the argument presented throughout the above chapters. Dreyfus and Rabinow begin their response to Habermas by arguing that his interpretation of the Foucauldian programme is misconceived: "the interpretation of Foucault as making normative but unjustified theoretical claims...is not consistent with Foucault's general approach".⁷⁶ While they admit that normative elements appeared in some of Foucault's writings and interviews the overall pattern of Foucault's genealogical research was based on a refusal to "articulate normative principles". To support this interpretation of Foucault they assess his concept of modernity, as it appears in "What is Enlightenment?". Foucault, they argue, was not concerned with modernity as a specific set of theoretical tools brought into being by Kant. If Foucault had conceived of modernity in this way then his analysis would have amounted to an acceptance or rejection of the concepts that constitute "our" sense of modernity. Yet, as we saw above, Foucault was explicitly aiming to avoid the "blackmail" of the Enlightenment/modernity. If such "blackmail" is to be avoided, however, it is necessary to elaborate an alternative concept of what is meant by modernity in Foucault. Dreyfus and Rabinow summarise Foucault's concept of modernity as follows:

Modernity is not a specific historical event, but a historical conjuncture which has happened several times in our history, albeit with different form and content....This breakdown results in a specific attitude toward reality which, to differentiate it from a subjective state, Foucault calls an *ethos*. In a modernity-crisis, a taken-for-granted understanding of reality ceases to function as a shared background in terms of which people orient and

⁷⁵ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'" , *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, pp109-121.

⁷⁶ Dreyfus and Rabinow, "What is Maturity?", p113.

justify their activity and the modernist response is heroically and lucidly to face up to the collapse of the old order.⁷⁷

Modernity, therefore, is not set of specific theoretical tools or normative principles outlined by Kant nor a singular moment in time but a category to understand any moment of crisis where a dominant understanding of reality gives way to another way of thinking about the world. During the moment of "breakdown", moreover, the potential for an ethical perspective is inaugurated. This ethical life of modernity, for Dreyfus and Rabinow, consists of two primary characteristics. First, a heroic attitude to the collapse of shared understandings, that is, one that recognises and faces up to the collapse. Secondly, an ironic attitude to the loss of shared understanding that refuses to reinstate universal principles. On these characteristics, Kant (and Habermas) have a heroic attitude to modernity but they have not "matured" into an ironic stance towards the present. Conflating modernity with Enlightenment embroils one in the blackmail of being for or against its precepts and tools - a futile exercise. Conceiving of the Enlightenment as one manifestation of modernity emphasises the importance of rupture in the constitution of our ethical commitments.

Dreyfus and Rabinow's interpretation of Foucault is more subtle and thoughtful than the "straw man" that Habermas knocks down: though there are also aspects of the Dreyfus and Rabinow argument with which I take issue. I shall conclude, therefore, on the following remarks. First, Habermas, given that his essay was written very shortly after Foucault's death, does not take on board the later writings which I have argued play a crucial role in our understanding of the connection Foucault makes between an analysis of the present and an ontological foundation for ethics. Secondly, in applying normative value to the concept of modernity Habermas is telling us more about his own programme as opposed to engaging with

⁷⁷ Dreyfus and Rabinow, "What is Maturity?", p117.

Foucault's. The extent to which Habermas's critique may be valid relies upon whether or not we accept that the questions he asks are the right ones - questions relating to the procedural grounds of normative critique. In chapter four, though, I have argued that Habermas's attempt to locate a universal pragmatics to ground his normative ethical position is problematic given the assumptions it makes about the character of speech acts. To this degree, it is imperative that Foucault's works are critically explored outside of Habermas's agenda as well as within it. Thirdly, and in relation to Dreyfus and Rabinow, the connection hinted at between modernity as a time of rupture and the ethical perspective this induces was not elaborated upon. This is due to the fact that they don't recognise the difference (and relation) between the archaeological/genealogical conception of the present, as an absolute limit to understanding, and the ethical/liminal present, that emerges in the later work *via* Foucault's analysis of subjectivity and desire. In this chapter I have sought to elaborate just this relation.

Conclusion

If knowledge is the codification of force into a system of propositional relations, power is force in relation with other forces and subjectivity is the action of force on itself, then what is liminality? Putting it simply, it is the action of *time on force*. Force itself must operate in time, creating new interrelations between the triad of power, knowledge and subjectivity. Foucault's analyses were concerned with the "foldings" of force in time; by looking at the effect of time on force we can conceive of a liminal (temporal) present. In this way we can make sense of the fractures of institutional time that provide the ontological conditions of freedom. Thus, when Rajchman argues that the form of our individuality at present, constructed as it is through the relations of power, knowledge and subjectivity, is "not a requirement of Eternity, but a concrete problem of history", he is only partly right. Certainly, "we as individuals" are a product of our history in a thoroughly

material sense. Yet, the potential for criticism of our individuality, for a critical stance in relation to the present, resides in the freedom contained in the glimpses of "eternity" apparent at times of crisis and liminality. History is a product of eternity: to critically unmask the ways in which we are constituted in history is to reveal the "inside" of transitions at all levels of social relations. Social criticism, the art of speaking the truth about society, is a never-ending process of engagement and transgression, with the present as the (potentially permanent) exemplar of crisis. Foucault put it eloquently as follows: "The task of speaking the truth is an infinite labour; to respect it in its complexity is an obligation that no power can afford to short-change, unless it would impose the silence of slavery."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Foucault, Foucault Live, p308.

CONCLUSION

The argument can be summarised in two ways; firstly, as an interpretation of Foucault's works and secondly, as an attempt to articulate a distinctive position in debates surrounding the character of social criticism.

The secondary literature on Foucault is a vast and ever growing concern.¹ Interpretations of his work have flourished since his death and the publication of The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self. The debate surrounding Foucault's "ethical turn" has reinvigorated the earlier interpretations of his genealogies of power/knowledge. Are the later writings, as McNay argues, a reaffirmation of "autonomy as a worthwhile goal of emancipatory politics"?² Do these writings manifest "the free, ethical activity of thought" though continuing Foucault's rejection of humanism, as Bernauer suggests?³ Perhaps, as Shumway puts it, the last books "fall outside of [Foucault's] *oeuvre*".⁴ By interpreting Foucault's later works as an attempt to overcome the finitude of a genealogical conception of the present I have tried to chart a course through these various interpretations. Initially, I have argued in favour of treating the later works as part of an on-going project; in other words, that they represent a "break" in Foucault's project in a sense equivalent to the genealogical "break" from the archaeological project. Secondly, it is argued that Foucault's later writings do not amount to the relocation of an autonomous subject at the heart of his work. If this interpretation is pursued then Foucault's work becomes a weak version of critical theory; weak, that is, because the normative foundations for social criticism it implies are poorly formulated.

¹ For a recent bibliography of secondary sources see, The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, pp328-352.

² L. McNay, Foucault and Feminism, p197.

³ J. Bernauer, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1990, p159.

⁴ D. Shumway, Michel Foucault, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville and London, 1989, p155.

Instead, it has been argued that an alternative reading of Foucault's work, one that views the later writings as a continuation of anti-humanist themes, is the most fruitful approach (if one is to preserve anything other than "empirical insights" from his work). Thirdly, this implies an investigation into the character of his overall project. Bernauer views Foucault's project as the attempt to delineate an "ethics for thought". While highly insightful, Bernauer's account of ethics as the condition of thought-as-politics leaves the problem of the condition of ethics largely untouched; that is, how is an ethical intervention possible? Bernauer's response, that it demands a form of "ecstatic thinking", tends towards the humanism he is trying to avoid. By focusing on the later works as an attempt to account for a liminal present as against a limiting genealogical present, I have sought to explain the condition of possibility for ethics in Foucault's work without recourse to a transcendental strategy. The impact of this interpretation can be articulated as a facet of the debate regarding the character of social criticism.

Five "models" of social criticism have been implicit in the preceding chapters. Firstly, there is social criticism as the reflection upon historical grand narratives. For Jameson, the task of the social critic is to demonstrate that the fragmented appearance of contemporary social relations can be revealed as the effect of the logic that underpins late-capitalism. Criticism is constituted by an "imperative to totalise". Only in this way is it possible to make sense of the roots of oppression and adequately account for the creative realisation of the self in post-capitalist society. Without the construction of grand historical narratives the act of criticism can be no more than irresponsible playfulness.

Secondly, there is the postmodern refusal of all critical endeavours that employ modernist categories and concepts. The very idea of social criticism is called into question as one of the chief illusions of the Enlightenment project. Given the impossibility of discovering meta-narratives of liberation, all that remains is the

playful and ironic appropriation of groundless critical positions. Baudrillard's investigation of "the hyperreal" is a prime example of this attitude to social criticism. The critical act becomes equivalent to the act of parody - norms may be criticised as long as the critical act is suspended in quotation marks: "criticism".

Thirdly, there is the communitarian account of social criticism as an act of self-reflection upon substantive claims embedded in one's own community. Social criticism, in this sense, becomes the task of articulating a stance from within a moral framework as opposed to the discovery of grand narratives. As Walzer has put it, communitarian critics must "find a place to stand, close to but not engulfed by their company".⁵ Or as Taylor suggests, the communitarian critic must excavate the moral principles at the heart of the modern identity: "to show how my picture of the modern identity can shape our view of the moral predicament of our time".⁶ Both thinkers argue that a moral foundation can be discovered by which norms and institutions may be legitimated without having to place the critic in a privileged position "outside" of a social context.

Fourthly, there is the attempt to delineate a normative basis for social criticism upon a conception of practical reason. Rather than offering substantive claims about the true nature of human beings (whether universalisable or context-specific), this project aims to outline a procedure against which the legitimacy of social norms may be tested. In other words, social norms and institutions can claim legitimacy to the extent that they would be chosen by subjects participating in a rational discussion. Procedural accounts of social criticism claim that they allow for the recognition of difference emphasised by postmodernism while not forsaking the critical foothold of substantivist accounts. Habermas's reconstructive critical theory

⁵ M. Walzer. The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century, Peter Halban, London, 1989, p26.

⁶ Taylor, Sources of the Self, p521.

is one attempt at delineating a conception of practical reason suitable for a procedural approach to social criticism.

Lastly, there is the attempt to delineate the ontological conditions that make social criticism possible. On this account the critical act is that which suspends substantive *and* procedural claims while refusing the parodic stance of postmodernism. The role of the critic is to investigate each event in terms of the radical singularity immanent to it. There must be no trace of transcendentalism in the critical act; if there is then the critical act loses its effectiveness by becoming its own limitation. This was the lesson of Foucault's genealogy; the present assumed a role that had to transcend itself for the analysis to function and in becoming transcendent it ceased to refer to the actuality of the present. In his later works, though, the present became a singular event, a liminal present, and the possibility of delimiting the conditions of possibility for social criticism was reinstated.

Certainly the boundaries between these different models are not clear cut and many of the critics examined above utilise a variety of approaches. The analytical distinctions, though, can be held intact. Given this, the case for the incorporation of Foucauldian - poststructuralist - conceptions of social criticism as a distinctive voice in the debate can be maintained. Thinking on a scale that runs from strong universalism to complete relativism, poststructuralism occupies a distinctive space of concerns between proceduralist and postmodern accounts of social criticism. Putting it more polemically, poststructuralism is not a "weak" version of Critical Theory nor is it a "strong" version of postmodernism. On the contrary, poststructuralist social criticism employs distinct conceptual categories that constitute an important contribution to contemporary political thought.

Perhaps a poststructuralist ontology of social criticism is not up to the task of offering radical proposals for change? Perhaps it is caught in its own negativity?

Yet, perhaps it is the other models, in their immodesty and immaturity, which have led us to falsely believe that political philosophy is a grand problem-solving endeavour? Perhaps the role of political philosophy is to create the possibility for new questions to be asked and then step aside? And this is no small nor unimportant task. As Deleuze and Guattari have phrased it: "To think is to experiment, but experimentation is always that which is in the process of coming about - the new, remarkable, and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is."⁷ As Foucault has phrased it: "the task of speaking the truth is an infinite labour".⁸ Poststructuralist political thought is the interrogation of the present utilising non-teleological and non-transcendental conceptual categories; it is, in other words, the never-ending subversion of the myriad manifestations of force that induce sedentary and complacent thought.

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, p111.

⁸ Foucault, Foucault Live, 308.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

As regards translated texts, I have given the citation for the translation and edition used above. Where a number of translated texts by a single author have been used I have listed those texts in order of original publication.

- Armstrong, Timothy (ed). Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1992.
- Austin, J.L. How to do Things with Words, Blackwell, London, 1962.
- Baudrillard, Jean. The Mirror of Production, trans. Mark Poster, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1975.
- Baudrillard, Jean. For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1981.
- Baudrillard, Jean. Simulations, Semiotext(e), New York, 1983.
- Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulations, trans. Paul Foss and Philip Beitchman, Semiotext(e), New York, 1983.
- Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault/Forget Baudrillard, Semiotext(e), New York, 1987.
- Bove, Paul. "The Foucault Phenomenon: The Problematics of Style", Foreword to Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988.
- Beckett, Samuel. "Rockaby", The Collected Shorter Plays, Faber and Faber, London, 1990.
- Bellour, R. "Towards Fiction", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992.
- Bergson, Henri. Matter and Memory, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, Zone Press, New York, 1991.
- Bernauer, James. Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethic for Thought, Humanities Press, London, 1990.
- Bernstein, R.J. "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic Ethos", Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment, Axel Honneth et al (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 1992.
- Best, S. and Kellner, D. (eds). Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, Macmillan Press, London, 1991.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him", trans. Jeffery Mehlman and Brian Massumi, Foucault/Blanchot, Zone Books, New York, 1990.

- Boon, J. "Claude Levi-Strauss", The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences, Quentin Skinner (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.
- Bubner, R. Modern German Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.
- Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (eds). The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1991.
- Callinicos, Alex. Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Perspective, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.
- Canguilhem, Georges. The Normal and the Pathological, trans. C.R. Fawcett in collaboration with R.S. Cohen, Zone Books, New York, 1991.
- Canguilhem, Georges. "The Death of Man, or Exhaustion of the Cogito?", The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Gary Gutting (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.
- Caygill, H. "Architectural Postmodernism: The Retreat of the Avant-Garde?", Postmodernism and Society, Roy Boyne and A. Rattansi (eds), Macmillan Press, London, 1990.
- Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa", New French Feminisms, E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (eds), Harvester, Brighton, 1980.
- Cohen, G. A. Marx's Theory of History: A Defence, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978.
- Connolly, William. "Taylor, Foucault and Otherness", Political Theory, vol. 13, 1985, pp365-376.
- Cooke, Maeve. Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Bergsonism, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Zone Press, New York, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Foucault, trans. Sean Hand, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Huxley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983.

- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. What is Philosophy?, Verso, London, 1994.
- Descombes, Vincent. Modern French Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.
- Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976.
- Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (eds). Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1988.
- Donnelly, Michael. "On Foucault's Use of the Notion of Bio-Power", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992.
- Dreyfus, Hubert and Rabinow, Paul. Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1982.
- Eribon, Didier. Michel Foucault, trans. Betsy Wing, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1991.
- Featherstone, M. "In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction", Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 5, June 1988, pp197-215.
- Flynn, Thomas. "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France (1984)", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 12, 1987, pp213-229.
- Foucault, Michel. Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard, Routledge, London, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. Sheridan, Routledge, London, 1991.
- Foucault, Michel. Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel, trans. Charles Raus, Athlone Press, London, 1987.
- Foucault, Michel. The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Tavistock Publications, London, 1977.
- Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. Sheridan Smith, Routledge London, 1991.
- Foucault, Michel (ed), I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...., Penguin, London, 1978.

- Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. A. Sheridan, Penguin, London, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Penguin, London, 1978.
- Foucault, Michel. Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, D.F. Bouchard (ed), Cornell University Press, New York, 1977.
- Foucault, Michel. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Colin Gordon (ed), trans. C. Gordon et al, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. The Foucault Reader, Paul Rabinow (ed), Penguin, London, 1984.
- Foucault, Michel. The Use of Pleasure, trans. Robert Hurley, Penguin, London, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel. The Care of the Self, Penguin, London, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel. Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984, Lawrence Kritzman (ed), Routledge, London, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds), Tavistock Publications, London, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84), trans. J. Johnston and S. Lotringer, Semiotext(e), New York, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombardi, trans. R.J. Goldstein and J. Cascaito, Semiotext(e), New York, 1991.
- Frank, M. "On Foucault's Concept of Discourse", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992.
- Fraser, Nancy. Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Late-Capitalist Social Theory, Polity Press, London, 1989.
- Freeman, Mark. Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative, Routledge, London, 1993.
- Gane, Mike and Johnson, Terry (eds). Foucault's New Domains, Routledge, London, 1993.
- Gennep, A. van. The Rites of Passage, trans. M.B. Vizendom and G.L. Caffee, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960.

- Gillan, Garth and Lemert, Charles C. Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.
- Gordon, Colin (ed). Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, trans. C. Gordon et al, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980.
- Gutting, Gary. Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.
- Habermas, Jurgen. Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. J. Shapiro, Heinemann, London, 1971.
- Habermas, Jurgen. Toward a Rational Society, trans. J. Shapiro, Heinemann, London, 1970.
- Habermas, Jurgen. "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence", Recent Sociology, H.P. Dreitzel (ed), Macmillan, New York, 1970.
- Habermas, Jurgen. Communication and the Evolution of Society, trans. T. McCarthy, Heinemann, London, 1979.
- Habermas, Jurgen. The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society, Heinemann, London, 1984.
- Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987
- Habermas, Jurgen. Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays, trans. W.H. Hohengarten, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- Hacking, Ian. "Michel Foucault's Immature Science", Nous, vol. 13, 1979, pp39-51.
- Hardt, M. Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy, UCL Press, London, 1993.
- Hollingdale, R.J. Nietzsche, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973.
- Honneth, Axel. The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in Critical Social Theory, trans. K. Baynes, MIT Press, London, 1991.
- Horkheimer, Max. Critical Theory: Selected Essays, trans. M. O'Connell, Seabury, New York, 1972.
- Hoy, David Couzens (ed). Foucault: A Critical Reader, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

- Hundert, E.J. "Augustine and the Sources of the Self", Political Theory, vol. 20, 1992, pp86-104.
- Jameson, F. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, London, 1991.
- Jaques, T. Carlos. "Whence Does the Critic Speak? A Study of Foucault's Genealogy", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 17, 1991, pp325-344.
- Jay, Martin. The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950, Heineman, London, 1973.
- Junod, Henri. The Life of a South African Tribe, Volumes One and Two, David Nutt, London, 1912.
- Kellner, D. (ed). Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique, Washington, Maiseuneuve, 1989.
- Lecerle, J.J. "The Misprision of Pragmatics: Conceptions of Language in Contemporary French Philosophy", Contemporary French Philosophy, A. Philips Griffiths (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
- Lepore, E. and van Gulick, R. (eds). John Searle and his Critics, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grunfest Schoepf, London, 1968.
- Levitas, Ruth. "Review of Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 9, 1992, pp167-169.
- Low-Beer, Martin. "Living a Life and the Problem of Existential Impossibility", Inquiry, vol. 34, 1991, pp217-236.
- Macey, David. The Lives of Michel Foucault, Hutchinson, London, 1993.
- Machado, R. "Archaeology and Epistemology", Michel Foucault: Philosopher, trans. T. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992.
- Mandel, E. Late Capitalism, New Left Books, London, 1975.
- Massumi, Brian. A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 1992.
- McCarthy, Thomas. The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984.
- McCarthy, Thomas. "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School", Political Theory, vol. 18, August 1990, pp437-469.

- McNay, Lois. Foucault and Feminism, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- Miller, James. The Passion of Michel Foucault, Harper Collins, London, 1993.
- Miller, Peter. Domination and Power, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987.
- Mitchell, Harvey. "Charles Taylor on the Self, its Languages and its History", History of Political Thought, vol. 12, 1991, pp335-358.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox", Celebration, Victor Turner (ed), Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C., 1982.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Introduction", Who Comes After the Subject?, Jean-Luc Nancy et al (eds), Routledge, London, 1991.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", Who Comes After the Subject?, Jean-Luc Nancy et al (eds), Routledge, London, 1992.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "La Comparution/The Compearance: From the Existence of 'Communism' to the Community of Existence", trans. Tracy Strong, Political Theory, vol. 20, 1992, pp371-398.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin, London, 1973.
- Norris, Christopher. "The End of Ideology Revisited: The Gulf War, Postmodernism and *Realpolitik*", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 17, 1991, pp1-40.
- Norris, Christopher. What's Wrong with Post-modernism?, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1990.
- Noujain, E.G. "History as Genealogy: An Exploration of Foucault's Approach to History", Contemporary French Philosophy, A. Phillips Griffiths (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
- O'Neill, John. "Religion and Postmodernism: The Durkhemian Bond in Bell and Jameson", Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 15, June 1988, pp493-508.
- O'Farrell, Clare. Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?, Macmillan, London, 1989.
- Poster, Mark (ed). Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, Stanford University Press, California, 1988.
- Rabinow, Paul (ed). The Foucault Reader, Penguin, London, 1984.

- Rajchman, John. Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics, Routledge, London, 1991.
- Ricoeur, Paul. Time and Narrative, Volumes 1-3, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Narrative Identity", Philosophy Today, 1991, pp73-81.
- Ricoeur, Paul. Oneself as Another, trans. K. Blamey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Self as *Iipse*", Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992, B. Johnson (ed), Basic Books, London, 1993.
- Rorty, Richard. "Philosophy as a kind of Writing", The Consequences of Pragmatism, Harvester, Brighton, 1982.
- Rorty, Richard. Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.
- Sawicki, J. Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body, Routledge, London, 1991.
- Searle, John. Speech Acts, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969.
- Shapiro, Michael. "Charles Taylor's Moral Subject", Political Theory, 1986, pp311-324.
- Sheridan, Alan. Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth, Tavistock, London, 1980.
- Shklar, Judith. "Review of Sources of the Self", Political Theory, vol. 19, 1991, pp105-109.
- Shumway, David. Michel Foucault, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville and London, 1989.
- Simmons, Jon. "From Resistance to Polaesthics: Politics After Foucault", Philosophy and Social Criticism, vol. 17, 1991, pp41-56.
- Skinner, Quentin. "Who are 'we'? Ambiguities of the Modern Self", Inquiry, vol. 34, 1991, pp133-153.
- Smart, Barry. Foucault, Marxism and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.
- Smart, Barry. Michel Foucault, Routledge, London, 1988.
- Smart, Barry. "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present", Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity, Bryan S. Turner (ed), Sage, London, 1990.

- Stearns, W. and Chaloupka, W. (eds). Jean Baudrillard: The Disappearance of Art and Politics, Macmillan, London, 1992.
- Taylor, Charles. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", Political Theory, vol. 12, May 1984, pp152-183.
- Taylor, Charles. "Connolly, Foucault and Truth", Political Theory, vol. 13, 1985, pp377-385.
- Taylor, Charles. Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.
- Taylor, Charles. "Comments and Replies", Inquiry, vol. 34, 1991, pp237-254.
- Thompson, J.B. Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.
- Thompson, J.B. and Held, D. (eds). Habermas: Critical Debates, Macmillan Press, London, 1982.
- Toynbee, A. A Study of History, Oxford University Press, London, 1954.
- Turner, Bryan S. (ed) Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity, Sage, London, 1990.
- Turner, Victor. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage", The Forest of Symbols, Cornell University Press, New York, 1967.
- Turner, Victor. On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience, Edith Turner (ed), University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1985.
- Wagner, G. and Zipprian, H. "Intersubjectivity and Critical Consciousness: Remarks on Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action", Inquiry, vol. 34, 1991, pp49-62.
- Wartenburg, T. "Foucault's Archaeological Method: A Response to Hacking and Rorty", The Philosophical Forum, vol. 15, 1984, pp345-364.
- White, Stephen. "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory", American Political Science Review, vol. 80, 1986, pp421-432.
- White, Stephen. The Recent Work of Jurgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
- Wood, David. Philosophy at the Limit, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990.
- Wood, David. On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation, Routledge, London, 1991.