Mapping Transformations: The Visual Language of Foucault's Archaeological Method

REBECCA A. LONGTIN
The State University of New York at New Paltz
Department of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: Scholars and philosophers have thoroughly discussed the visual aspects of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods, as well as his own emphasis on how sight functions and what contexts and conditions shape how we see and what we can see. Yet while some of the images and visual devices he uses are frequently discussed, like *Las Meninas* and the panopticon, his diagrams in *The Order of Things* have received little attention. Why does Foucault diagram historical ways of thinking? What are we supposed to see and understand through these diagrams? To examine the role of the diagram in Foucault's archaeological method, this paper provides a close reading of how the classical quadrilateral visualizes the structure, function, content, principles, and underlying assumptions of language and thought. In analyzing the diagram as a way for visualizing history, I hope to demonstrate how Foucault enacts a new visual language that emphasizes the contingency of thought.

Keywords: Foucault, Deleuze, Agamben, archaeology, language, representation, visualization

Philosophers and scholars have described Michel Foucault as both a visual historian and a theorist of visibility. As John Rajchman has explained, Foucault uses vivid images to reveal historical shifts in how we see the world at the same time that he reveals the relation between visualization and theorizing.[1] This relation between vision and theory is especially vivid in Foucault's archaeological method in *The Order of Things*. While the term "archaeology" evokes the sense of uncovering some hidden source or substructure, Foucault does not adopt these connotations. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault notes that the term "designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive."[2] That is, Foucault's archaeology is not *arche*-ology (*arche* – origin), but *archive*-ology. Rather than unearthing a logical substructure or discovering an origin, an archive organizes and compares given elements to describe their relations. Instead of deducing relations from one source through causal necessity and subordinating elements to create a hierarchy, the archive uses a mode of visual and auditory organization to coordinate information. As Gilles Deleuze describes in an interview: "archaeology is to do with archives, and an archive has two aspects, it's audio-visual. A language lesson and an object lesson. It's not a matter of words and things (the title of Foucault's book [*Les mots et les choses*] is meant ironically). We have to take things and find visibilities in them."[3] By this description, archaeology is a method for visualizing the order of things.

Yet Foucault's archaeologies and genealogies reveal how visibility acts as a principle of power and various forms of "the gaze" control individuals or impose systems and values.[4] The question becomes whether or not Foucault's archaeology can escape the dangers of the visual practices he criticizes. Martin Jay notes this tension in Foucault's thought and argues that "in all of his attempts to problematize the given visual order and expand the boundaries of what could be seen, Foucault never provided a genuinely positive alternative."[5] While Jay admits that Foucault's thought is highly visual and contains images that can evoke disruptions for the sake of social criticism, he ultimately sees Foucault as belonging to a French movement that denigrates vision. Thus when Jay asks, "Can Foucault himself be said to have offered a visual antidote to the disciplinary power of the gaze?" his response is negative.[6]

In this paper, I will argue against Jay's answer to this provocative question by exploring Foucault's archaeological method as a visual practice that successfully avoids subordination, necessity, and domination.[7] To do so, I will analyze the visual details of the Classical quadrilateral—Foucault's diagram that depicts the episteme, or epistemological space, of the 'Classical' period (the 17th and 18th century)—and highlight their philosophical significance both for *The Order of Things* and for his archaeological method as the "mapping of transformations" (AK 138). The Classical quadrilateral is particularly revealing because it maps out the transformation of thought from the Classical to the modern period ('modernity' begins in the 19th century for Foucault) and allows us to see the conditions for discourse, everyday perception, and theory, which is how Foucault describes the historical a priori.[8] The diagram gives shape to the field of knowledge that is possible at a given time and allows us to see what is and is not possible within these perimeters.[9] Visual analysis of the Classical quadrilateral thus gives us insights into how Foucault's investigation of the historical a priori is possible and, due to the subject-less nature of this particular configuration, also suggests the revolutionary possibility of archaeology as a visual practice.

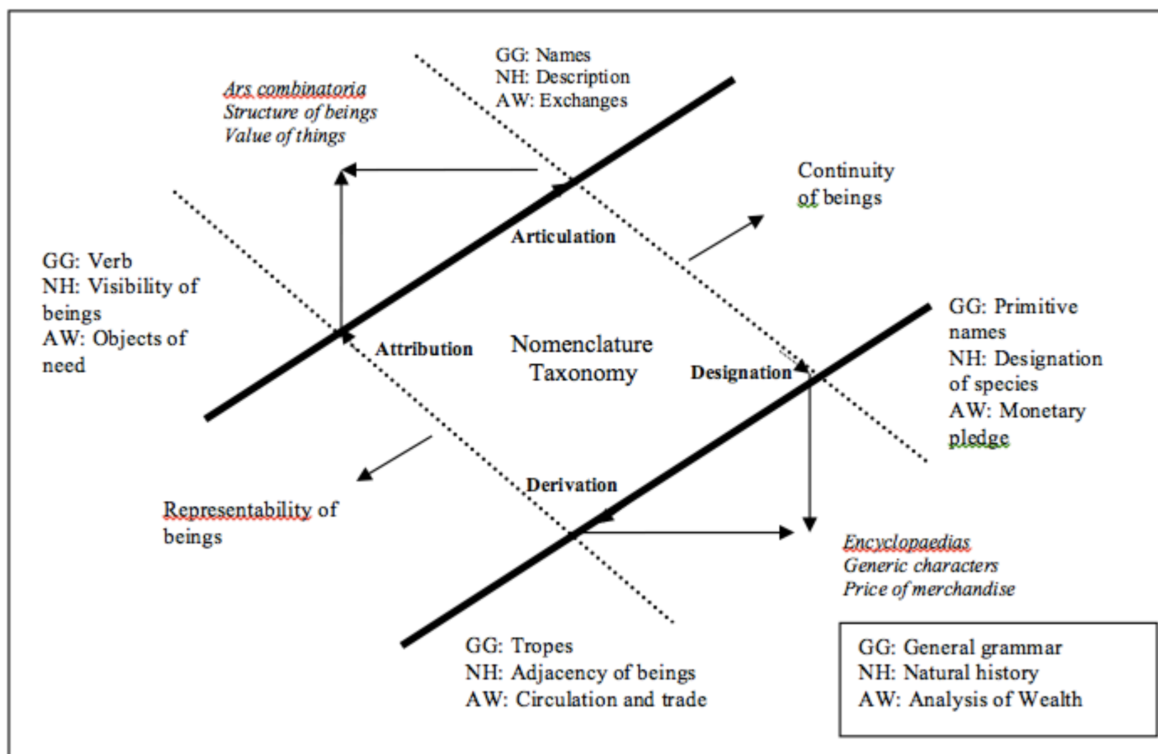
There are many unexplored details of the quadrilateral that require visual analysis in order to determine exactly what is being presented. While Andrew Cutrofello has pointed out that Foucault's Classical quadrilateral maps onto Kant's table of categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,[10] there is still a lack of scholarship as to the details of how Foucault depicts these elements visually.

The following will provide a close reading of the quadrilateral's visual aspects by analyzing: (I) the four points of the quadrilateral that depicts the four elements of language, (II) the solid lines that represent the two general principles of language, i.e. grammar and genealogy, (III) the dashed lines that convey the mirror of language, which acts as a system of self-referential rules for what is sayable, (IV) the interior of the diagram that presents a taxonomy of names, and (V) the exterior of the diagram, which reveals the hidden ontological assumptions that allow the possibility of discourse. By interpreting the meaning of these visuals in terms of language, I will argue that archaeology is a form of negative visualization that reveals the historical contingency of thought—that is, a liberating and non-hierarchical visual practice, rather than yet another dominating form of the gaze.

I. The Elements of Language

Our analysis of the quadrilateral begins with the four points that define this diagram's shape: attribution, articulation, designation, and derivation [see Fig. 1]. Together these points define the terrain of language and how it speaks. Foucault describes the function of each term in his chapter on language in the Classical age, "Speaking." Attribution is defined by the verb, articulation by names, designation by primitive names, and derivation by tropes. Together these points define the space of possible language within the Classical episteme.

Fig. 1: Classical Quadrilateral (as pictured in *The Order of Things*, 201)



By *attribution*, Foucault means the act of making a proposition or conjoining words with a verb. Foucault begins with attribution because it forms the threshold for language. Language begins with the verb, and the basis of all verbs is “to be” (OT 94). For Classical thought, the proposition is the most basic element of language—words do not constitute language until they are established in this manner. Just as thought is not a heap of unrelated empirical instances, language is not an amalgamation of disassociated utterances. Rather, the raw material of language must be formed by relations in the linguistic act of attribution. Attribution allows us to connect the instances of *x* and *y* in such a way that they become language: *x is y*. Here we see the importance of the copulate ‘is.’ The copulate relates words and thus allows for the most rudimentary beginnings of language. While the copulate provides the constant point of connection between two elements, attribution expresses nothing unless it *articulates* a noun or name. To say ‘x is y’ necessitates that x and y have some element of commonality, a generality that they share. *Articulation* provides this dimension of generality needed to establish relations.

Foucault then moves to the opposite side of the quadrilateral, the source of words in particular instances. By contrast to the generality of articulation, designation is particular. Designation indicates, it points at what names name. Foucault describes primary designation as the “language of action” composed of “sounds, gestures, grimaces” (OT 1 – 6). Yet while designation indicates, it does not mirror its object: “The cry does not resemble fear, nor the outstretched hand the sensation of hunger” (OT 106). The instances of designation give us the source of language but are not identical with the content of a sentence. For this reason, language is not the mirror of nature but its own system of relations. It is important to note that Foucault’s explanation of language in the Classical age begins with the general structure of language in attribution and articulation before it moves to designation. The general form of language plays a more primary position in Classical thought, which will become more evident as we examine the relations between these points.

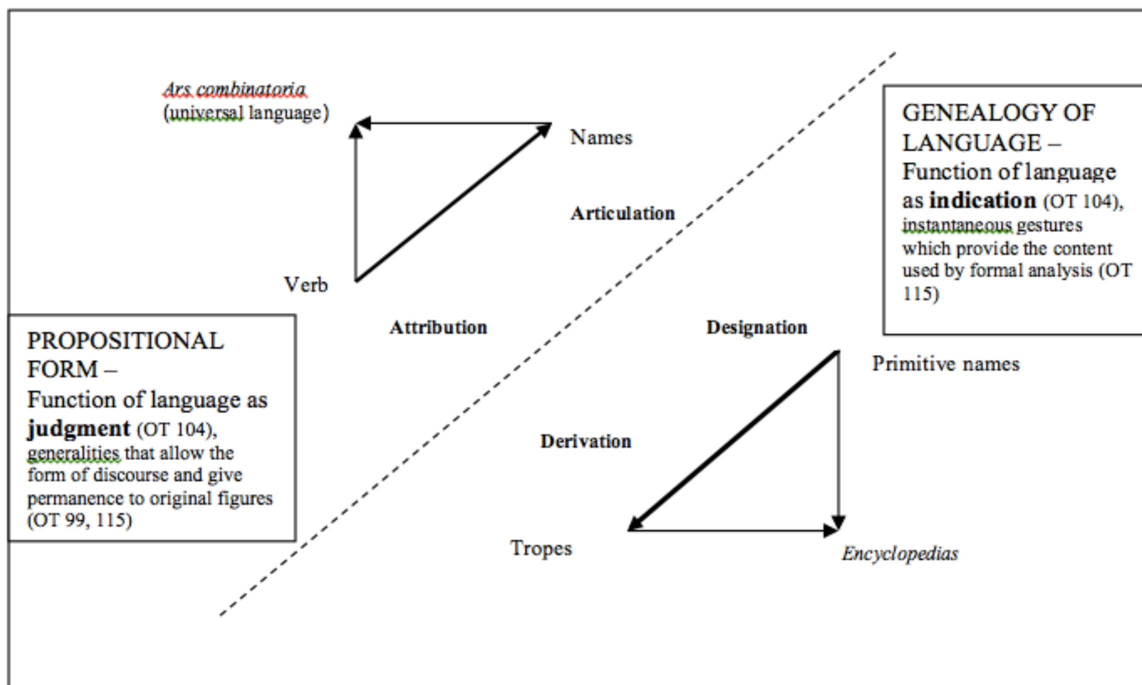
So far we have the form of language (attribution), the commonality of elements (articulation) and the source of words (designation), but the quadrilateral is not complete without *derivation*—which allows the generalized form and elements of language to arise from the particular sources of words given by designation. Derivation creates relations between the instances of designation to form common names. Foucault uses the example of the word ‘tree.’ Originally each particular tree had its own name, a proper name peculiar to it. As language develops, however, people connect elements that are common among individual trees and derive one general name for it. These common elements and relations that allow derivation are rhetorical figures: tropes and metaphors. Its derivations are more like taxonomy than logic. In establishing rhetorical relationships between particulars, derivation establishes the *mobility* of language—its ability to connect spontaneous, gestural moments into a more intelligible schema.

Given these four points, we have a general sense of language in the Classical episteme. Yet Foucault does not simply give us these elements of language—he plots them out as a quadrilateral. To understand how he maps out the relations between attribution, articulation, designation, and derivation, requires examining the more subtle nuances of his diagram’s visual language: (II) the solid lines, which demonstrate the principles of language, (III) the dashed lines, which symbolize the mirror of language, (IV) the interior space of the quadrilateral, which forms a grid of names, and (V) the negative space surrounding the quadrilateral.

II. Two Principles of Language

Two solid arrows form the sides of the Classical quadrilateral: one connecting attribution to articulation and the other connecting designation to derivation. These solid arrows visually convey the two Classical aspects of language: propositional form and genealogy [See Fig. 2].

Fig. 2: Solid Lines – Principles and Functions of Language



The relation between attribution and articulation provides a formal structure: the proposition. Attribution provides the form of the proposition, and articulation gives propositions content. Thus, where attribution and articulation meet, they form the concepts behind Leibniz's *Ars Combinatoria* and the idea of a universal language. By contrast, designation and derivation describe primary indication, the instantaneous gestures and figures that allow signs to indicate what they substitute. Here primal names are drawn together by tropes to establish a "*tropological* space" (OT 114). The metaphors of derivation draw relations between primal names, a practice that we can examine through genealogies of language. Thus where designation and derivation meet they point towards encyclopedias, which give a historical account of our knowledge through the development of words. These two solid lines present the two principles of Classical language, propositional form and genealogy—the general form of language and its particular, historical developments. Propositional analysis and indication present the two functions of language: one providing the necessary generality of form and the other providing the necessary particularity of content. They run parallel to each other and do not intersect. Each forms its own solid basis for one aspect of language: syntax versus semantics.

Yet the quadrilateral of language indicates not only these two aspects of language, but also relationships across the boundaries of these general and particular forms of language.

Articulation is connected to designation by a dashed line, as is derivation to attribution. These dashed lines complete the quadrilateral and show interplay between the formal and gestural principles of language. These relations show that the logic of language and its genealogy reflect each other and form a set of self-referential relations. That is, the classical quadrilateral presents language as a mirror.

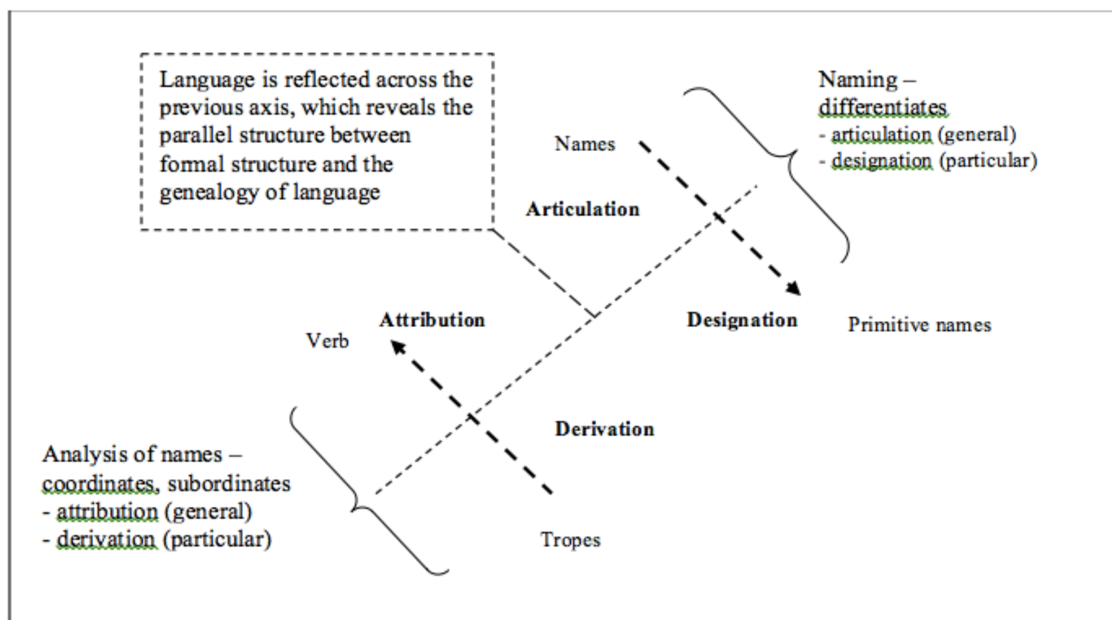
III. The Mirror of Language

Here we must note the parallel relationships between these two halves of the quadrilateral. Namely, articulation and designation are both principles of naming and attribution and derivation are principles of analyzing names and creating connections. Articulation provides general names, whereas designation gives particular names. Similarly, attribution gives general relations, while derivation gives relations particular to instances of designation. The parallel of naming and coordinating that occurs between the generalized form of language and its particular instances suggests that language is folded upon itself and forms a closed system. For the Classical quadrilateral of language,

> nothing is given that is not given to representation; but, by that very fact, no sign ever appears, no word is spoken, no proposition is ever directed at any content except by the action of representation that stands back from itself, that duplicates and reflects itself in another representation that is its equivalent. Representations are not rooted in a world that gives them meaning; they open of themselves on to a space that is their own, whose internal network gives rise to meaning. (OT 78)

Language does not mirror the world; it mirrors itself. That is to say, language is a system of signs that provides the entirety of its content and associations. From the parallel structure of the quadrilateral, we can account for particulars and universals, instances and generalizations, origins and formal aspects, without outside reference. Representation and language show self-referentiality in this mirroring. The completeness of this self-referential system is further indicated by the interior of the quadrilateral, which forms of the grid of language [See Fig. 3]

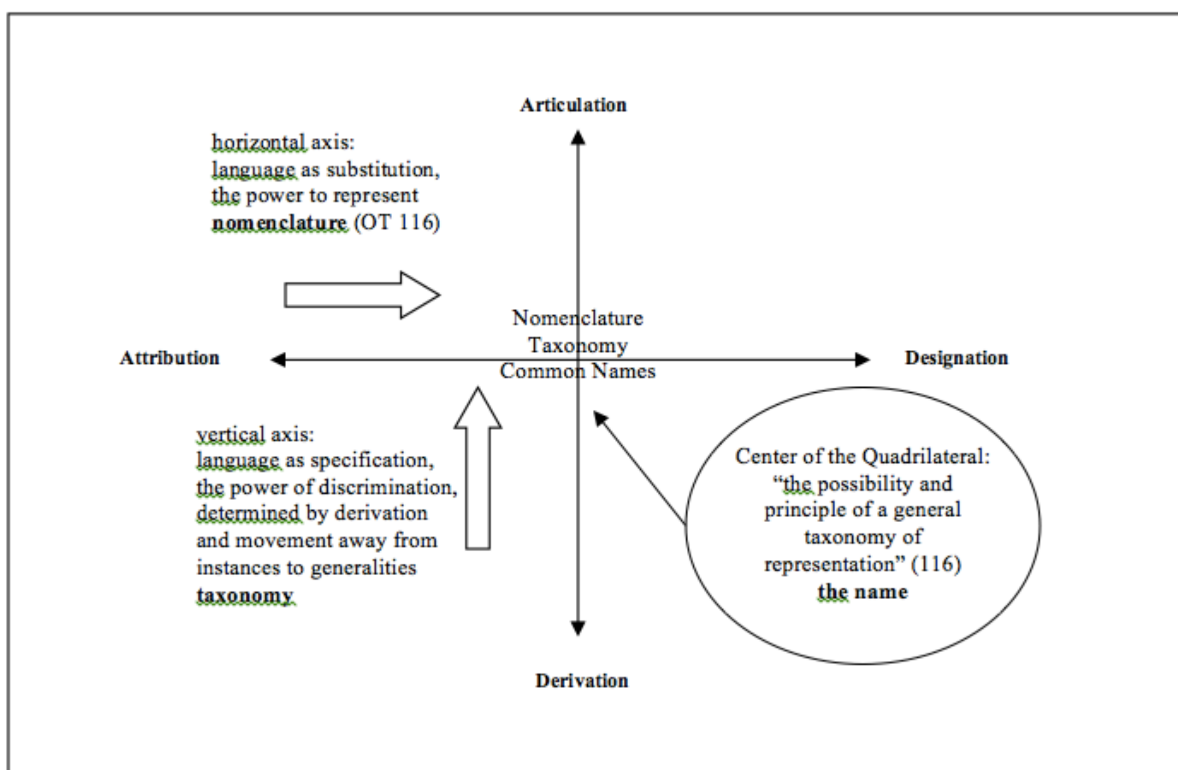
Fig. 3: Dashed Lines– The Mirror of Language



IV. The Grid of Language

In turning to the interior of the diagram, the meaning of the visual language becomes more vivid. To do so requires plotting out a space that Foucault does not diagram. While Foucault's diagram of the Classical episteme does not draw lines between articulation and derivation or between attribution and designation, he describes "diagonal relations" between these points (OT 115 – 116). From this description we may infer the possibility of drawing these lines to further our visualization of Classical language [See Fig. 4]. These diagonal relations differ from the ones that are depicted in solid and dashed lines, because they do not form a perimeter but instead establish positions within the quadrilateral of language. That is to say, the relations between articulation and derivation and between attribution and designation describe the interior of the quadrilateral. In particular, drawing lines to depict these relationships allows us to visualize a coordinate plane that fixes language and orders it as a grid.

Fig. 4: Diagonal Relations: a Coordinate System and the Grid of Language



The relation between articulation and derivation forms a vertical line, or y-axis. Along this axis, we are able to mark linguistic progress in terms of specification: "if the existence of an articulated language is possible, with words in juxtaposition, interlocking or arranging themselves in relation to one another, then it is so only in so far as the words of that language… have never ceased to move further and further away, by a process of derivation, thus acquiring a variable extension" (OT 115 – 116). The arrangement of specific relationships and tropes into general names with greater extension shows movement up the vertical axis, which describes a language's "articulative capacities" (OT 116). At an earlier juncture, Foucault had created a similar vertical axis for a "grid of language" (OT 97). In this description, names increase in their

generality by moving from substance to quality along a vertical axis (OT 97 – 98). This vertical axis thus describes the movement away from individual instances towards shared characteristics that allow us to establish common names. Foucault sees this axis as establishing the word as an *element* "with its power to make combinations and break them down" (OT 116). The *y*-axis expresses language as combination, subordination, and differentiation—which illustrates the Classical method of *taxonomia*, or "the arrangement of identities and differences into ordered tables" (OT 71 – 72). In this way, language establishes taxonomy, a table of identity and differences, along the vertical axis between articulation and derivation.

Perpendicular to the axis of taxonomy, we can extend a horizontal line between attribution and designation to form the x-axis. Here we see a relational line from the proposition, which affirms existence, to the origin of all nominations. In drawing a relationship between the affirmation of the being of language and the instantaneous moments of nomination in primitive words, this axis describes the relation between language and what language indicates, or represents. That is, the being of language and all of its affirmations are essentially tied to the role of signification, or representation. In this way, the *x*-axis describes representation: "it is along this axis that the relation of words to what they represent is established" (OT 116). But given the nature of designation, *what words represent is representation*. The sign established in primal words is not a copy or mirror of the world, but a sign that replaces what it indicates. The designation *is* a representation, and so what words indicate is their nature as representation: "here it becomes apparent that words never speak anything other than the being of representation, but that they always name something represented" (OT 116). The movement between the being of language as its primary moment of representation describes language as *substitution,* or "power to represent" (OT 116).

This horizontal axis, as the power of words to represent, denotes a form of duplication. Words are names, and to "name is at the same time to give the verbal representation of a representation" (OT 116). Words always act as substitutions, or representations of an original. Designation is particular, but it is still representation. Attribution, as the general form representing original designations and derivations, is a further representation. Accordingly, when attribution moves towards designation, it relates the existence of its representations to an origin of representations. This relation between attribution and designation displays the duplication of representation within language: the fact that language makes representations of representation (OT 98, 116). As such, this axis of substitution describes language as representation and establishes words within a self-referential system of signs. The *x*-axis thus duplicates and places words along an "endless interleaving of language and representation" that relates words to the representations that they represent (OT 116). This process of giving the representation of a representation, is *naming*. For this reason, the line that directs words to their representations is the axis that situates names. The horizontal axis of the quadrilateral describes language as nomenclature.

Given the vertical line of taxonomy and the horizontal line of nomenclature, the point where they meet is taxonomy of nomenclature. The power of discrimination that exists between articulation and derivation establishes a system of identity and difference, or taxonomy. The power of substitution that exists between attribution and designation establishes a system of duplication in which representations represent representations with names. With the power of these two axes, the quadrilateral has an inner method of analysis to constitute itself as an organized table. Thus, the interior of the quadrilateral is a *grid of language*,[11] a table where

names are given and arranged according to identities and differences, a coordinate plane of a self-contained system of rules.

The name, as the center of the quadrilateral, expresses all of the principles and conditions for possibility of language. The interior of the quadrilateral is a coordinate plane established by the capacity of language for substitution and for discrimination. The point of intersection between these two capacities—the origin, to use the geometrical term—is the name. All the structures of language—attribution, articulation, designation, and derivation—meet here. All the relations between these structures converge here. The name thus describes all the principles, conditions, possibilities and elements of language in the Classical episteme. Classical language is established, identified, and centered upon the name.[12]

Perhaps the most important detail of this grid is the centrality of the name. The epistemological space of the Classical period is defined by language and not by the human subject, "man." The concept of man does not ground or establish knowledge within the Classical episteme, which is why Foucault claims that "man is only a recent invention" (OT xxiii). The quadrilateral depicts the main observation of *The Origin of Things*: that the configuration of knowledge has undergone a dramatic rupture between the Classical episteme and the modern episteme in which the principle of naming has been replaced by the principle of man. The history of the sciences is not continuous and does not revolve around the human subject. By mapping out the figure of Classical language, Foucault demonstrates what is missing: man. Once we understand Foucault's diagram of the Classical episteme, the quadrilateral should have the same visual effect as the painting *Las Meninas*,[13] i.e. showing us the disparity between our contemporary episteme and the Classical episteme.

Las Meninas in all its subtle movements, suggestions and relations, exposes us to the discontinuity between the presuppositions of contemporary thought and Classical thought by confusing our expectations. The painting contains a mirror that is placed directly across from us, the spectators of the painting. But the mirror does not and cannot reflect our image since it is a representation within the painting and we are outside of it. Instead the mirror reflects the image of figures who are included in the scene of the painting already, figures who are being painted by the painter within the painting. This work of art mirrors and duplicates all its figures to the point where we as viewers are not included within its interplay of references. It quietly excludes us from its representations. The mirror at the center of the painting refuses to reflect our image and make us a part of the painting, but instead encloses itself as a representation (mirror image) within a representation (the scene of a royal painting) within an act of representation (Velázquez's painting itself). *Las Meninas* is a representation without a subject, as the Classical quadrilateral is a table (or *tableau*) of knowledge without man.

Fig. 5 Diego Velázquez. *Las Meninas,* 1656-57, oil on canvas, 318 x 276 cm.
Reprinted with permission from Museo del Prado. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade-48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f

V. The Exterior of the Quadrilateral

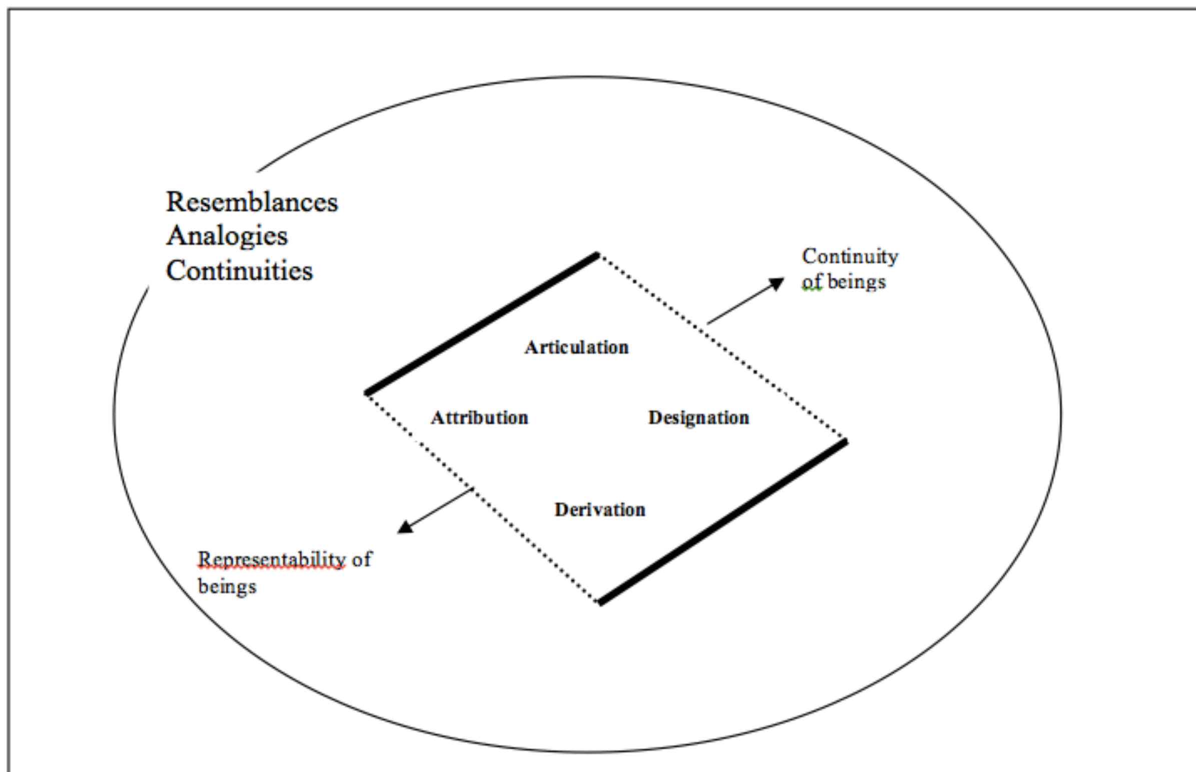
Taken together, the quadrilateral's points, segments and interior grid depict all the principles, structures, rules, and figures necessary for it to function as a system. In this sense, the quadrilateral is complete in itself; it is a closed table, "a region of signs – of signs that span the whole domain of empirical representation, but never extend beyond it" (OT 73). This table of language is a self-referential configuration; it folds upon itself and duplicates its representations in order to maintain itself as a table. Its meaning is internal and not derived from an external world. As Foucault states, "Representations are not rooted in a world that gives them meaning; they open of themselves on to a space that is their own, whose internal network gives rise to meaning" (OT 78). As such, the quadrilateral is a well-defined, closed shape. What constitutes knowledge and language is defined within particular perimeters.

Yet in another sense, this quadrilateral is not closed. The dashed lines—while they draw fixed relations—do not express the same closed and constant relationship that the solid lines of the quadrilateral express. There is a difference in relation between the elements that constitute the principles of language and those that constitute the mirror of language. The dashed lines, which express the folding over of language upon itself, betray that this duplication may not be completely enclosed and explained by representation itself. Foucault expresses this point by

asking, "How, generally speaking, can the two opposite segments (those of judgement and signification for language…) relate to each other in such a way as to make possible a language…?" (OT 206). This question indicates that the relation between the formal elements of language (syntax) and function of language as indication (semantics) require an additional, hidden assumption, not contained within the system itself. More fundamentally, this question exposes the open sides of the quadrilateral to an implicit ontology or a series of assumptions about being.

While representation does not get its meaning from the world, it still functions under certain assumptions about the world. These assumptions are expressed by arrows emanating from the dashed lines: arrows pointing towards the *Continuity of beings* and the *Representability of beings* [See Fig. 5]. While the *continuity of beings* and the *representability of beings* cannot be contained within the clarified principles, rules and content of language since they are not forms of representation, they function on the periphery of language as implied assumptions. Between derivation and attribution, "it becomes really necessary to suppose that representations resemble one another"—and it is here that the *representability* of being allows for the "interconnection of representations" by which logical propositions and particular metaphors make their connections (OT 206). In general, derivation and attribution both rely upon implied resemblance, as they are both forms of connection. In particular, the relation between derivation and attribution—in which derivation combines designations into more general ideas by fixing "upon some internal element, upon some adjacent point, upon some analogous figure"—assumes that there is some adjacent point or analogous figure that allows for this function (OT 114). Being must have a quality of analogy, or representability: "being as expressed in the presence of representation" (OT 206).

Fig. 6: Periphery of the Table – Continuities and Resemblances



Similarly, between the two modes of names (articulation and designation), there must be the *continuity of being*, or “the unbroken expanse of beings” (OT 206). Names, as nouns, “proliferate in endless differentiation” (OT 97). This differentiation is most obvious in primitive names, which are particular to each individual and have not yet arrived at the generality of articulation. But the differentiation that characterizes naming is impossible without a certain continuity of being. Being cannot be completely discrete instances or be complete differentiation, otherwise there would be nothing to point towards as we name: “If everything were absolute diversity, thought would be doomed to singularity… doomed to absolute dispersion and absolute monotony” (OT 119). All naming requires that there be some continuity, some established whole in order to indicate anything at all.

Together, the representability of being and the continuity of being encircle the quadrilateral. Yet we must not think of these concepts in the same way as the figures, rules, and principles that define the quadrilateral. On the contrary, these concepts act as the periphery around the quadrilateral and describe the negative space of this shape. Foucault says that we must think of these concepts as “an ontology defined negatively as an absence of nothing” (OT 206). In this sense, the representability of being and the continuity of being do not provide any positive principles for the quadrilateral, but only deny negative principles that would prohibit the possibilities given by language. For this reason, the analogies and resemblances of being that make it representable and continuous are not proper to the Classical episteme, but occupy the negative space that surrounds it: “Resemblance, excluded from knowledge since the early seventeenth century, still constitutes the outer edge of language: the ring surrounding the domain of that which can be analysed, reduced to order, and known. Discourse [i.e. Classical language] dissipates the murmur, but without it it could not speak” (OT 120). The space around the quadrilateral is outside of language, yet forms the conditions for its possibility. In particular, artists and madmen occupy this blank space. The mad lie outside of the established space of discourse because they form correspondences and assume similitude without reference to how knowledge is ordered at that given time. Artists also form correspondences and assign similitude outside of the established order but without the destruction and chaos of madness. “The poet brings similitude to the signs that speak it, whereas the madman loads all signs with a resemblance that ultimately erases them. They share, then, on the outer edge of our culture and at the point nearest to its essential divisions, that ‘frontier’ situation—a marginal position and a profoundly archaic silhouette—where their words unceasingly renew the power of their strangeness and the strength of their contestation” (OT 50). Language at the margins thus provides essential insight into language and how it functions. Its murmurs reveal the hidden assumptions and implicit rules that we ordinarily ignore.

The exterior of the diagram is easy to overlook, as negative space often is to the untrained eye, but Foucault asserts that it is this space that provides the inner workings of the quadrilateral:

> Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in a depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression. (OT xx)

It is the blank spaces of the Classical quadrilateral that are most telling and most in need of finding expression. This frontier is significant for Foucault not just for understanding the Classical episteme, but also because its illuminates his method. Archaeology looks at limits—it examines where there is rupture and discontinuity in order to question the legitimacy of certain theories, methods, and practices. Foucault's corpus as a whole utilizes marginal positions to provide a critical perspective of the established order. It is this frontier and the negative space of the quadrilateral that exemplifies Foucault's method of visualizing history. When we shift our attention to this periphery we see the emancipatory potential of Foucault's visual practices.

VI. Conclusions: Archaeology and the Art of Describing Visibility

I have argued that Foucault's diagram is more than a mere visual aid for clarification by analyzing how it provides its own enactment of his archaeological method as a "mapping of transformations" (AK 138). The Classical quadrilateral reflects Foucault's description of archaeological method as "the description of discursive formations, the analysis of positivities, [and] the mapping of the enunciative field" (AK 131). Foucault's ability to provide such visual description suggests what Jay denies—namely his archaeology invents a new visual practice. The unique qualities of this visual practice—especially insofar as it differs from the structuralist and phenomenological discourses of Foucault's time—become more evident when we think about the above qualities of the Classical quadrilateral.

The Classical quadrilateral challenges the modern subject because it excludes human subjectivity. In this sense, Foucault's archaeological method reflects the system of representation in the Classical episteme. The Classical quadrilateral is a closed system of self-referential rules, which describes the conditions that would allow for Foucault's attempt "to explore scientific discourse… from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such a discourse" (OT xiv). Archaeology seeks the point of view of the system of rules, not the perspective of human subjectivity. Like the Classical quadrilateral, Foucault's archaeology does not make "man" central. That is, human subjectivity is not the principle that dictates the space of his inquiry. Foucault even states that he "writes in order to have no face" (AK 17).

Moreover, if we examine Foucault's use of the Classical quadrilateral more critically, we see a fundamentally different use of visual space, one that suggests radical nominalism.[14] Representation is everything within this space, and there is nothing outside of representation. There is an absence of dimensions—no structuralist sub-layer or transcendental level. Without these dimensions, there is no vertical line to allow for hierarchies and subordination. This space defines its own laws without external necessity, which suggests the possibility of rearrangement but without implying a cause or subject that arranges knowledge in any particular form.[15] It is a space of complete contingency. This space thus serves the purpose of archaeology, which according to Thomas Flynn is "[to] radicalize our sense of the contingency of our dearest biases and most accepted necessities, thereby opening up a space for change."[16] Thus, unlike the sense of necessity, control, and authority of the disciplinary gaze, Foucault's archaeological method provides a new visual practice that allows for contingency, rupture, and social critique. Given this close visual analysis of the diagram and all it presents and gestures toward, both said and unsaid, both visible and invisible, it should be clear that there is much more to Foucault's diagrams than a shadow box of still images.

Moreover, Deleuze's description of archaeology as finding visibilities also seems to indicate an aesthetic method at work. Finding visibilities suggests that we must look, compare, and describe—rather than analyze, establish, and subordinate—a descriptive and comparative

method similar to the spectator observing a work of art.[17] As Béatrice Han has emphasized, Foucault adopts a "descriptive rather than explicative outlook."[18] Yet archaeological method does not necessarily cohere with our general sense of "vision" or "visibility." What does it mean to look for visibilities from the blank space of archaeology? Visibility is associated with positivity rather than negativity, with affirmation rather than annihilation, and with presence instead of rupture and void. How are we to think of Deleuze's insistence upon archaeology as a visual method? Here Giorgio Agamben's description of archaeology provides insight.

Agamben's description of archaeological method in *The Signature of All Things* evokes art and aesthetic practices, especially his discussion of the role of paradigms. Paradigms provide a type of reasoning that is visual in nature and, more importantly, allow us to make connections without subordination, hierarchy, or necessity. Agamben uses Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* to expose the unique and paradoxical way that paradigms draw connections. The paradigm is *not* a particular that relates to a whole and thus does not exhibit inductive thought. Nor does the paradigm assert a general principle that can be applied to other cases, which would be deductive in nature. A paradigm dwells on the plane of the particular. It does not move up like induction or down like deduction, but works beside (*para*) the other particulars it illuminates. Agamben notes that Aristotle's description of the paradigm is radical because it questions the dichotomy between particulars and universals and asserts a way of knowing that uses analogies rather than logic.[19] Like the table of language in the Classical quadrilateral, paradigms form taxonomies, rather than pure systems of logic. A paradigm is paradoxical in the sense that it is an example that stands for other cases, even though it is a case among other cases.[20] Agamben explains this paradoxical aspect of paradigms in terms of Kant's description of aesthetic judgment in *The Critique of Judgment*.

Agamben explicitly unites aesthetics and archaeology when he describes the analogical function of the paradigm in terms of Kant's aesthetic judgment. *The Critique of Judgment* describes aesthetic judgments as having a paradoxical type of necessity where an example can be given, but no rule. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are not necessary in terms of theoretical objectivity or practical concerns. For this reason, an aesthetic judgment cannot be determined by any general rule that would apply to all cases. Yet aesthetic experience asserts some form of necessity. That is, if I experience something as beautiful, I feel as though others also ought to think it is beautiful, even though I cannot universalize this "ought" as a rule. Kant resolves this tension by describing the necessity of aesthetic judgment as *exemplary*. Aesthetics proceeds according to paradigms, not logic.[21] But how do we know the paradigm is an example if there can be no rule? Agamben notes "that a paradigm implies the total abandonment of the particular-general couple as the model of logical inference."[22] Instead, we rely upon "the exhibition alone."[23] The function of paradigms in this type of thinking is present throughout Foucault's corpus. Agamben provides an incomplete list of paradigms in Foucault's work: the panopticon, the confession, the care of the self, among others. In each of these cases, Foucault's use of paradigms "establish a broader problematic context that they both constitute and make intelligible."[24] Paradigms thus break from our usual ways of thinking not only in terms of being non-hierarchical, but also in terms of establishing a different sense of necessity, one that denies the possibility of general rules.

This comparison of paradigms and aesthetic judgment describes a way of seeing, a method of finding visibilities, that does not determine its objects according to rules. Judgments of beauty cannot be totalized. Aesthetic judgment operates outside of distinctions that we use to analyze or subordinate elements: especially the distinction between universal and particular,

cause and effect. As Agamben states: "In the paradigm, intelligibility does not precede the phenomenon; it stands, so to speak, 'beside' it (para)."[25] There is no above or below, examples are merely set side by side with what they exemplify. In this sense, we can see how it is possible to find visibilities without falling into a sense of vision that subjects everything to the lawfulness and presence of its gaze. Not only are paradigms visual devices, they also exemplify the thought behind archaeology: negative visibility. There can be intelligibility without determinations or fixed relations. There can be a sense in which vision does not control and subjugate, but instead provides a negative position for a critical perspective.

Lastly, the absence of rules, hierarchy, and necessity mean that we must think of this type of visualization in terms of negative space—that is, the frontier, or marginal spaces of what can be said, thought, and seen. In his Foucault book, Deleuze describes the task of making visibility visible as a negative one when he discusses *visibility outside the gaze*: "Visibilities are not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passion, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes which emerge into the light of day."[26] Visibility, or the conditions of possibility for what can be seen, is itself not visible. It is implicit, hidden, obscure. That is, visibility must be *made* visible.[27] This task, moreover, requires that we work through negation. The visibility of the past, as Walter Benjamin has noted, is not a source that we simply uncover. In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin writes that we do not see the past as it really was, but instead "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[28] Agamben reads this passage as meaning that we must view the past from a position of alienation, a negative space in which we are lifted out of the context of time and view it from the outside.[29] In this sense, archaeology is not a method that uncovers hidden sources or operates according to a set of rules. Archaeology instead offers a new history by giving us a new way to see.[30]

Notes

[1] John Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 88 - 117.
[2] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 131. Henceforth cited as AK followed by page number.
[3] Gilles Deleuze. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 96. See also Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. Deleuze emphasizes the visual aspects of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy throughout the book.
[4] Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power" in *Power/Knowledge*. ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 146 – 165. Originally published as "L'Oeil du Pouvoir" as a preface to Jeremy Bentham, *Le Panoptique* (Paris: Belfond, 1977).
[5] Martin Jay, *Downcast eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 414. Jay addresses Rajchman's reading of Foucault's visual histories in passing and only superficially, especially insofar as Jay does not address the distinction Rajchman makes between vision and visibility or the fact that there are multiple types of visibility within Foucault's thought. However, Jay raises an interesting and important tension between Foucault's critique of visual practices and the fact that his method is so visual. Jay's concerns here merit further consideration.

[6] Jay, 413.
[7] See also Gary Shapiro's critique of Jay in *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003. Shapiro argues against a simplistic approach to vision that sees it as either good or bad, benevolent or oppressive. Shapiro provides thorough and nuanced readings of vision in Foucault's thought.
[8] Foucault describes the historical a priori as "what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* , trans. A. Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). 158. Henceforth cited as OT followed by page number.
[9] See also Béatrice Han's explanation of Foucault's historical a priori and how his sense of the a priori departs from the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Husserl: "Foucault proposes the paradoxical hypothesis of an *a priori* fully given in history, which transforms itself with it, and which nevertheless somehow lies beyond it in defining the conditions of possibility, themselves variable, from which the knowledge of an epoch can and must form itself" (4). This paradox will be discussed more in my conclusions, specifically in terms of the role that paradigms play in archaeological method. Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, trans. Edward Pile (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[10] Andrew Cutrofello, "The Completeness of Foucault's Table of the Classical Episteme" in *Philosophy Today* 47 (2003): 53 – 62.
[11] As Foucault describes, "the entire order of the resulting coordinations and subordinations is covered by a grid of language and each one of these points will be found upon it together with its name" (OT 97).
[12] "At the point where these two diagonals intersect, at the centre of the quadrilateral, where the duplicating process of representation is revealed as analysis, where the substitute has the power of distribution, and where, in consequence, there resides the possibility and the principle of a general taxonomy of representation, there is the *name*" (OT 116).
[13] That is, if we look at *Las Meninas* within the context of *The Order of Things*. Many other thinkers give interpretations of *Las Meninas* that do not coincide with Foucault's use of it. For example, John Searle asserts the impossibility of the painting and looks at it as illusory, rather a disruption between the Classical sense of representation (without a subject) and our contemporary notions of representation. See John Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation" in *Critical Inquiry*, 6.3 (1980), 477 – 488. See also, Stephen H. Watson, *In the Shadow of Phenomenology*: *Writings After Merleau-Ponty I*, (London: Continuum, 2009). As a phenomenologist, Watson provides an interpretation similar to Searle—the impossibility of the missing subject in *Las Meninas*—in contrast to Foucault's claim of a fundamental rupture. It should be noted, however, that the fact that we perceive *Las Meninas* as an impossible illusion does not necessary undermine Foucault's argument and in many ways supports it—the very notion of subject-less representation is impossible within our contemporary episteme.
[14] See also, Thomas R. Flynn, "Foucault and Historical Nominalism" in *Phenomenology and Beyond: The Self and Its Language*, ed. Harold A. Durfee and David F.T. Rodier, (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 134 – 147.

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[15] Stuart Elden describes Foucault's spatial language as freeing history from teleology and other types of narratives that rely on linear development. See Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London: Continuum, 2001).
[16] Thomas Flynn, "Foucault's mapping of history," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29 – 48. 32.
[17] See Joseph J. Tanke, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art: A Genealogy of Modernity* (London: Continuum, 2009). Tanke emphasizes the role art plays in Foucault's historical method, particularly insofar as works of art reveal the conditions that allow things to be visible and transform those conditions.
[18] Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, 5.
[19] Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D'Isanto with Kevin Attell, New York: Zone Books, 2009. 19.
[20] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 20. Han also notes this tension between the transcendental and the historical in her explanation of Foucault's historical a priori, which is "an a priori fully given in history, which transforms itself with it, and which nevertheless somehow lies beyond it in defining the conditions of possibility, themselves variable, from which the knowledge of an epoch can and must form itself." Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, 4. Her book reveals this paradox at the heart of Foucault's method.
[21] Deleuze has also compared Foucault's thought to the role of imagination in Kant's aesthetics.
[22] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 21.
[23] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 21.
[24] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 17.
[25] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 27.
[26] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 59.
[27] As Rajchman explains, "we have pictures not simply of what things looked like, but how things were made visible, how things were given to be seen, how things were 'shown' to knowledge or to power—two ways in which things became *seeable*… There is a history not simply of what was seen, but of what could be seen, of what was *seeable*, or visible." Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," 91.
[28] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007. 253 – 264. 255.
[29] Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content,* trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. 104 – 105.
[30] A note of gratitude to Thomas Flynn and Samuel Talcott, who provided critical feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and to David Peña-Guzman for his insightful suggestions during the final editing process.