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FOUCAULT, KANT, DELEUZE, AND THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AGENCY

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date

FOUCAULT, KANT, DELEUZE, AND THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AGENCY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

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by

Christopher S. Penfield

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ABSTRACT

Penfield, Christopher S. Ph.D., Purdue University, May 2015. Foucault, Kant, Deleuze, and the Problem of Political Agency. Major Professor: Daniel Smith.

Political agency concerns the transformation of the conditions of social organization through collective action. In order to treat the set of necessary conditions for such agency, I develop a detailed reconstruction of Michel Foucault's political philosophy, placed in relation to the work of Immanuel Kant and Gilles Deleuze. I argue that the key to Foucault's political thought is contained in two crucial but neglected concepts, *verticality* and *transversality*, and that the systematic exposition of these concepts yields an account of what must obtain for political agency to be possible, realizable, and sustainable.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Overview: On the Problem of Political Agency in Capitalist Society*

While philosophy dissertations are often depicted as either detailed studies on a philosopher or interventions concerning a more general philosophical problem, the present thesis, if it is to be successful, must be both. It takes form largely as an exegetical analysis, aiming to be as precise and comprehensive as possible, of a figure in the history of philosophy – namely, Foucault, though also (and necessarily) Deleuze and Kant; and it gives itself the task of constructing the beginnings of a political theory that would respond to the problem of political agency in capitalist society. *Political agency* refers to the power of individual or collective action to transform the conditions of social production. To pose political agency as a philosophical *problem*, is both to inquire into its necessary conditions and to diagnose the forces that undermine them. And to pose the problem of political agency in the context of capitalism, is to suggest the historical singularity of the power relations that defuse, exclude, or appropriate potentially transformative agential force.

I will argue that this problem is the guiding impetus of Foucault's political philosophy, and indeed, of Foucault's thought *tout court*, insofar as he situates his own work in the critical tradition and takes its measure through its transformative effect. Crucial to my argument will be to demonstrate that Foucault's political thought hinges on

two concepts that have remained almost entirely untreated, *verticality* and *transversality*, and that their conceptual treatment provides the basis for a theory of political agency.

‘Verticality,’ philosophically grounded in both Kant and Nietzsche, refers in Foucault to either (1) an intensive form of limit-experience irreducible to historical determination, or (2) a critical ‘history of limits’ that shows how the exclusion of such experience plays a constitutive role in the formation of western culture. ‘Transversality,’ a concept that emerges through Foucault’s decades long exchange with Deleuze, refers to a compositional principle of connection for creating dynamic lines of alliance between various excluded or marginal groups over whom a common form of power is exercised.

Carefully charting the trajectory of Foucault’s work across thirty years, I aim to show how vertical experience, transversal connection, and vertical critique satisfy, respectively, political agency’s necessary conditions of possibility, realization, and sustainability. I would also suggest that from popular uprisings, to sovereign debt crises, to the basic inadequacies of representative democracy, the problem of political agency in capitalist society is still, and especially, ours today. Indeed, if there is a reason to take such care in reconstructing an original political theory from Foucault’s work, one that would outline the set of necessary conditions for transformative politics, it is not only its scholarly value but also its contemporary salience.

Now, in order for such salience and scholarship to be borne out, it must actually be the case that Foucault took the contemporary exercise of power in capitalist society to be problematic and its transformation, desirable. Such a claim, however, might seem to be controverted by the recent view, centered on his 1979 *Birth of Biopolitics* lecture course at the Collège de France, that Foucault was sympathetic to neoliberal governmentality.

For example, someone as close to Foucault as François Ewald has been able to maintain that Foucault, in fact, offers “the apology of neoliberalism – especially the apology of Gary Becker,”¹ insofar as the “Chicago School” theory of human capital allows for the problem of government (how to govern or manage the conduct of individuals, of groups, of the population) to be posed in non-moral and non-judicial terms (namely, in economic terms of calculable self-interest).

Therefore, in order to clear the way for reconstructing Foucault’s critical political philosophy of agency, I will introduce my thesis by arguing (1) that Foucault’s relation to liberalism is best understood on the model of his relation to Kant, and (2) that doing so provides the ground for *denying* that Foucault was an apologist for neoliberalism in any sense, including Becker’s theory of human capital. This reading of Foucault also supports the position taken recently by Frédéric Gros, who argues that a distinction must be drawn between two forms of liberalism.² On the one hand, there is “economic” or “political” liberalism, which designates the biopolitical production and capture of the active forces of a population for the profit of a dominant arrangement of power relations – in other words, the form of governmentality corresponding to modern capitalism, which intensifies the operation of power by exacerbating non-egalitarian social divisions (e.g., growing rates of economic inequality) while de-politicizing economic agents (as self-interested private citizens) and impoverishing the possibilities for collective relations of

¹ François Ewald, “American Neoliberalism and Michel Foucault’s 1979 Birth of Biopolitics Lectures: A Conversation with Gary Becker, François Ewald, and Bernard Harcourt,” The University of Chicago – May 9, 2012, 4. Ewald, philosopher and historian in his own right, was an assistant to Foucault at the Collège de France in the 1970s.

² Frédéric Gros, “Y a-t-il un sujet biopolitique?,” *Nóema*, IV-1/2013.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell, 319.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 319-20.

⁵ Frédéric Gros, “Y a-t-il un sujet biopolitique?,” *Nóema*, IV-1/2013. Do not confuse Gros’s use of ‘minoritarian’ – which I take to mean something like ‘the 1 percent’ – with Deleuze and Guattari’s use of

solidarity (e.g., amongst workers, as in the decline of unions, of labor as an organized political force, etc.). On the other hand, there is what Gros calls “critical liberalism,” or, as Foucault puts it, liberalism as a “tool for the criticism of reality” and “form of critical reflection on governmental practice,”³ which functions as a critique of excessive government and activates or realizes the rights of the governed. In short, there would be a *positivist* economico-political liberalism, a “regulative schema of governmental practice,” but also a *critical* liberalism, “a sometimes radical oppositional theme”⁴ to excessive forms of governance.

Further, these two forms of liberalism are not just distinct but diametrically opposed to one another. Such is the upshot of Gros’s argument: (1) Foucault conceives “biopolitical resistance” in terms of “the right of the governed,” a right realized or expressed when those who are governed by an exercise of a power they deem unjust “assert the will to exist otherwise”; (2) historically, on Foucault’s view, “this activation of a right of the governed” is made possible by critical liberalism; therefore (3) critical liberalism can be seen as the basis for resisting the biopolitical exercise of power proper to economic or political liberalism.

Before being the doctrine of the sacred rights of the individual or the ideological justification for capitalism, liberalism is that form of thought which, in the West, posed the question of ‘too much government.’ Are we overly governed, and in what sense? ... Thus, if economic liberalism justifies a biopolitics that exploits vital forces for the profit of exclusive [*minoritaire*]⁵ politico-economic forces, critical liberalism nourishes the forms of biopolitical resistance.⁶

³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell, 319. ⁴ Ibid, 319-20.

⁵ I have opted to translate *minoritaire* as ‘exclusive’ here so as to avoid confusing Gros’s use of ‘minoritarian’ – which I take to mean something like ‘the 1 percent’ – with Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term.

⁶ Gros, “Y a-t-il un sujet biopolitique?”, 42, my translation.

Gros's view thus has the virtue of accounting for the apparent ambivalence of Foucault's relation to liberalism, and the divergent interpretations that result: Foucault could be read as both a critic of liberalism, taken as an economico-political regime, and proponent of liberalism, taken as a mode of critique targeting the undue exercise of power.

Indeed, the general distinction Gros draws between a form of *positivism*, which Foucault would resist, and a form of *critique*, which would provide the means for such resistance, runs deeper than even Gros suggests. I will argue that it fundamentally orients Foucault's view of his own philosophical project, expressed in his career-long ambivalence toward Kant and culminating in his reflections on the Enlightenment.⁷ One merit of this reading is to deny the view that Foucault's lectures on liberalism mark an inflection point along his political trajectory, one purportedly tending toward de-radicalization or even conservatism, since what interests Foucault in critical liberalism is consistent with his earliest formulations of critique.

Further, I will argue that such a consideration of Foucauldian critique provides the basis for rejecting the view of Foucault as neoliberal apologist. Foucault's favorable remarks on Becker's analysis of drug policy notwithstanding, he would ultimately not defend neoliberalism as a critical form of thought, let alone as an economico-political regime of power; for neoliberalism takes *homo economicus* – i.e., the neoliberal subject, the form of individual as self-interested decision-making agent – as something

⁷ In Foucault's early work, such as *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* (1961), "Preface to Transgression" (1963), and *The Order of Things* (1966), Kant is both the thinker of constitutive finitude – hence opening a tradition of reflection on transgressive forms of limit-experience, radicalized by Nietzsche and running through Bataille – as well as the thinker of anthropological positivism, by which a more radical kind of finitude (death of God) becomes territorialized in man. We will return to this point in greater detail in Chapter 3.

universally given or methodologically presupposed, and thus cannot analyze this form of subject as being itself the contingent effect of historical power relations. Moreover, as will be shown in the last section of Chapter 4, neoliberal governmentality effectively impoverishes what Foucault calls the ‘relational fabric’ of society, and thus constitutes precisely that biopolitical administration of social life that Foucault’s own ethico-politics aims to resist.

1.2 *Neoliberal Governmentality and the Two Kantian Traditions*

By the end of his life, Foucault situated himself philosophically within a certain tradition of Kant.⁸ However, in a manner perfectly analogous with the distinction drawn between positivist and critical liberalism, he does so by sharply differentiating between two opposed Kantian strains.⁹ On the one hand, there is the Kantian tradition that Foucault calls the “analytic of truth”: coming out of Kant’s surreptitiously anthropological critical project, the analytic of truth is an epistemological interrogation into “the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge.”¹⁰ On Foucault’s view, this tradition gives rise to a form of scientific and logical positivism that informs the “science of the State,” that is, the form of governmental rationality that “selected as its instruments procedures to rationalize the economy and society”¹¹ – which is to say, precisely, *liberal* governmentality. Indeed, Foucault analyzes liberalism itself in decidedly Kantian terms,

⁸ See, e.g., Foucault, “Foucault,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 2*, edited by James Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley, 459.

⁹ Foucault makes this distinction several times specifically with regard to Kant, e.g., in “What is Critique?” (1977), in the *The Government of Self and Others* (1983), and in “What is Enlightenment?” (1984).

¹⁰ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, edited by Gros, translated by Burchell, 20-1.

¹¹ Foucault, “What is Critique?”, *The Politics of Truth*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, translated by Lysa Hochroth, 49-50.

indicating the extent to which they belong to the same tradition: for example, echoing the Copernican turn of transcendental idealism, liberal government does not act on “things in themselves,” such as individuals, wealth, and land, but rather on the “phenomena of politics,” namely, interests.¹² Neoliberalism, in turn, rigorously follows the Kantian notion of a regulative idea, specifically with respect to regulating rather than determining the conditions of the market, e.g., achieving price control by stabilizing inflation through credit policy (i.e., by managing interest rates) rather than by determining or fixing prices.¹³ The market itself becomes a site of veridiction, e.g., of the ‘true’ or ‘natural’ price of commodities. Liberalism, in its positivist form as regulative schema of governmental practice, is thus an analytic of truth linked to the science of the State, or to a form of governmentality that acts upon interests (and thus upon the possible actions of individuals) by regulating the conditions of the market.

On the other hand, there is, as Foucault emphasizes, a properly “*critical* tradition of Kant,”¹⁴ stemming from Kant’s writings on Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which critiques the forms of subjugation by which human beings are maintained in a subordinate condition to an excessive form of authority. Precisely like critical liberalism, the second Kantian tradition problematizes governance from the perspective of those who are governed, thereby seeking to limit or reverse the exercise of power through a critical movement that would itself constitute a practice of freedom. Foucault refers to this second Kantian tradition, running from Hegel through Nietzsche and Weber to the

¹² Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 44-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

¹⁴ Foucault, “Foucault,” 459.

Frankfurt School, as the “critical attitude”¹⁵ or “limit-attitude,”¹⁶ which couples a “call for courage” for humanity to lift the “minority condition” in which it has been “maintained in an authoritative way,”¹⁷ together with an “ontology of ourselves,” which interrogates the historically contingent conditions, the techniques of “governmentalization” that have delimited what it is possible to be, say, think, or do.¹⁸

As with the two kinds of liberalism, then, the two Kantian traditions are not merely distinct from one another, but diametrically opposed: on the one hand, a positivist analytic of truth enlisted to support the governmental rationality of a state system, and on the other, a “critical attitude” that would precisely resist this form of governmentality. In a general sense, these would be like the two strands of modernity, the one (major, dominant) marked by the historical emergence of capitalism and general intensification, proliferation, and diffusion of power relations, and the other (minor, oppositional), a potentially revolutionary form of critique and practice of freedom. Foucault, of course, locates himself in this second, more radical tradition of Kant. And indeed, even when Foucault turns to Antiquity in the 1980s, in an apparent break from his research on power, it is “to construct a genealogy of the critical attitude in Western philosophy,” finding in the Greek concept of *parrhesia* (‘free speech,’ ‘outspokenness’) “the roots of what we could call the ‘critical’ tradition in the West,” which he again opposes to the “analytics of truth.”¹⁹ Thus, if Foucault is interested in liberalism, it is to the extent that it constitutes a kind of critical attitude – and, more specifically, to the extent that this strand of critical

¹⁵ Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 42.

¹⁶ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Catherine Porter, 315.

¹⁷ Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 47-8.

¹⁸ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 20-1. See also, Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 315-6.

¹⁹ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, edited by Joseph Pearson, 170-1.

liberalism is not only separate from dominant politico-economic liberalism, but in fact would allow one to contest the latter.

Now, to defend the claim that critical liberalism is opposed to economic or political liberalism in the way that the critical attitude is opposed to the analytic of truth, it must be true that for Foucault, economic-political liberalism is in fact a form of ‘governing too much.’ And indeed, throughout the *Birth of Biopolitics*, there are various ways in which liberal governmentality is depicted as excessive: to pick three examples, (1) “liberal reason is correlative with activation of the imperial principle,”²⁰ allowing the worldwide expansion of capitalist power relations through colonialism (including endo-colonization) and later globalization; (2) liberalism is the form of governmentality proper to biopolitics, the liberal State assuming “the task of continuously and effectively taking charge of individuals and their well-being, health, and work, their way of being, behaving, and even dying, etc.”²¹; and (3) liberalism is the form of governmentality to which corresponds the historical emergence and exercise of what Foucault calls ‘disciplinary power,’ for “the Panopticon is the very formula of liberal government.”²²

More generally, we can say that for Foucault, liberalism is the form of governmentality that corresponds to the economico-political function of power in capitalist society. By this, I mean the following: if the *economic* refers to the problem of capital accumulation and the *political* refers to the problem of the accumulation of human beings (e.g., integrating the ‘floating populations’ into the industrial apparatus of production through factory discipline; managing processes of urbanization and the

²⁰ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 21.

²¹ Ibid, 62. Foucault would seem to have in mind here the Welfare State.

²² Ibid, 67.

productive forces of a population), then the fundamental operation of modern power – whether it be disciplinary power, biopower, or ‘debt power’ (Lazzarato) – will be *economico-political* insofar as its “primary function” is to adjust the “accumulation of men” to the “accumulation of capital.”²³ Therefore, positivist liberalism, as the “framework of political rationality”²⁴ for the economico-political exercise of power, constitutes precisely the kind of excessive form of governance that the critical attitude would contest, insofar as this “power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation.”²⁵

However, one might argue that while this critical analysis is appropriate for classical liberalism, it is less so for neoliberalism, especially Chicago School neoliberalism, since Foucault himself speaks optimistically of the latter as suggesting a non-normalizing possibility for governmental rationality, proceeding not through coercion but by intervening at the level of interests.²⁶ That is, the neoliberal exercise of

²³ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, edited by Jacques Lagrange, translated by Burchell, 110. This holds just as much for disciplinary power at the micropolitical level (producing politically docile, economically productive subjects; controlling the plebeian population) at it does for biopolitics at the macropolitical level (regulating, capturing the vital forces of a population). See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan, 218-21; and *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, translated by Hurley, 140-1. We will return to the topic of the economico-political function of power at greater length in Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁴ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 317.

²⁵ Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, edited by Donald Bouchard, translated by Bouchard and Sherry Simon, 216.

²⁶ For example, Foucault seems sympathetic to Becker’s analysis of delinquency and penal policy, precisely because it effaces the anthropology of the criminal and, by referring instead to his or her calculable interests, is not moralizing, pathologizing, or normalizing: “First of all, there is an anthropological erasure of the criminal. It should be said that this does not mean that the level of the individual is suppressed [manuscript note: “not a nullification of the technologies aiming to influence individual behavior”], but rather that an element, dimension, or level of behavior can be postulated which can be interpreted as economic behavior and controlled as such. ... In other words, all the distinctions that have been made between born criminals, occasional criminals, the perverse and the not perverse, and recidivists are not important. We must be prepared to accept that, in any case, however pathological the subject may be at a certain level and when seen from a certain angle, he is nevertheless ‘responsive’ to some extent to possible gains and losses, which means that penal action must act on the interplay of gains and losses or, in other words, on the environment; we must act on the market milieu in which the individual makes his supply of crime and encounters a positive or negative demand” (Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 258-9).

power would act on the conditions of action, on the field of possible actions, disincentivizing undesirable behaviors and incentivizing desirable ones, rather than disciplining the bodies and forces of individuals. Thus, on such a view, Foucault might turn out to be an apologist for neoliberalism after all, not only in the sense of a critical-liberal right of the governed, but from the perspective of government itself, that is, in terms of a positivist schema for managing the conduct of the population.

The key for understanding why such a view is misguided is the recognition that, despite its pretensions to the contrary, *neoliberal* governmentality involves a fundamental intensification of power's exercise. This is because the economico-political function of power, ever adjusting the double process of capitalization and control of conduct, has come to capture and commodify the mental life of subjectivity: the very 'freedoms' that the market provides, the arrays of individual choice that neoliberalism makes possible, are themselves merely so many instruments for our subjection, that is, for producing and putting to work our 'interests, desires, and aspirations.' Here is how Jason Read puts the point:

As a mode of governmentality, neoliberalism operates on interests, desires, and aspirations rather than through rights and obligations; it does not directly mark the body, as sovereign power, or even curtail actions, as disciplinary power; rather, it acts on the conditions of actions. Thus, neoliberal governmentality follows a general trajectory of intensification. This trajectory follows a fundamental paradox; as power becomes less restrictive, less corporeal, it also becomes more intense, saturating the field of actions, and possible actions.²⁷

Thus, just as disciplinary power, despite being less corporeal and restrictive than sovereign power, is by no means an 'improvement' (*pace* humanist reformists) but instead a more insidious and effective redoubling of power; so, too, neoliberal

²⁷ Jason Read, "Genealogy of Homo Economicus," *Foucault Studies*, no. 6 (February 2009), 29.

governmentality is a more insidious and effective redoubling of power when compared to discipline, despite being even less corporeal and restrictive.

This point is indeed central to Foucault's very analytic of power. The logic of discipline is what Foucault terms 'mildness-production-profit' (rather than 'levying-violence' proper to sovereign power), and the function of disciplinary power is to make human multiplicities and the individuals who compose them more productive and more docile (e.g., in factories, schools, army barracks, prisons, and hospitals). To the extent that panopticism as a general strategy is effective, power will operate without ever having to be coercively imposed, since individuals themselves become the relay and instruments for power's exercise.

Read's argument is that we must say the very same thing about neoliberal governmentality since it realizes the logic of mildness-production-profit, only to an even greater degree: the seamless efficiency of a power that operates without having to coerce, but rather through incitation, that is, by having been internalized and reproduced through the actions and mental lives of individuals. Such actions appear to be freely chosen, such mental lives to be freely experienced and pursued, but both are circumscribed within a field of possibility precisely delimited by power. That is, neoliberalism allows an intensification of political techniques of control: ever milder and less coercive in their application, such techniques form individuals who are more productive and profitable, governable and docile, precisely to the extent that individuals as economic agents are de-politicized, privatized, removed from (and set competitively against) collective relations of solidarity with others. And all this functions without power needing to show its own

exercise, for power has already operated upon the conditions of action and the field of what is possible, which is to say, upon the interests of the subjects it helps to produce.

We may thus conclude that just as Foucault situates himself in the Kantian tradition of the critical attitude, which would contest the positivist tradition of Kant, so, too, Foucault critiques the excessive economico-political function of neoliberal governmentality. The view that Foucault would be an apologist for neoliberalism, however, might have one more recourse: might it not be the case that the Beckerian theory of human capital provides a form of critical neoliberalism that would call into question the undue exercise of power?

I would suggest that the answer must be ‘no,’ and that it is here where we see the essential difference between Becker and Foucault. The Chicago School takes the individual neoliberal subject – *homo economicus*, understood as an indivisible atom of self-interested decision-making agency, attended by a naturalized form of rationality (rational choice theory) – to be in some sense a universal given, or at least a necessary methodological presupposition. What neoliberalism will *not* do is conceive of this form of economic man as itself a product of power – an effect of a very specific process of subjection –, one whose interests, preferences, desires, projects, etc. are themselves produced in accordance with conditions of action made possible and regulated by neoliberal governmentality (that is, the market principles of competition and private enterprise). In other words, neoliberalism cannot adopt a critical attitude toward what is the very site, effect, and relay of power in contemporary capitalist society.

For Foucault, the critical Kantian tradition contests the positivist analytic of truth by transforming an epistemological interrogation into a political critique or ‘ontology of

ourselves,' posing the question: "In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?"²⁸ Because neoliberalism cannot put this question to its own formulation of *homo economicus*, it cannot critique what is, in fact, the excessive exercise of government proper to capitalism today.

²⁸ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 315.

CHAPTER 2. THE DEGREE ZERO OF VERTICALITY: FREEDOM AND
TRANSGRESSION IN THE KANTIAN SUBLIME

“For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, ...[w]hat is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time.... [E]xperience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution.”

— Foucault²⁹

“Taste promises everyone the happiness of an accomplished subjective unity; the sublime speaks to a few of another unity, much less complete, ruined in a sense, and more ‘noble.’”

— Lyotard³⁰

Before excavating the foundations of the concept of *verticality* that will be basic to the account given here of ethical and political agency, the term itself must be unburdened of some of its common connotations. ‘Verticality’ does not refer to a hierarchical relation, the line of force of which would travel from above to below, or to associated notions like social stratification and institutional centralization. Nor does it refer to a religious axis of transcendence, construed in terms of otherworldliness above or below. Rather, a clue for understanding the special sense given to ‘verticality’ by Foucault happens to be contained in the etymology of the word *sublime*, the origins of which lie in the Greek noun *hupsos* (height). ‘Sublime’ is derived from the Latin word *sublīmus* (uplifted, high, elevated, exalted, towering), which the standard etymology renders as *sub* (up to) + *līmen*

²⁹ Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3*, edited by Faubion, translated by Hurley, 241.

³⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, 25.

(threshold of a building). However, as Timothy Costelloe notes, there is a compelling alternate etymology, suggested in 1967 by A. Ernout and A. Meillet in their *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine, histoire des mots*, that

... involves the connection made over time between *sub* (under or at the bottom) and *super* (to raise, to bring to a standing position from below), and the postclassical confusion among three different words and, consequently, three possible roots from which it might arise: *līmen* (threshold or lintel), *limes* (a road bordering and delimiting a field), and *līmus* (sidelong/oblique). Ernout and Meillet argue for *līmus*, rendering *sublīmis* as ‘moving upward from a position below: hence rising diagonally, or more specifically from below to above, along a diagonal path.’³¹

As should be clear later on, this oblique trajectory of sublime up-rising comes quite close to describing the directionality of the vertical vector in Foucault, an elevating movement emerging ‘from below’ that also involves a crossing-over of thresholds and trans-gressing of delimitation.

It is indeed fitting, then, that the philosophical basis of Foucault’s concept of verticality can be reconstructed out of Kant’s account of the sublime³² in the *Critique of Judgment*. The very category of the *limit-experience*, central to a certain lineage of tragic thought in which Foucault situates himself,³³ finds perhaps its first distinctively modern philosophical expression in the Kantian sublime. However, just as Foucault identifies a deep tension between two opposed Kantian traditions, the critical limit-attitude and the positivist analytic of truth, so a similar ambivalence can be discerned in Kant’s own treatment of sublime feeling. On the one hand, Kant articulates the limit-experience of

³¹ Timothy M. Costelloe, “The Sublime: A Short Introduction to a Long History,” in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Costelloe, 3.

³² The German noun and adjective for ‘sublime’ – respectively, *Das Erhabene* and *erhaben* – derive from the Middle High German verb *erheben* (to raise aloft). The same general point about the vertical connotations of the ‘sublime’ and its etymology thus also applies.

³³ I have in mind here, for example, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot, and Bataille. Foucault also identifies as belonging to this tradition such literary writers as Sade, Hölderlin, Nerval, Mallarmé, Artaud, Roussel, and Klossowski. See, for example, Foucault, “The Thought of the Outside,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*.

radical finitude by which the constitutive structures of the thinking subject and the empirical world are undone. On the other hand, as though sensing some danger in this ‘abyss-deep thought’ (Nietzsche), Kant moralizes the aesthetic experience of sublime terror and delight, invoking by way of explanation our ratio-volitional vocation and respect for the moral law.³⁴

In what follows in this chapter, I will analyze both of these aspects of the Kantian sublime, beginning with the latter by examining the relation between sublime and moral feeling. While this first reading of the sublime, since it takes Kant’s appeal to the moral law at face value, is in some sense more traditional (or naïve) than the one to follow, my interpretive strategy will be to invert the standard relation between moral and sublime feeling, according to which the latter is parasitic on the former. Rather than merely moralize sublime feeling by locating its source in our respect for the moral law within us, my aim is, as it were, to ‘sublime’ moral feeling: I will argue that moral feeling serves for Kant as the *ratio cognoscendi* of human freedom, and that such feeling can play this role precisely by virtue of its aesthetic expression in the sublime.³⁵ In short, I will argue that it is sublime experience which satisfies a necessary condition of realization for ethical

³⁴ In his lectures on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* given at the New School for Social Research in Fall 2007, Jay Bernstein refers to this moralizing gesture as Kant’s ‘containment strategy.’ See Bernstein, “The Sublime – 11.28.2007,” <http://bernsteintapes.com/3rdCritiquelist.html>.

³⁵ In her article “The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime” (2012), Melissa McBay Merritt argues that since, for Kant, “our capacity to appreciate the sublime in nature is grounded in the development of sound moral disposition”; and since such development is the proper vocation of human beings; it follows that “the sublime and its connection to morality is not a peripheral curiosity for Kant ... [but] runs, rather, to the very heart of his critical philosophy” (Merritt, “The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime,” in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, 49). While I agree with Merritt’s conclusion regarding the centrality of the sublime for Kant, on her account, the sublime remains epiphenomenal to ethical agency: that is, sublime experience (and specifically, one’s unwearied enjoyment of it) may appear as a sign of a sound moral disposition, but it does not play a role in bringing the latter about. By contrast, what I am arguing for is not the moral source of the Kantian sublime, but the sublime source of Kantian morality: sublime experience, for Kant, is that through which we can become aware of our freedom as rational agents, which awareness is necessary for the practice of virtue and cultivation of sound moral disposition.

agency, a claim which anticipates an analogous and fundamental role played by vertical experience in Foucault's theory of political agency.

The second part of this chapter, in turn, will examine in greater detail the structure of the sublime as a form of limit-experience, for it is here that we see how the Kantian sublime supplies the conceptual foundations for Foucauldian verticality. Drawing from Lyotard's interpretation in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, I will demonstrate how the sublime is an intensive experience of finitude – the precursor to what Nietzsche will call the 'tragic'; Heidegger, 'transcendence'; Bataille, 'transgression'; and Blanchot, 'the thought of the outside' – by means of which thought is elevated to its highest vocation as critique.

2.1 *The Sublime Source of Ethical Agency*

In arguing for the view that, for Kant, moral feeling is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, I am largely in agreement with the position recently advanced by Dieter Schönecker, who interprets Kant as a special kind of ethical intuitionist insofar as the moral feeling of respect is that through which "we recognize the validity of the moral law."³⁶ What I aim to show, however, is that we can only understand how moral feeling performs the *ratio cognoscendi* function – that is, to make us first aware of our practical

³⁶ Dieter Schönecker, "Kant's Moral Intuitionism: The Fact of Reason and Moral Dispositions," *Kant Studies Online*, 2013, 2. As Schönecker later elaborates: "...we cognize the binding validity of the moral law through an immediately given feeling. Thus the thesis not only implies that respect prompts us to do what is morally right, and that respect is therefore an incentive. Respect is also a feeling through which I cognize something; it is through the feeling of respect that the CI is given to us in its absolute validity. We could therefore also say that Kant is an ethical intuitionist, precisely because consciousness of the CI as a fact of reason is itself an intuition, in the sense that it is a non-inferential, epistemically fundamental, and reliable (though not necessarily unrevisable) emotional act of cognition with regard to binding validity. The feeling in question is the feeling of respect" (Ibid, 25).

freedom – by situating such feeling in relation to the sublime, with which it is “akin”³⁷ in formal conditions and structure. For Kant, the sublime is that form of aesthetic experience by which we gain access to moral feeling, or which stirs such feeling in us. Indeed, by disclosing to us our duty to the moral law within us, and by thus calling the mind to its higher vocation, sublime feeling plays the same role as the controversial “fact of reason” that is so central to the argument of the second *Critique*. The strategy, then, will be to read the third *Critique* back into the second, analyzing the relations between sublime and moral feeling so as to illuminate their essential place in Kant’s critical system.

Basic to this interpretation will be to show how Kant’s account of both moral and sublime feeling follows from his philosophical anthropology, where what distinguishes the being of human being is to have a double nature as simultaneously sensible and intelligible, *homo phaenomenon* and *homo noumenon*.³⁸ I will use the term *constitutive limit* to refer to the boundary that separates these two heterogeneous aspects (‘attributes,’ ‘domains’) of our being – a dividing line which is the very site of sublime and moral

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, “General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments,” 267

³⁸ See Kant’s solution to the apparent contradiction of having a duty to oneself in *The Metaphysics of Morals*: “When a human being is conscious of a duty to himself, he views himself, as the subject of duty, under two attributes: first as a *sensible being*, that is, as a human being (a member of one of the animal species), and secondly as an *intelligible being* (not merely as a being that has reason, since reason as a theoretical faculty could well be an attribute of a living corporeal being). The senses cannot attain this latter aspect of a human being; it can be cognized only in morally practical relations, where the incomprehensible property of *freedom* is revealed by the influence of reason on the inner lawgiving will. Now the human being as a *natural being* that has reason (*homo phaenomenon*) can be determined by his reason, as a *cause*, to actions in the sensible world, and so far the concept of obligation does not come into consideration. But the same human being thought in terms of his *personality*, that is, as a being endowed with *inner freedom* (*homo noumenon*), is regarded as a being that can be put under obligation and, indeed, under obligation to himself (to the humanity in his own person). So the human being (taken in these two different senses) can acknowledge a duty to himself without falling into contradiction (because the concept of a human being is not thought in one and the same sense)” (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Mary J. Gregor, 6:418).

feeling. This divide, which it is the singularity of human being to encompass, reflects the ‘immense gulf’ that separates the sensible and supersensible domains in general, and that can only be bridged practically through the exercise of our freedom³⁹: that is, through the pursuit and cultivation of our supersensible vocation, for which we first require the awareness of our autonomy, enabled by the feeling that manifests both the moral law within us and the rational determinability of our will by this law.

Indeed, what is so “singular” and “peculiar”⁴⁰ about moral and sublime feeling is that through them – that is, through sensibility, albeit in a negative manner – we become conscious of our freedom as rational agents or moral persons, which is to say, of a supersensible power of the mind (rational volition). It is just insofar as moral and sublime feeling involve both our sensible and intelligible aspects that we can recognize and experience a freedom within ourselves that gives us practical access to that which exceeds all standards of sense. And these special forms of feeling involve both our sensible and intelligible aspects precisely insofar as they are experiences of our constitutive limit. In this sense, human freedom and ethical agency cannot be grasped independently of human finitude, of the limit that simultaneously divides our being and makes possible the experience (in moral or sublime feeling) of this division as both pain (from the perspective of our sensible side) and respect or elevation to our highest vocation (from the perspective of our intelligible side).

³⁹ See the Preface to the *Critique of Judgment*: “Hence an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that no transition from the sensible to the supersensible (and hence by means of the theoretical use of reason) is possible, just as if they were two different worlds, the first of which cannot have any influence on the second; and yet the second *is* to have an influence on the first, i.e., the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §46, 175-6).

⁴⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Gregor, 5:76.

2.1.1 *The Sublime as Aesthetic Expression of Moral Feeling*

Let us begin with the sublime. Sublime feeling is an aesthetic reflective judgment the quality of which is complex or double, containing two analytically distinct moments of anguish (pain or displeasure) and exaltation (elevating respect). In the experience of the mathematical sublime, which is occasioned by the immensity of a boundless object of nature (e.g., a raging tempestuous sea or a craggy glacial pass) that carries with it the idea of infinity, reason demands that the imagination present in sensibility an extensive magnitude that is absolutely large, i.e., that takes as its basic unit of measure “the absolute whole of nature, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended.”⁴¹ In turn, the imagination, because of its limitations as a finite faculty, necessarily fails and cannot provide the requisite schema to form a sensible intuition of such an infinite magnitude. But precisely because of this failure, which is first experienced as anguish, the mind as a whole is called to a higher vocation insofar as sublime feeling calls to mind an idea of reason (here, the idea of the supersensible substrate of nature) to which all phenomenal presentations in nature are inadequate.

Accordingly, what is sublime is not the sensible object of nature at all but, rather, the supersensible power of the mind: “For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind *by this very inadequacy*, which can be exhibited in sensibility.”⁴² This ‘arousal’ and elevation of the mind is then felt as exaltation, which not only is made possible by the inadequacy of

⁴¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 255.

⁴² *Ibid.*, §23, 245, my emphasis.

imagination's finite powers, but is indissociable from this very inadequacy: "Yet this inadequacy *itself is* the arousal in us of *the feeling* that we have within us a supersensible power."⁴³

Indeed, the two feelings of anguish and exaltation are one and the same experience (the sublime), the first felt from the perspective of our sensible being and its limitations, the second felt from the perspective of our supersensible being and its power to exceed these limitations through the ideas of reason that we give to ourselves. It is important to note that this second feeling of what exceeds sensible limits is not a special kind of positive intuition. Rather, it is like the flip side of the negative feeling of inadequacy and inadequation by which our imagination, constrained in its power of aesthetic estimation by the standards of sensibility, feels its own limitations in impossibly striving to realize an unattainable idea of reason; yet because this ceaseless striving also expresses our respect for our 'supersensible power,' we are aroused by virtue of this negative feeling to discover in our power of reason that which is superior to nature in us. This arousal, which *is* the feeling of the imagination's inadequacy, is also the feeling by which we are elevated to a higher vocation than that of our career as sensibly determinable beings. And this apparently ambivalent quality of sublime feeling, which is both an anguished disliking and a 'soul-stirring delight,' can only be explained by the double nature of human beings as simultaneously *homo phaenomenon* and *homo noumenon*.

At the interior limit that divides and doubles human being, the mathematical sublime is thus the feeling of a limit-relation between the phenomenal and noumenal dimensions of our being. In other words, the mathematical sublime is a limit-experience

⁴³ Ibid, §25, 250, my emphasis.

of the constitutive division that structures the being of human being as a rational and free yet sensuously dependent creature.

The dynamical sublime possesses a similar structure: confronted by the destructive chaos of nature in all its might (e.g., “volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind”⁴⁴), we face our own fragile sensuous finitude and “recognize our physical impotence”⁴⁵ to resist such might; yet at the same time, and by virtue of first encountering our sensible powerlessness, we also feel within ourselves a different, non-sensible power which is undominated by and hence superior to nature. We thus judge the terrible forces of natural disaster as sublime because “they raise the soul’s fortitude above its usual middle range,” stoking in us the courage to believe that we could resist “nature’s seeming omnipotence” – not insofar as we could oppose it with equal natural might, but insofar as we discover in ourselves a greater strength of a higher order, that is, the “strength ... to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life....”⁴⁶

In other words – and indeed, in words that distinctly echo the famous ‘gallows example’ by which Kant aims to illustrate the fact of reason in the second *Critique* – the exaltation of the dynamical sublime is the feeling that nature’s might, irresistible though it be with respect to our natural being, exerts no “dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between

⁴⁴ Ibid, §28, 261.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 262.

upholding or abandoning them.”⁴⁷ The dynamical sublime thus “keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded,”⁴⁸ for, as in the gallows example, the power to ‘regard as small’ even our strongest natural inclination (love of life) demonstrates the motivational and ratio-volitional force of morality within us, which is irreducible to sensible determination. In such a way does the sublime serve as the *ratio cognoscendi* of human freedom.

There is thus a double movement that animates sublime feeling, reflecting the double nature of human being from each side of the divide: on the one hand, we experience anguish when we confront our own sensible limitation, yet ‘at the same time,’ the very inadequacy of our sensible finitude reveals to us a heterogeneous and supersensible power of our minds that is superior to either the immensity or might of nature. In the mathematical sublime, the mind is elevated by the idea of the supersensible substrate of nature, which contains infinity under itself as a unit; in the dynamical sublime, the mind is elevated by the ideas of rational volition (freedom as unconditioned causation) and the absolute worth of ‘the humanity of our person,’ which empower us to uphold our ‘highest principles’ regardless of natural pressures or inclinations to the contrary, even at the risk of our most basic material concerns. In both cases, the pain of

⁴⁷ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §28, 262. Cf.: “Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply. But ask him whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him” (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:30).

⁴⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §28, 262.

encountering our own sensible finitude in its failings or limitations is simultaneously the exalting feeling by which “the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature.”⁴⁹

What is sublime, then, is the auto-elevating power of the mind by which we become aware of our dignity and calling as rational agents that contain within ourselves the power to autonomously determine our will. It is by demanding of ourselves the realization of an idea of reason, to which we strive to become adequate and which striving becomes a law for us, that we simultaneously come up against our own sensible “limits and inadequacy” and discover the feeling of “respect for our own vocation,”⁵⁰ a vocation that exceeds all sensible mensuration and, as Kant puts it in the second *Critique*, “elevates a human being above himself (as part of the sensible world).”⁵¹

Such respect – which Kant defines as the “feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea *that is a law for us*,”⁵² and which is already active in the imagination’s impossible striving to meet the demand of reason in the mathematical sublime – is the aesthetic expression of what in moral feeling will be understood as duty to the moral law within us. For indeed, moral feeling forms the very basis of sublime judgments: “But it is this idea [of the supersensible] that is aroused in us when, as we judge an object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination *to its limit*, whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically). *The judging* strains the imagination because it *is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly*

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, §27, 257.

⁵¹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:86.

⁵² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §27, 257.

*transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling)....*⁵³ The imagination is pushed to the limit of its exercise, compelled to confront the boundary of its sensible finitude *in sensibility* (anguish) and, at the same time, to awaken the mind through this feeling to its supersensible vocation as a free rational agent (respect), which ‘wholly transcends’ the limits of nature’s domain. And this feeling of the mind of respect for its supersensible vocation just is moral feeling, by which we disclose to ourselves the rational determinability of our will.

However, sublime feeling seems to naturally involve a certain subreptive illusion whereby the object of the sublime is mistaken as a sensible object of nature rather than a moral vocation of the powers of the mind.⁵⁴ Therefore, in order to in fact become conscious of our freedom as moral agents through sublime feeling, sublime judgment must offer a critical corrective to the fallacy of subreption, identifying the anguish and exaltation not with respect to the immense or mighty object of sensible nature (which is a mere occasion for sublime judgment) but to a sublime attunement of the mental powers. Indeed, if we mistook the sublime object as something sensible (a hurricane, crashing waterfall, etc.); and if we correctly understood the sublime as disclosing an idea of reason that “even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense”⁵⁵; then sublime feeling would degenerate into the dangerous delusion of fanaticism, that is, “the *delusion of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of*

⁵³ Ibid, “General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments,” 268, my emphasis.

⁵⁴ “But by a certain subreption* (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves as] subject[s]) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers over the greatest powers of sensibility” (Ibid, §27, 257). Where asterisked, the editor notes Kant’s definition of the subreptive fallacy from the Inaugural Dissertation (1770): “We may call *fallacy of subreption* (by analogy with the accepted meaning) the intellect’s trick of slipping in a concept of sense as if it were the concept of an intellectual characteristic.”

⁵⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §25, 250.

sensibility....”⁵⁶ By critically restricting the sublime to a “pure, elevating, and merely negative exhibition of morality”⁵⁷ – one which is expressed through the aesthetic reflective *feeling* of anguish and exaltation – the idea of freedom can be disclosed to us without our lapsing into fanatical delusion.

Moreover, because the sublime object proper is the vocation of the mind, involving a mental attunement or discordant harmony of the faculties that universally pertains to all human beings qua free, rational, sensibly dependent beings, sublime aesthetic reflective judgments are therefore necessary judgments, for they have their

... foundation in human nature: in something that, along with common sense, we may require and demand of everyone, namely, the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to moral feeling. This is what underlies the necessity – which we include in our judgment about the sublime – of the assent of other people’s judgments to our own. ... [W]e presuppose moral feeling in man. And so we attribute necessity to this [kind of] aesthetic judgment as well.⁵⁸

The predisposition to moral feeling in human beings – that by which pure reason becomes practical and our wills rationally determinable insofar as the moral law holds a practical (rather than pathological) incentive for us – is the necessary and universal (hence a priori) condition of possibility for sublime feeling, as well as that which grounds sublime judgment’s modal claim to (subjective) necessity. As we will see below, moral feeling is itself cognizable a priori, just as humiliation is a universal and necessary feeling for all human beings who contrast their sensibly dependent self-conceit to the austere majesty of the moral law within them. Kant can thus help himself to the presupposition of ‘moral feeling in man,’ and he does so by again relying upon the double nature of human

⁵⁶ Ibid, “General Comment,” 275.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, §29, 265-6.

beings, i.e., the limit-relation between the phenomenal and noumenal dimensions of our being.⁵⁹

A triple relation therefore obtains between sublime and moral feeling. First, the universality of moral feeling in human beings grounds the necessity of sublime judgments and thereby secures sublime feeling its licensed place within transcendental philosophy.⁶⁰ Second, the two feelings are “akin” with respect to their structure and “formal conditions” inasmuch as both elevate us to respect our supersensible vocation as autonomous moral agents by “overcoming” the “obstacles” of our sensual dependence.⁶¹ Indeed, sublime judgments disclose to us our duty toward an idea of reason – the attainment of which we give to ourselves as a law but can yet never be adequate to – and thus express (negatively exhibit) the rational determinability of our will, “which determinability is moral feeling.”⁶² Thus, third, sublime feeling is the aesthetic expression of moral feeling that makes manifest our duty to the moral law in ourselves and elevates us through respect for our supersensible vocation. Indeed, in (dynamical) sublime feeling we take an intellectual liking to the moral law because we experience our rationally determinable will as a might that is independent of and superior to the sensible might of nature outside or within us. In short, moral feeling, realized aesthetically through the

⁵⁹ Further, if it is true that moral feeling is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, then this would also allow Kant to presuppose universal moral feeling: for if all human beings have the ability to be conscious of themselves as free, and if moral feeling is itself the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, then we may infer that moral feeling is something for which all human beings have the disposition or ability.

⁶⁰ See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §29, 266.

⁶¹ Ibid, “General Comment,” 267.

⁶² Ibid.

sublime, discloses to us our vocation as free rational agents; it thus serves in sensibility as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.⁶³

2.1.2 *Moral Feeling as the Ratio Cognoscendi of Human Freedom*

In light of this reading of the third *Critique*, let us now approach moral feeling in the second, inquiring further into its structure and the role it plays in the practical incentive of the moral law. Insofar as the moral law commands that our free will be exclusively determined by the law, the law provides a negative incentive, for it rules out the sensible inclinations and impulses that stem from our pathological determinations as sensibly affected creatures. Yet this proscriptive effect, which ‘can be cognized a priori’ since it is merely negative, is itself felt precisely as the pain of privation by the pathologically determinable self:

So far, then, the effect of the moral law as incentive is only negative, and as such this incentive can be cognized a priori. For, all inclination and every sensible impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (by the infringement upon the inclinations that take place) is itself feeling. Hence we can see a priori that the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain; and here we have the first and perhaps the only case in which we can determine a priori from concepts the relation of a cognition (here the cognition of pure practical reason) to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure.⁶⁴

⁶³ Of course, the duty remains to exercise this freedom through practicing our moral agency by making the moral law the determining ground of our will: “For here the liking concerns only our ability’s *vocation*, revealed in such cases, insofar as the predisposition to this ability is part of our nature, whereas it remains up to us, as our obligation, to develop and exercise this ability.” (Ibid, §28, 262) We can thereby resist and overcome the sensible obstacles that threaten us by means of the moral principles that preserve respect for our humanity. Indeed, this just is the practice of virtue, and it is here that the importance of the Categorical Imperative can be situated as an ethical test of the moral worth of our actions. However, the exercise of this ability is only possible under the condition that we are first made aware of this ability as our supersensible vocation, a condition satisfied by moral feeling and expressed in sublime anguish and exaltation.

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*: 5:72-3.

Specifically, when the moral law serves as the sole and immediate determining ground of the will, the inclinations belonging to self-love are brought into line with the demands of agreement with the law, and the inclinations belonging to self-conceit – which are antecedent to the law, and upon which we base our arrogant self-satisfaction – are nullified insofar as “certainty of a disposition in accord with this law is the first condition of any worth of a person.”⁶⁵ Self-conceit, which robs human personality of its dignity, is the form of deluded self-worth of a human being who, having never encountered her constitutive limit, takes her sensible self (*homo phaenomenon*) to constitute her entire being (to the exclusion of *homo noumenon*), treating self-love as though it were “the unconditional practical principle.”⁶⁶

Further, the delusion of self-conceit contains a subreptive illusion, for we mistake our sensibly determinable self for our rational lawgiving self. When we fall under this illusion, we treat our own subjective determining grounds, our self-love, as though it were a universal and objectively valid principle for acting. This is, moreover, precisely how Kant here defines ‘delusion,’ namely, as “the internal practical deception of taking what is subjective in a motive for something objective.”⁶⁷ Accordingly, in the critical first moment of moral feeling, we feel humiliated because our self-conceit – that by which we prescribe “as laws the subjective conditions of self-love”⁶⁸ – is disclosed, belied, and

⁶⁵ Ibid, 5:73.

⁶⁶ See Ibid, 5:74: “[W]e find our nature as sensible beings so constituted that the matter of the faculty of desire (objects of inclination, whether of hope or fear) first forces itself upon us, and we find our pathologically determinable self, even though it is quite unfit to give universal law through its maxims, nevertheless striving antecedently to make its claims primary and originally valid, **just as if it constituted our entire self**. This propensity to make oneself as having subjective determining grounds of choice into the objective determining ground of the will in general can be called *self-love*; and if self-love makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional practical principle, it can be called *self-conceit*” (ibid, my bold).

⁶⁷ Kant, VA 7:274; cited in Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*: 266.

⁶⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:74.

debased. This humiliation, suffered by our pathologically determinable selves at the hands of the moral law, is necessary and universal (hence cognizable a priori) for all human beings: “Now, what in our own judgment infringes upon our self-conceit humiliates. Hence the moral law *unavoidably* humiliates *every* human being when he compares with it the sensible propensity of his nature.”⁶⁹ Thus, in feeling the proscriptive force of the moral law within us and ‘our own judgment’ restrict the sway of our inclinations, we compare ourselves in our sensuous finitude to the moral law “in its *solemn majesty*”⁷⁰ and feel ourselves degraded.

However, this first negative moment of pain and humiliation flows directly into a second, positive moment of moral feeling, for the humiliation itself by which self-conceit is ‘struck down’ is simultaneously the feeling of respect: “inasmuch as it even *strikes downs* self-conceit, that is, humiliates it, it is an object of the greatest *respect* and so too the ground of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin and is cognized a priori.”⁷¹ Insofar as the moral law is “something in itself positive – namely the form of an intellectual causality, that is, of freedom”⁷²; and insofar as we freely give ourselves this law by legislating it as the determining ground of our own will; the law elicits the positive feeling of respect. Kant writes: “If something represented *as a determining ground of our will* humiliates us in our self-consciousness, it awakens *respect* for itself insofar as it is positive and a determining ground.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid, 5:74, my emphasis

⁷⁰ Ibid, 5:77.

⁷¹ Ibid, 5:73.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, 5:74.

It is what humiliates us, then, that stirs the feeling of respect; the negative feeling is a precondition for the positive. Indeed, in a formulation strikingly similar to that of the dynamical sublime, Kant argues that this feeling of respect is owed to the moral law overcoming the resistance of our pained sensuous inclinations that struggle against it:

As the effect of consciousness of the moral law, and consequently in relation to an intelligible cause, namely the subject of pure practical reason as the supreme lawgiver, this feeling of a rational subject affected by inclinations is indeed called humiliation (intellectual contempt); but in relation to its positive ground, the law, it is at the same time called respect for the law; there is indeed no feeling for this law, but inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way, in the judgment of reason this removal of a hindrance is esteemed equivalent to a positive furthering of its causality. Because of this, this feeling can now also be called a feeling of respect for the moral law, while on both grounds together it can be called a *moral feeling*.⁷⁴

Moral feeling is thus always double and ambivalent, for, like sublime feeling, it is an experience of our constitutive limit. The moral law in us humiliates us in our self-consciousness as pathologically determinable beings; yet in so doing, this law clears the way of any sensuous obstacles that would prevent it from being the sole determining ground of the will, and it thereby commands respect. In this regard, as in the dynamical sublime, we are conscious that nature in us (our inclinations) has no sway or dominance over us (since it need not determine the ground of our will), and we are thus elevated above the heteronomous and contingent conditions of our natural or sensuous being.

Our debasement and our elevation therefore belong to the same movement, the same feeling of the mind, and differ only insofar as they reflect separate sides of the divided self: “the lowering of pretensions to moral self-esteem – that is, humiliation on the sensible side – *is* an elevation of the moral – that is, practical – esteem for the law

⁷⁴ Ibid, 5:75.

itself on the intellectual side.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, there is no temporal priority between humiliation and respect, for they are each a different perspective (one of *homo phaenomenon*, the other of *homo noumenon*) on the same experience. When Kant does write in a manner that suggests a serial relation between humiliation and respect, the priority of the former might be best understood as logical priority. In this sense, as with the inadequacy of the imagination in sublime feeling, humiliation is indeed a necessary first condition for respect, which is why respect – felt in the wake of the removal of resistance to the determination of the will by the moral law, a removal the proscriptive force of which unavoidably humiliates every human being who feels it – is an indirect effect of the moral law. As Kant writes: “respect for the moral law must be regarded as also a positive though indirect effect of the moral law on feeling *insofar as* the law weakens the hindering influence of the inclinations *by humiliating* self-conceit...”⁷⁶

Further, because the moral law is one that we give to ourselves as the determining ground of our will, the respect that we feel for the law in us elevates us to a higher vocation as autonomous though finite beings. In other words, moral feeling gives us insight into our freedom as moral persons, for through respect we feel within ourselves an incentive of pure practical reason that is both free and arises from the moral law itself:

As *submission* to a law, that is, as a command (indicating constraint for the sensibly affected subject), it therefore contains in it no pleasure but instead, so far, displeasure in the action. On the other hand, however, since this constraint is exercised only by the lawgiving of his *own* reason, it also contains something *elevating*, and the subjective effect on feeling, inasmuch as pure practical reason is the sole cause of it, can thus be called *self-approbation* with reference to pure practical reason, inasmuch as he cognized himself as determined to it solely by the

⁷⁵ Ibid, 5:79, my emphasis.

⁷⁶ Ibid, my emphasis.

law and without any interest, and now becomes conscious of an altogether different interest subjectively produced by the law, which is purely practical and *free*....⁷⁷

The supersensible vocation to which we are elevated in the feeling of respect is precisely our duty to act from the moral law in such a way that the law (which we freely give to ourselves) exclusively and immediately determines our will. And it is respect, and the duty it discloses, that the moral law must effect in the mind insofar as there can be an incentive of pure practical reason.

Indeed, this moral feeling of the mind reveals to the human being her personality, which is to say, her freedom as a moral agent. Inquiring into the origin of duty,⁷⁸ Kant answers:

It can be nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world) ... It is nothing other than *personality*, that is, freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity of a being subject to special laws – namely pure practical laws given by his own reason, so that a person as belonging to the sensible world is subject to his own personality insofar as he also belongs to the intelligible world.... This idea of personality [awakens] respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation) while at the same time showing us the lack of accord of our conduct with respect to it and thus striking down self-conceit....⁷⁹

So it is by virtue of this affection of the mind – the elevation of respect following the debasement of humiliation – that we are able to *feel* the free incentive of pure practical reason and, thereby, to become aware of our duty or vocation as moral persons who are autonomous with respect to nature and free unconditioned causes with respect to ourselves.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 5:80-1.

⁷⁸ “*Duty!* ... [W]hat origin is there worthy of you, and where is to be found the root of your noble descent...?” (ibid, 5:86).

⁷⁹ Ibid, 5:86-7.

In this sense, our nature and its vocation are sublime because we are not dominated by the might of nature in us, yet it is only insofar as we feel degraded by the moral law that we can have the elevated feeling of respect. That is, in order to overcome or ascend above our heteronomous limitations as sensibly affected beings, we must precisely encounter the painful failings of those limitations and feel shame when comparing these to the austere perfection of the moral law. Again like sublime feeling, moral feeling is made possible by the power of reason in us to confront our constitutive limit.

Moral feeling is not, of course, the objective ground of the moral law, but it is the subjective sign through which we are affected by and made aware of the moral law; and the capacity for this feeling is a necessary condition for the determinability of the will by the moral law, which is also to say, for the exercise of human freedom. So it is by virtue of moral feeling – respect for the law, and also the law in us, the self-giving law that thereby elevates us in our supersensible vocation above our pathologically determinable selves – that we are made conscious of our freedom, which consciousness is identical to the fact of reason. Thus, if the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom – that is, “the condition under which we can first *become aware* of freedom”⁸⁰ – it is so by virtue of moral feeling, for it is through moral feeling that the moral law becomes a subjective determining ground or incentive of pure practical reason. Moral feeling is that by which we can become aware of our supersensible vocation, that is, our duty and its origin in moral personality, that is, the dignity of our humanity, which is elevated above the limit-conditions of our finite, pathologically determinable sensuous selves. However, such moral feeling is made possible precisely because we are finite sensuous selves who feel

⁸⁰ Ibid, 5:4n.

humiliation when the moral law in us determines our will and restricts our sensuous inclinations and pathological desires, thereby inciting pain and degradation.

In short, only by encountering the constitutive limit of our ontological self-division can we feel and cognize what exceeds our sensible finitude in us: namely, our supersensible vocation as free rational beings.⁸¹ And as we have seen, it is in the experience of the sublime that we are confronted by this limit. Indeed, more than any merely hypothetical formulation, such as the gallows example, it is the anguish and exaltation of sublime feeling that awakens in us the ‘idea of personality’ by means of which our freedom becomes binding for us. That is, the auto-elevating movement of sublime experience, once a critical corrective to the natural subreption it involves has been applied, calls to mind our proper vocation, eliciting the moral feeling on the basis of which we recognize our freedom. Operating in sensibility to open thought to that which, in thought, is irreducible to sensibility, the sublime therefore provides the conditions of realization – what, in the context of Foucault, I will call the *conditions of material expression* – for ethical agency.

⁸¹ It might be objected that moral feeling cannot be the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom because it can only come after our representation of the law. Indeed, this seems to be just how Kant elsewhere distinguishes moral from pathological feeling: “The state of *feeling* here (the way in which inner sense is affected) is either *pathological* or *moral*. – The former is that feeling which precedes the representation of the law; the latter, that which can only follow upon it” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:399). However, I would suggest that though moral feeling does not precede the representation of the law, neither is this representation somehow independent of moral feeling. Rather, moral feeling just is that by which we represent the moral law to ourselves, for we cannot form a representation of the law before being made aware of the law, and we are only made aware of the law through our humiliation before it, a humiliation which is cognizable a priori and which issues into our respect for the moral law in ourselves. In other words, our representation of the law is that by means of which we become aware of the law, but we become aware of the law by feeling its proscriptive force in us as the feeling of constraint, which is the feeling of humiliation proper to the first moment of moral feeling. So it is moral feeling that forms the basis of the representation of the moral law by means of which we become aware of the law in ourselves. This helps make sense of how Kant, in the sentence following the one last quoted, can consistently write: “...any consciousness of obligation depends upon moral feeling to make us aware of the constraint present in the thought of duty” (ibid).

2.2 *Anguish and Exaltation: The Limit-Experience of Transgression and the Critical Vocation of Thought*

“The limit-experience is the answer man receives once he decides to call himself radically into question. ... To man, such as he is and such as will be, there belongs an essential lack, from which comes this right to call himself forever into question. ... If he comes to feel this surplus of nothingness, ...if he lets himself be seized by the infinity of finality [l’infini de la fin], then he must respond to another exigency, no longer to produce but to expend... Inner experience demands this event that does not belong to possibility; it opens in completed being an infinitesimal interstice by which all that is lets itself be suddenly overcome and deposed by a surfeit that escapes and exceeds it. Strange surplus ..., surplus of void, surfeit of ‘negativity’ that is in us the infinite heart of the passion of thought.”

— Blanchot⁸²

“But such an experience ... discloses as its own secret and clarification, its intrinsic finitude, the limitless reign of the Limit, and the emptiness of those excesses [le vide de ce franchissement] in which it spends itself and where it is found wanting. In this sense, the inner experience is, throughout, an experience of the impossible (the impossible being both that which we experience and that which constitutes the experience).”

— Foucault⁸³

Like the Kantian sublime, Foucault will articulate the concept of an intensive form of experience that enables the realization of human agency and the practice of freedom. Of course, Foucauldian verticality will make no appeal to the universal validity of a moral law or our supersensible vocation⁸⁴, so the reading of the sublime given above may appear to be of limited instruction. However, a closer analysis of the mathematical sublime in the third *Critique* reveals another possible interpretation of sublime experience, one that allows us to dispense with Kant’s invocation of either a supersensible substrate of nature or a transcendent moral law. Indeed, what such a reading prepares is the tragic

⁸² Maurice Blanchot, *L’entretien infini*, “L’expérience-limite,” 302-8, my translation.

⁸³ Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 71.

⁸⁴ In his late lectures on the ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia*, Foucault will, however, invoke a concept of ethical duty with regard to political critique and revolt. We will return to this point in Chapter 6.

concept of a vertical form of limit-experience, which Foucault paradigmatically refers to as *transgression*, by which the constituent subject or ‘*moi-sujet*’ (Bataille) is undone through an auto-intensifying movement of thought. It is this auto-elevating movement proper to the sublime, I will argue, that discloses thought’s highest vocation as vertical critique.

The general form of the limit-experience can be provisionally characterized according to the following eight traits:

- i. Fundamentally, it is an *experience of radical or absolute finitude*: that is, the limit experienced not (or not only) as privation or limitation but as constitutive condition of possibility.
- ii. This experience of absolute finitude arises through an encounter with that which radically exceeds the limits of possible (phenomenal) experience – e.g., the idea of the infinite – and is thus an *experience of the impossible*.
- iii. In this movement by which the conditions of sensible experience and cognition are transcended or transgressed (yet still within sensibility itself), the experience of the impossible *ruptures the unity of the subject* (opening it to that which absolutely exceeds it) and at the same time *ruptures the unity of the object* (as an object of possible knowledge).⁸⁵

⁸⁵ “I am *open*, yawning gap, to the unintelligible sky and everything in me rushes forth, is reconciled in a final irreconciliation. Rupture of all ‘possible’, violent kiss, abduction, loss in the entire absence of all ‘possible’.... And above all *no more object*. Ecstasy is not love: love is possession for which the object is necessary, and at the same time possession of the subject, possessed by it. There is no longer subject-object, but a ‘yawning gap’ between the one and the other and, in the gap, the subject, the object are dissolved; there is passage, communication, but not from one to the other: *the one* and *the other* have lost their separate existence. The questions of the subject, its will to know are suppressed: the subject is no longer there; its interrogation no longer has either meaning or a principle which introduces it. In the same way no answer remains possible. The answer should be ‘such is the object’, when there is no longer a distinct object” (Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, translated by Leslie Anne Boldt, 59-60).

- iv. Because the forms of subject and object are themselves the products of processes of limitation, the fracturing of these forms *opens thought to the absolute or limitless*, to an abyss (‘strange surplus of void’) that is at once a source of terror and joy.
- v. In the face of this unboundedness, thought is compelled to express the absolute, but precisely because thought itself is finite, it can only do so negatively by *presenting the absolute as irrecoverable absence*.
- vi. Since it exceeds the conditions of phenomenal experience yet takes form through an expanded mode of sensibility, this negative presentation of the absolute, which *elevates thought to the very heights of its powers*, can take form only in the *feeling* that thought experiences when confronting the absolute.
- vii. *This feeling* – which *constitutes the proper object and criterion of the limit-experience* – is simultaneously *anguish* suffered in the face of thought’s proper limit (the impossibility of positively presenting the absolute) and *exaltation* affirmed in the movement by which thought is transported to this very limit and able to apprehend it as such;⁸⁶ for only in this way can thought

⁸⁶ “Anguish is given in the theme of knowledge itself: as *ipse*, through knowledge, I would like to be everything, therefore to communicate, to lose myself, however to remain *ipse*. The subject (me, *ipse*) and the object (in part undefined, as long as it is not entirely grasped) are presented for communication, before it takes place. The subject wants to take hold of the object in order to possess it . . . , but the subject can only lose itself: the nonsense of the will to know appears, nonsense of all possible, making *ipse* know that it is going to lose itself and knowledge with it. As long as *ipse* perseveres in its will to know and to be *ipse*, anguish lasts, but if *ipse* abandons itself and knowledge with it, if it gives itself up to non-knowledge in this abandon, then rapture begins. In rapture, my existence finds a sense once again, but the sense is referred immediately to *ipse*; it becomes my rapture, a rapture which I *ipse* possess, giving satisfaction to my will to be everything. As soon as I emerge from it, communication, the loss of myself cease; I have ceased to abandon myself—I remain there, but with a new knowledge” (Ibid, 53).

touch upon its own absolute, the limit being the a priori (hence unconditioned) condition of possibility for thought itself.

- viii. As such, *the limit is itself limitless* (*‘the limitless reign of the Limit’*) and, by becoming an object of thought, opens thought to the only form of the infinite to which it has proper access: an infinite or radical finitude, *‘l’infini de la fin.’*

In brief, and to invoke Lyotard: the limit-experience is a differend of feeling (anguish and exaltation: what Bataille calls ‘ravishment’ and Blanchot, ‘ravaging joy’) that is the feeling of the differend of absolute finitude and the absolute infinite on the occasion of thought’s being propelled to its own fundamental limit and taking this limit as its proper object.

The remainder of this chapter, then, will offer an analysis of the Kantian sublime oriented by these eight aspects or moments of the limit-experience. This interpretation becomes possible if, as Lyotard suggests, the rational idea proper to the sublime, which reason demands that the imagination present to thought in sensation, is understood to be the idea of the limit, rather than the idea of nature as supersensible substrate or the idea of absolute freedom as unconditioned causality. In sublime experience, for a mode of thought capable of feeling (or, to speak with Lyotard, of tautegorically⁸⁷ reflecting upon)

⁸⁷ Lyotard uses the term ‘tautegorical’ to refer to the character of aesthetic reflective judgments whereby the basis of the judgment – its criterion as well as its object – is the feeling itself, the pleasure or displeasure, that thought feels on the occasion of judging: “*tautegorical* [is] a term by which I designate the remarkable fact that pleasure and displeasure are at once both a ‘state’ of the soul and the ‘information’ collected by the soul relative to its state” (Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 4). See also: “Any act of thinking is thus accompanied by a feeling that signals to thought its ‘state.’ But this state is nothing other than the feeling that signals it. For thought, to be informed of its state is to feel this state – to be affected. The sensation (or the feeling) is both the state of thought and a warning to thought of its state by this state. Such is the first characteristic of reflection: *a dazzling immediacy and a perfect coincidence of what feels and what is felt.* ... Pure reflection is first and foremost the ability of thought to be immediately informed of its state by this state and without other means of measure that feeling itself” (ibid, 11, my emphasis).

its constitutive finitude, it is precisely the idea of the limit that indicates the absolute of thought itself (its a priori condition), opening the power of thinking to what is, for it, infinite.

2.2.1 *The Sublime as (i) Experience of Absolute Finitude and (ii) Experience of Impossibility*

Whereas a judgment of beauty (aesthetic reflective judgment of taste) is occasioned by the singular form of an object, which exhibits a “purposiveness” (though without a determinant purpose) “by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking”⁸⁸; sublime judgment, on the other hand, is occasioned “by a formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness*”⁸⁹: “in what we usually call sublime in nature there is such an utter lack of anything leading to particular objective principles and to forms of nature conforming to them, that it is rather in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, or in its wildest and most ruleless disarray and devastation, provided it displays magnitude and might.”⁹⁰ Beauty, given in the superabundant richness of form, delights the mind by facilitating the harmonious and free interplay of imagination and understanding, which are faculties that in their cognitive employment operate on the basis of limitation and determination to render knowledge possible (schematization in the case of the imagination, subsumption of intuitions under concepts in the case of the understanding). By contrast, the sublime, which is also a source of delight, appears “contrapurposive for

⁸⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*: §23, 245.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 244.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 246.

our power of judgment”⁹¹ precisely because of the formlessness or limitlessness of the magnitude or might of nature that in its chaos gives rise to sublime feeling.

This unboundedness exceeds the delimitative operations of aesthetic comprehension and mensuration by which the imagination presents to the understanding a sensible object taken as extensive magnitude. This is why, as we have seen, there is strictly speaking no phenomenal object of sublime experience, though there are phenomenal occasions for it. Confronted with the impossibility of presenting what it must nonetheless struggle to present, the imagination, at the limit of what it can do, feels its own failing; and it is precisely this failing that ‘can be exhibited in sensibility’ and thereby form the sensible basis (anguish) for the sublime feeling by which thought is called to that which transcends the conditions of possible experience.⁹²

The finitude of the imagination is thus itself a necessary condition for the possibility of an experience (in sublime feeling) of that which exceeds the very limits of possible experience. Despite (or, rather, by virtue of) the fact that it is contrapurposive for the imagination, the sublime bespeaks another, more elevated purposiveness of the mind by which thought encounters the absolute. The sublime is thus an *experience of the impossible* in two distinct but indissociable senses: (1) the impossibility that the imagination suffers when faced with the demand to present the unbounded (absolute) in intuition; and (2) the impossible as the sublime object proper, which ‘cannot be contained

⁹¹ Ibid, 245.

⁹² “If a sensible form cannot contain ‘the thing,’ then the latter has some relation to the Ideas of reason, for the objects of these ideas precisely never give an adequate presentation of themselves in a form that would be adapted, *angemessen*, to them. However, even in the case of this unrepresentability of principle, what remains presentable for the objects of rational Ideas is the inadequacy, the *Unangemessenheit*, the demensuration of all presentation. Presented in the sensible to and through the imagination, this ‘discrepancy’ reminds the mind of the Ideas that are always absent to presentation and thus revives them” (Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 69-70).

in any sensible form' and thus exceeds the limits of possible experience that condition objects of sense, yet which is nevertheless presented (negatively) in sensibility through sublime feeling.

This dynamic of double impossibility is on display in Kant's account of the mathematical sublime:

Hence, considered on this basis, nothing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime. [What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment.⁹³

Considered in its mathematical aspect, the sublime is "what is *absolutely* [*schlechthin*] *large*,"⁹⁴ which is to say, "*what is large beyond all comparison*,"⁹⁵ an absolute magnitude that exceeds any form of comparative measurement. The sublime is a kind of measureless measure or '*mesure démesurée*' (Foucault): an infinite magnitude that admits of no numerical measurement; an absolute magnitude that gives to itself its own measure. "Clearly, in that case [viz., the sublime], we do not permit a standard adequate to it to be sought outside it, but only within it. It is a magnitude that is equal only to itself."⁹⁶ There can be no adequation between the absolutely large and anything outside it, for inadequation is the very mark of the absolute. And for that reason, the imagination can

⁹³ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §25, 250.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

possess no sensible standard by means of which it could present an adequate estimate of the sublime.

Let us consider the problem in more detail. The imagination is ‘our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense,’ which is to say, the power of thought to give an aesthetic “estimation of magnitudes in mere intuition (by the eye).”⁹⁷ Aesthetic estimation of magnitude is distinguished from the mathematical estimation of magnitude, which employs the understanding and operates “by means of numerical concepts (or their signs in algebra).”⁹⁸ Although “all logical estimation of magnitude is mathematical” insofar as “we must use numbers ..., whose unity is [the unit we use as] the measure” in order to obtain “determinate concepts of *how large* something is,” mathematical estimation presupposes that the “magnitude of the measure” is known.⁹⁹ That is, the measure used to estimate mathematical magnitude is also a magnitude that must be measured in turn, and thus cannot itself be constituted mathematically. Rather, all mathematical estimation of magnitude depends upon a “first or basic measure,” which can only be given by an aesthetic estimation of magnitude as the limit of what we are able to “take in [*fassen*] directly in one intuition.”¹⁰⁰ Lyotard puts the point as follows: “the very notion of measure ... proceeds from the ‘aesthetic’ limitation of the comprehension of the manifold in a single presentation. This is the ‘first or fundamental measure’ by which all mathematical measure is made possible as numerical

⁹⁷ Ibid, §26, 251.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

determination. The ‘horizon’ of comprehension is the magnitude of the measure that makes the measure of magnitudes possible.”¹⁰¹

Now, because the sublime is the absolutely large, the experience of the sublime presents to thought a magnitude that exceeds the first measure of aesthetic estimation and thus cannot be determined by means of numerical concepts: “estimation has been pushed to the point where the ability of our imagination is inadequate to exhibit the concept of magnitude.”¹⁰² Indeed, this is the constitutive inadequacy of the imagination that makes sublime experience possible. The ‘idea of the sublime’ is awakened at the very moment that thought, struggling to present that which surpasses its ‘power of estimating magnitude in the world of sense,’ confronts its own ‘first or basic measure’ as the absolute subjective limit of aesthetic comprehension:

Now even though there is no maximum for the mathematical estimation of magnitude (inasmuch as the power of numbers progresses to infinity), yet for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude there is indeed a maximum. And regarding this latter maximum I say that *when it is judged as [the] absolute measure* beyond which no larger is subjectively possible (i.e., possible for the judging subject), then it carries with it the idea of the sublime and gives rise to that emotion which no mathematical estimation of magnitude by means of numbers can produce....¹⁰³

The idea of the sublime arises through a reflection by thought upon its proper finitude – upon the absolute limit of its powers of presentation and comprehension – and this reflection is occasioned by those “appearances” of nature “whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity.”¹⁰⁴

In a way that must still be clarified, the idea of the infinite (which attends an appearance of nature in its chaotic and ruleless disarray) – by virtue of the intrinsic

¹⁰¹ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytics of the Sublime*, 101-2.

¹⁰² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 253.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 251, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 255.

excess by which it surpasses, as absolute magnitude, the limits of the presentable – prompts thought to judge its own first measure as an absolute limit (the absolute of the finite). It is this reflective judgment of thought upon its constitutive limit that opens thought to the idea and feeling of the sublime: “This limit is the absolute, felt subjectively or aesthetically, of what the faculty of presentation can grasp in terms of presentable magnitude. It is enough for thought to feel this measure as insurmountable, as subjectively absolute, for this aesthetic maximum to convey ‘the idea of the sublime’ and to call for the ‘emotion’ that characterizes this feeling.”¹⁰⁵

It remains to articulate this ‘idea of the sublime’ in its specificity. No doubt it is an idea of reason, and it might seem to be simply the idea of the infinite as a whole or ‘absolute totality,’ which reason (impossibly) demands that the imagination present in sensibility. However, the text of the *Critique* cited above suggests a more complicated story, for it is precisely because the ‘first or basic’ limit of the imagination is judged to be an ‘absolute measure’ that the thought and feeling of the sublime become possible. That is, the idea of the sublime owes at least as much to the absolute of the finite as to the absolute infinite: “The only way for this [viz., for nature to be sublime in those of its appearances whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity] to occur is through the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination to estimate an object’s magnitude.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, both of these absolutes are at work in the experience of the impossible that constitutes sublime feeling. Let us take a closer look, then, at the infinite

¹⁰⁵ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 100-1.

¹⁰⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 255.

demand of reason that compels the imagination to “advance toward what is impossible for it.”¹⁰⁷

When working in conjunction with the understanding in the mathematical estimation of magnitude, the imagination has no difficulty progressing toward infinity by means of numerical concepts. However, because reason “demands totality for all given magnitudes,” “reason demands comprehension in *one* intuition, and *exhibition* of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time). Rather, reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite ... as *given in its entirety* (in its totality).”¹⁰⁸ By requiring totalization, the command of reason that issues in the sublime is contrapurposive for the imagination with respect to the latter’s powers of ‘comprehension’ and ‘exhibition’: the thought that presents cannot think the infinite as an absolute and actual whole.

But what exactly does the imagination’s failure consist in? Precisely the inability of the subjective syntheses of apprehension and comprehension (*comprehensio aesthetica*) to take in – in one intuition, at one time, and as a whole – a progression the magnitude of which exceeds the first measure of aesthetic estimation:

Hence it must be the *aesthetic* estimation of magnitude where we feel that effort, our imagination’s effort to perform a comprehension that surpasses its ability to encompass [*begreifen*] the progressive apprehension in a whole of intuition, and where at the same time we perceive the inadequacy of the imagination – unbounded though it is as far as progressing is concerned – for taking in and using, for the estimation of magnitude, a basic measure that is suitable for this....¹⁰⁹

The imagination’s powers of comprehension falter before the infinite demand of reason, not only because comprehension (and thus aesthetic magnitude) has a limit, but because

¹⁰⁷ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 254.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

comprehension itself is a delimitative operation and thus necessarily inadequate for presenting what is formless or limitless: “Comprehension ... is limitation itself before any conceptual rule, for it consists in a putting into form, and form is a limitation.”¹¹⁰

This point, to which we will return below, will be crucial for the claim that the idea of the limit is that by which thought thinks its own absolute, its proper a priori condition of possibility.

2.2.2 *The Sublime as (iii) Rupture of the Unities of Subject and Object and (iv) Opening of Thought to the Absolute*

It is difficult to overstate the devastation that this impossibility of comprehension wrecks upon the constitutive basis of the subject. To begin with, the violence the imagination does to itself (under the command of reason) consists in a violation of the three syntheses (apprehension, reproduction, recognition) that Kant analyzes in the A Deduction of the first *Critique*, and which constitute the “‘subjective sources’ that establish the transcendental possibility of the knowledge of objects.”¹¹¹ The synthetic activity of comprehension is the power of the imagination to apprehend and hold together the unity of the manifold in intuition and to reproduce this unity over time as a condition for temporal succession (which, when employed for cognition, enables objects of intuition to be recognized and subsumed under concepts). As we have seen, the limit of (and condition for) the synthesis of apprehension is the first measure of aesthetic estimation, the maximum that we can ‘take in directly in one intuition.’ Therefore, when

¹¹⁰ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 100-1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

this limit is exceeded (by the absolute largeness of the sublime) and can no longer function to give unity and form to the manifold, the comprehensive synthesis breaks down, for apprehension is overwhelmed and intuition itself rendered impossible.

In this way, the experience of the sublime disrupts the unities of both self and world. On the side of the world, by forcing thought beyond the limit of its “subjective absolute in the presentation of a magnitude,”¹¹² the encounter with absolute magnitude undoes the unity of the manifold (by disabling the synthetic activity of the mind that holds together this unity). Dizzied before the abyss it beholds in the absence of presentable intuition and blinded in the face of its proper limit, thought is seized by the terror characteristic of sublime experience: “at the moment of passing beyond this absolute limit, the comprehensive synthesis of magnitude becomes impossible, and the quality of the state, in which the thought that imagines finds itself, is reversed: it is afraid of this *Überschwengliche*, of this transcendent, this movable and confused (*schwingen*) beyond (*über*) ‘like an abyss [*Abgrund*] in which it fears to lose itself.’”¹¹³ Thought trembles before the unrepresentable ‘presence’ of the absolute, the object of the sublime which cannot be grasped or contained in sensible form.¹¹⁴

On the side of the self, there is a breakdown of all three elementary syntheses that are the ‘subjective sources’ by which understanding is made possible: the failure of the apprehensive synthesis consigns to the same fate the reproductive synthesis that is

¹¹² Ibid, 110.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See Lyotard: “Under the name of the Analytic of the Sublime, a denatured aesthetic, or, better, an aesthetic of denaturing, breaks the proper order of the natural aesthetic and suspends the function it assumes in the project of unification. What awakens the ‘intellectual feeling’, the sublime, is not nature, which is an artist in forms and the work of forms, but rather magnitude, force, quantity in its purest state, a ‘presence’ that exceeds what imaginative thought can grasp at once in a form – what it can *form*.” (Ibid, 53)

“inseparably bound up with”¹¹⁵ it, as well as the cognitive synthesis that requires objects of intuition to be comprehended (formed, delimited) so as to bring them under concepts. Moreover, sublime experience, by thus undermining object- and world-awareness from a point of view (that of the subject, the absolute subjective limit of which has been transgressed), fractures the ordinary synthetic unity of the ‘I think.’ There can be no “formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations”¹¹⁶ if this manifold cannot be synthesized. As Kant says, “the mind could never think its identity in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this identity *a priori*, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its act, whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension ... to a transcendental unity”¹¹⁷; but since the sublime forecloses ‘all synthesis of apprehension,’ the latter cannot be subordinated to a transcendental unity, and the mind is thus deprived the identity of the act by which it could think its proper identity.

Indeed, given Kant’s claim that the “original and necessary consciousness of the identity of the self is thus at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearance according to concepts,”¹¹⁸ it follows that the failure of the three subjective syntheses in sublime experience (which renders impossible the ‘unity of the synthesis of all appearance according to concepts’) subverts the consciousness of self-identity and disables transcendental apperception. “One does not see how in the absence of the elementary syntheses, ‘subjective sources’ that ‘make possible understanding,’ the unity of a subject (here, the subject of sublime feeling) could be

¹¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, A 102.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, A 105.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, A 108.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

deduced. ... There seems to be no question that the most elementary conditions (the syntheses of time) for the synthesis of a *Selbst* are lacking here.”¹¹⁹

How does the experience of the sublime undermine ‘the syntheses of time’? We have already seen that the reproductive synthesis (indissociable though analytically distinct from apprehension) enables the progression of the imagination and its presentation of temporal succession. This progression or form of successive apprehension provides what Kant calls ‘the condition of time’ proper to the imagination, which makes it possible for the imagination to follow the understanding in providing the measure for mathematical estimations of ever-greater magnitudes.

Now, in the sublime, reason demands that the imagination comprehend and exhibit ‘in *one* intuition ... all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series’: the imagination must “comprehend in one instant what is apprehended successively,” an operation of thought termed “regression” that “cancels the condition of time in the imagination’s progression.”¹²⁰ Since time, for Kant, is “the form of inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state,”¹²¹ the canceling procedure of regression inflicts violence upon the constitutive condition of the subject: “Hence, (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it [viz., regression] is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to inner sense, and this violence must be the more significant the larger the quantum is that the imagination comprehends in one intuition.”¹²² Because sublime magnitude is absolutely large, the regression demanded by reason in the experience of the sublime inflicts, by the auto-

¹¹⁹ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 22.

¹²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §27, 258-9.

¹²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 33 / B 49.

¹²² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §27, 259.

violation of imagination, an infinite violence upon the very foundation of the subject, the temporal condition of the ‘I think.’¹²³

2.2.3 *The Sublime as (v) Negative Presentation of the Absolute, (vi) Elevation of Thought, and (vii) Feeling of Anguish and Exaltation*

Nevertheless, sublime experience must speak to some form of subjectivity insofar as it is an aesthetic reflective judgment based upon *feeling*, and insofar as it contains a higher (subjective) purposiveness for the power of judging (which alone, for Kant, can account for the sublime’s affirmative dimension as ‘soul-stirring delight’). The experience of the impossible is not itself an impossible experience: sublime experience is empirically real, and so an account must be given of how it can elevate thought despite (or by virtue of) the absence of the ‘I think.’ Indeed, the point is not that thought falters when the subject is undermined but, rather, that it thereby receives a higher calling: “this same violence that the imagination inflicts on the subject is still judged purposive *for the whole vocation* of the mind.”¹²⁴

We have seen what the failure of the imagination consists in, but we must more closely examine how it is constitutive of sublime experience. *That* Kant takes this failure to be constitutive is clear: the confrontation of the imagination with its absolute (subjective or aesthetic) limit ‘carries with it the idea of the sublime and gives rise to that emotion’; the imagination strives to present what it cannot, yet ‘this inadequacy itself is

¹²³ “Thus the grasp ‘in one glance’ of what is successive, which reason demands of the imagination in the judgment upon the sublime, and which must render intuitable the ‘coexistence’ of what can only be given successively, does ‘violence’ not only to the *a priori* condition of the intuition of any given or succession, but to the eminent and unique condition that such a grasp imposes on the ‘intuition of ourselves and of our state’” (Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 143).

¹²⁴ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §27, 259.

the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power.’ Or again: “the subject’s own inability uncovers in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his, and ... the mind can judge this ability aesthetically only by that inability.”¹²⁵ So the feeling of the imagination’s inadequacy yields (to) the feeling of a boundless power proper to thought, which is, in the end, the real object of the sublime: ‘what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment.’

The situation, then, is as follows: a formless object provides the occasion for thought to feel the absolute limit of its presentational power (anguish, terror) and, thereby, to feel another power of thinking that is unlimited, which is to say, unconditioned, absolute (exaltation); and it is this other power or ‘way of thinking’¹²⁶ that is properly judged sublime. Accordingly, we must inquire into this exaltation that thought feels as it is called to its proper vocation.

Now, as we saw in our discussion of the formlessness of the appearances in nature that occasion the sublime, the inadequacy of the imagination ‘arouses and calls to mind’ ‘ideas of reason’ because such ideas are precisely what cannot be presented in intuition. “In the case of the sublime, the without-form immediately suggests a concept of speculative reason, for the object of such a concept is by definition forbidden presentation and there is no presentation without form.”¹²⁷ (We will return in the following section to the crucial question of which particular idea of reason is called to mind in the sublime.)

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ “[T]he sublime must always have reference to our *way of thinking*, i.e., to maxims directed to providing the intellectual [side in us] and our rational ideas with supremacy over sensibility” (Ibid, “General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments,” 274).

¹²⁷ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 59.

Nevertheless, reason makes the impossible demand that imagination present this idea of reason; and imagination, answering the call of reason to breach the absolute limit of its first measure, feels, at the threshold of what exceeds the sensible, the expansive thrill of boundlessness: “For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition of the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul.”¹²⁸

The imagination exhibits, bears witness to the infinite negatively in the very movement by which it separates itself from the sensible. In this nearly impossible and uncertain gesture, which borders on delirium, the imagination finds itself unsupported and *without ground*; yet it is not the *Ab-grund* that it beholds, the abyss that had filled the imagination with terror on the occasion of the breakdown of its elementary subjective syntheses. Rather, the demand reason issues to the imagination, which Kant describes in the Dynamical Sublime as “the dominance that reason exerts over sensibility”¹²⁹ by which reason qua might is superior to the might of sensibility that resists it,¹³⁰ expands the very powers of the imagination, “letting it look outward toward the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss.”¹³¹ But in what sense is the imagination, separated from sensibility yet remaining the power of thought to present, able to ‘look outward toward’ what is infinite? What precisely is ‘the infinite’ in this case, and what *more* does the imagination

¹²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, “General Comment,” 274.

¹²⁹ Ibid., §29, 265.

¹³⁰ See Kant’s definitions of *might* and *dominance*: “*Might* is an ability that is superior to great obstacles. It is called *dominance* [*Gewalt*] if it is superior even to the resistance of something that itself possesses might. When in an aesthetic judgment we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us, then it is *dynamically sublime*” (Ibid., §28, 260).

¹³¹ Ibid., §29, 265.

‘look’ upon there where sensibility perceives only the void? Surely not a positive ‘vision,’ which would collapse thought into fanaticism and mania, for, as we have seen, the imagination’s presentation of the infinite must remain strictly negative. Of what, then, does the exhibition of the absolute consist if “it is neither the absence of presentation nor the presentation of nothingness,” and if “it is negative in the eyes of the sensible but at the same time is still a ‘mode of presentation’?”¹³²

The answer, which concerns the nature of aesthetic reflective judgment itself, lies in *feeling*, for such judgments have no criterion other than the feeling (pleasure or displeasure) of thought itself occasioned by the form of the object (in the case of beauty) or the lack thereof (in the case of the sublime).¹³³ This is the ‘tautegorical’ character of aesthetic reflection that Lyotard emphasizes, the ‘perfect coincidence of what feels and what is felt’: that is, “the identity of form and content”¹³⁴ of the judgment, the doubling of thinking (*la pensée*) by what is thought (*le pensé*) in the ‘dazzling immediacy’ of thought’s auto-affection.¹³⁵ Accordingly, if in sublime judgments thought is able to (negatively) present the absolute to itself, it must be through the feeling that thought itself experiences, a feeling that is the proper object of the sublime: “Only through its sensation can the thought that imagines be aware of this ‘presence’ without presentation.”¹³⁶

What is this feeling? Precisely that of thought itself as it withdraws from the sensible by judging, on the basis of its anguish, its ‘first measure’ as an absolute

¹³² Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 151.

¹³³ The feeling that forms the basis of a judgment of beauty (taste) differs from that of a sublime judgment, insofar as the former is disinterested whereas the latter is an emotion (albeit an intellectual one), but this difference is not operative here.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁵ As we will discuss in Chapter 6, the doubling of *la pensée* and *le pensé* will be a hallmark of Foucault’s conception of vertical critique.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

subjective limit – a judgment which thus frees the imagination (however momentarily) from the delimitative operations of comprehension, insofar as it (imagination) can reflect upon the fundamental condition (first measure, absolute of the finite) that makes such operations possible. In this reflexive feeling, which is a negative presentation because the condition for the feeling is the sacrifice of the imagination’s powers of comprehension by which it could present an object of intuition,¹³⁷ the imagination takes possession of its expanded powers: the feeling of the imagination when it touches upon its constitutive limit, which contains an ineliminable moment of anguish, gives way to a feeling of unboundedness – groundlessness experienced as an elevation or exaltation that ‘expands the soul’ – as thought discovers in the order of presentation the power to reflect upon its own absolute (its own a priori condition of possibility).

Indeed, as we saw above, what is properly called sublime (infinite, absolutely large) is the employment of thought itself when it thinks the absolute and thus exceeds the limits of sensibility; or, more precisely, the feeling of thought on the occasion of (and as the basis for) this employment. Therefore, not only must the absolute be felt in order to be ‘present’ to thought, but the feeling of thought must itself be felt as absolute. These are, in fact, two sides of the same tautological coin:

Because it is a reflective judgment, the Idea of the absolute is only ‘present’ and this presence is that of the ‘soul-stirring delight’ that thinking feels on the occasion of the object it judges sublime. This sensation, and this sensation alone, signals the call of reason that the critique makes explicit. Thus for reflective judgment it matters less that the object of this Idea is absolute What matters is that the

¹³⁷ “In excluding itself from its own limits of presentation, the imagination suggests the presence of what it cannot present. It unbinds itself, unleashes itself, but it does this by removing itself from its finality and thus annihilating itself according to this finality. It follows that the said ‘presence’ is not an object of the imagination; it is only felt subjectively by thought, as this gesture of retraction” (ibid).

delight is felt to be absolute. The reflective absolute predicates not an object, but a state of thought.¹³⁸

The infinite that the imagination ‘looks outward toward’ is thus not an infinite beyond but the feeling of a particular power of thought, one that is auto-expansive (hence soul-stirring) by virtue of violently suspending the normal operations of the subject and transgressing the limits that condition the sensible. But how are we to characterize this power of thought, and in what sense can the feeling of it be understood as absolute? As we will see, these questions concern what is essential to the sublime as a limit-experience and to critical thought as a whole.

2.2.4 *The Sublime as (viii) Thought of the Limitless Limit*

As we examined in the first part of this chapter, Kant terms ‘supersensible’ the expanded power of thought by which the imagination, by virtue of both its finitude and its ability to reflect (through feeling) upon the absoluteness of this finitude, calls to mind idea(s) of reason. I have suggested that this our second interpretation of the sublime allows us to dispense with Kant’s specific explanatory appeal to the ideas of a supersensible substrate of nature and universal moral law. The time has now come to articulate the alternative idea of reason by and toward which the imagination is impossibly and irresistibly summoned.

Let us return once more to Kant’s treatment of the mathematical sublime. The first measure that the imagination employs in making aesthetic estimations of magnitude is overwhelmed on the occasion of the sublime, and thought’s synthetic activity of

¹³⁸ Ibid, 121.

comprehension is thus violently disrupted, but this failure is itself purposive for the vocation of the mind as a whole. In order to explain this purposiveness, Kant transposes a problem from the first antinomy in the first *Critique*. The imagination falters in the mathematical sublime not simply because its basic aesthetic measure is exceeded but, further, because the measure it would need to estimate the absolute magnitude or largeness of the sublime is the ‘absolute whole of nature’: “Now the proper unchangeable basic measure of nature is the absolute whole of nature, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended. This basic measure, however, is a self-contradictory concept (because an absolute totality of an endless progression is impossible).”¹³⁹

Within the sensible conditions of nature as appearance, to grasp nature in its totality as an absolute whole would be to comprehend the infinite, which would require the synthetic comprehension in intuition of an unlimited progression. Not only is this an impossibility for the imagination, which cannot provide the requisite schema to form a sensible intuition for the understanding to cognize, but the very concept of the whole of nature as an absolute totality is self-contradictory within the phenomenal sphere.

The reason is given in the analysis of the first antinomy, where Kant raises the aporetic question of whether the world is spatiotemporally limited or unlimited, showing that it can be neither so long as the question is posed at the level of nature as appearance. It is the latter impossibility that is of particular relevance to the sublime: “It [viz., the world] cannot be unlimited because a spontaneous totality (space) or a successive totality (time) of states of things cannot be *given* in the forms of sensibility if totality is

¹³⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 255.

infinite.”¹⁴⁰ This is indeed why the basic measure of nature as an absolute whole – which reason, demanding ‘absolute totality as a real idea,’ effectively requires the imagination to deploy in the mathematical sublime – is self-contradictory within the limits of the sensible. We can begin to understand how sublime feeling is an experience of impossibility that contains, as Lyotard puts it, the differend of the absolute finite and the absolute infinite: “Thinking feels a sublime feeling when it comes up against the aporia expounded in the first antinomy, but in the order of presentation rather than of concepts. Yet it must still be pushed or attracted by an almost insane demand of reason.”¹⁴¹

Since an infinite totality cannot be given in intuition, Kant concludes that the encounter with absolute magnitude in the sublime and the constitutive failure of the imagination “must lead the concept of nature to a supersensible substrate.”¹⁴² He does so again by virtue of his reasoning in the first antinomy: since, considered as appearance, nature can be neither unlimited nor limited,¹⁴³ the question cannot be determined by understanding (lacking, as it does, “the sensible intuition corresponding either to the unlimited or to what the limited leaves ‘outside’ of itself”¹⁴⁴) but, rather, must be referred to speculative ideas of reason belonging to the supersensible sphere. It is thus only by virtue of rational ideas that the mind, without contradiction, is “able even to think the infinite *as a whole*,” and this ability “indicates a mental power that surpasses any standard of sense”: “If the human mind is nonetheless to *be able even to think* the given

¹⁴⁰ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 59.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 60.

¹⁴² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 255.

¹⁴³ Nature as appearance cannot be limited because that would “presuppose an empty space beyond the extension of the finite world, or beyond the extension of an empty time before the beginning of the finite world” (Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 59).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

infinite without contradiction, it must have within itself a power that is supersensible, whose idea of a noumenon cannot be intuited but can yet be regarded as the substrate underlying what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world.”¹⁴⁵

However, Kant’s insistence notwithstanding, it is not at all clear that the speculative idea of reason aroused by the experience of the mathematical sublime must be the idea of nature as supersensible substrate. A look at Lyotard’s reading of the resolution of the first antinomy suggests why: “Both claims [the thesis that the world is unlimited and the antithesis that the world is limited] are nonsuited, at least as theses of understanding. Nonetheless, *the very concept of the limit persists*, even when it can only be speculative. The limit is the object of an Idea of reason, a ‘being of reason.’”¹⁴⁶ Transposed into the mathematical sublime, the idea of the limit is called to mind at the moment when the imagination – overwhelmed, distressed, and displaced – takes the limit itself as an object of thought by judging its own first measure as an absolute (subjective) limit; for “an absolute limit ... cannot be a phenomenon, because it is always supposed to be unconditioned.”¹⁴⁷ It is for this reason that the inadequacy of the imagination – its finitude felt first as privation, then as the ‘presence’ in sensibility of the absolute – is constitutive of sublime experience and purposive for the powers of thought as a whole.

Yet if it is not to refer us to the concept of the supersensible substrate of nature and to the idea of freedom as unconditioned causation, how are we to understand the higher purposiveness of the sublime attunement by which the mind is called to its proper

¹⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, 254-5.

¹⁴⁶ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 59, my emphasis. “The limit is only conceivable with an outside and an inside. The limit, that is, immediately implies both the limited and the unlimited. However, there is no determinable concept of the unlimited. Moreover, the limit, the limited, and the unlimited, taken as objects, can only be objects of the Ideas of speculative reason” (ibid).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 98.

vocation? And if, given the tautegorical character of aesthetic reflective judgment, it is only insofar as sublime feeling feels itself to be absolute that the absolute itself can be felt as such, what explains the absoluteness of the delight?

The answers can only emerge when thought is considered in its critical vocation. We have already seen that the imagination, as the power of comprehension, operates on the basis of delimitation ('comprehension is limitation itself before any conceptual rule'), as does the understanding with which it collaborates in cognition. For this reason, neither faculty can take the limit itself as an object, not only because the idea of the limit belongs to speculative reason (the limit implying an unlimited 'outside' it that cannot be given in sensible form) but, further, because the limit itself is the 'method' of imagination and understanding – their a priori ground or constitutive condition – and, as such, constitutes their absolute:

It is the limit itself that understanding cannot conceive of as its object. ... The limit is not an object for understanding. It is its method: all the categories of understanding are the operators of determination, that is, of limitation. Furthermore, the faculties of intuition or presentation, sensibility and imagination, respectively, also proceed, in their order, by means of limitations: schemas when these limitations work for knowledge, and free forms when they work toward the pleasure of the beautiful. This is precisely what the Preliminary Remark to the deduction of the pure concepts of understanding in the first *Critique* shows: understanding cannot be 'deduced' in the critical sense, that is, legitimated in claiming to know the givens of intuition by determining them through concepts, if the concepts have not been delimited beforehand, that is, puts into elementary forms by the three syntheses of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition. This is where the limit first operates, making all presentation possible.¹⁴⁸

It is precisely these elementary subjective syntheses that sublime experience subverts; and yet, in the very movement of the subject's collapse and the object's dispersal, the imagination feels its powers expanded as it beholds the infinite and

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 59-60.

negatively presents the absolute in the feeling of its proper unboundedness. This is only possible insofar as the imagination judges its first measure to be an absolute limit on the occasion of its transgression: that is, insofar as the thought that presents can think (feel) the limit itself as an object of thought. And since this judgment is one of aesthetic reflection, the idea of the limit – which contains “the differend to be found at the heart of sublime feeling ... of the absolute of the infinite and the absolute of the finite”¹⁴⁹ – can only be ‘present’ to thought on the basis of the feeling of thought itself that is both anguish and exaltation.

Now, since the first measure of aesthetic comprehension is also ‘where the limit first operates’ as the a priori condition ‘making all presentation possible,’ it follows that the limit is the absolute of thought itself, its unconditioned condition of possibility, and thus that the limit as an idea of reason can only arise by virtue of the feeling of thought by which thought reflects upon, touches its proper absolute. Indeed, this ‘idea of the sublime’ arises in the very elevation by which the imagination, groundless, takes its own ground (or its ruins) as a (negative) object in the order of presentation. Only in such a way can thought, which “is destined for the absolute,”¹⁵⁰ both discover and achieve this destination. The feeling of thought reflecting upon its own absolute limit and first condition awakens the calling by which thought comes into possession of its proper vocation:

Thus in sublime feeling thought feels sensation as ... a soul-stirring delight, a sharp pleasure. Why is this? Because this appeal actualizes the *destination* (*Bestimmung*) of our *Geistesvermögen*, of our spiritual faculty – of the power of thought at its strongest – as it discovers this destination. One hears the *Stimme* in the vocation of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 123-4.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 120.

the *Bestimmung*, the destination. ... If the appeal exalts thought it is because it comes from the very 'place,' the transcendental place toward which it is already turned, toward which (to which?) it 'is going and giving itself'¹⁵¹

The expansive, auto-elevating power of thought, which Kant takes to be supersensible, can thus be understood as properly critical: the sublime feeling of exaltation expresses, realizes the freedom of thought in its critical vocation when, in aesthetic reflective judgment, thought takes as an object its own constitutive condition of possibility ('the limitless reign of the Limit,' *'l'infini de la fin'*).

It is a general feature of critical thought that its only access to the absolute (thought's destination) is by way of transcendental conditions: "*A priori* conditions of possibility must, by hypothesis, be unconditioned, or else they would not be *a priori*. Yet if the critical examination can establish them as such, it must be able to see the nothingness of the condition that is 'behind' them"¹⁵²; and this is precisely what is achieved in the sublime through the negative presentation of the absolute. If the imagination in its expanded powers is able to 'look outward toward the infinite' and 'see' there more than mere abyss, this is by virtue of the sublime feeling through which thought beholds its constitutive finitude, first as inescapable limitation (anguish) and then as limitless limit (exaltation). On the basis of sublime feeling, then, thought is elevated to the absolute, called to its destination, elected to its vocation as critical reflection; and the feeling itself of soul-stirring delight, which is the proper object and criterion of sublime experience, "is an absolute delight, because it is the absolute vocation of thought to think the absolute."¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 119-20.

¹⁵² Ibid, 56.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 121.

2.3 Conclusion

In our first interpretation of the Kantian sublime, situated in relation to moral feeling as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, sublime feeling was shown to be a form of aesthetic experience that enables the realization of ethical agency. The sublime, an experience arising in sensibility, gives material expression to that which is irreducible to sensibility, which expression is a necessary condition for the practice of human freedom.

In turn, our second interpretation of the sublime, while retaining its crucial feature as an experience of the irreducible (experience of impossibility), allowed us to jettison Kant's explanatory strategy that refers sublime feeling to a form of moral transcendence. Rather than appeal to the supersensible vocation of human personality (*homo noumenon*), the sublime can instead be understood as a limit-experience of radical finitude. The vertical movement of auto-elevation by which 'the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature,' finds its source in the nature of thought qua critique: that is, in the expansive, auto-affective relation of thought to itself when it takes its own constitutive limit as unconditioned condition of possibility. If the vocation of critical thought is super-sensible, that is, if it is elevated above the field of sensibility, this is by virtue not of some transport 'beyond,' but the movement of reflection by which thought feels – and in feeling, thinks – its own absolute limit as an a priori condition for the field of sensibility itself. And indeed, it is only in the transgression of this absolute limit, when the constitutive syntheses of self and world are undone, that thought 'can come to feel its own sublimity': as Foucault puts it in this chapter's first epigraph, 'what is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time.'

Understood in such a way, the Kantian sublime anticipates Foucault's twofold concept of verticality as both (1) a form of intensive limit-experience (transgression) and (2) a mode of critical thought, the double function of which is to enable the practice of freedom by 'wrenching the subject from itself' and 'seeing to its dissolution' (Foucault). Like the sublime, the vertical is the experience of that which is irreducible to the causal order of the given – whether this 'given' be the sensible manifold or history, where the latter is construed as the set of determining political, economic, social, and cultural conditions, relations, and processes. And like the sublime, the vertical is also the auto-critical activity of thought that is necessary for the realization of human agency insofar as it confronts or transgresses the constitutive conditions of the given. Where Foucauldian verticality goes beyond the Kantian sublime is in the *transformative* agency to which it gives rise: for as we will see, what begins for Foucault as an aesthetic experience of impossibility will become the political experience of the intolerable and the germ of popular uprising.

CHAPTER 3. FOUCAULT'S 'SECRET VERTICALITY': TOWARD THE POLITICAL PROBLEM OF MATERIAL EXPRESSION

The concept of *verticality* has gone almost entirely unnoticed by Foucault scholarship despite playing a truly fundamental role in his thought, from his first essay on existential psychology to his late ethico-politics. What Foucault terms the 'vertical dimension' or 'axis' orients his initial engagement with *Dasein* analysis, his subsequent history of madness, his writings over the next decade on literature and aesthetics, his formulation of genealogical critique as historical ontology, and his account of popular revolt. What's more, the concept of verticality sheds light on the transformative aims of Foucault's work and his conception of political resistance, from the contestation of western culture's forms of exclusion, to the dislocation of the subject effected through modern literature's 'transgressive fold,' to the critical intervention of thought in the historical field of force relations.¹⁵⁴

Perhaps it would be more remarkable that such an important concept has remained nearly invisible were it not for the obscurity of the concept itself. Foucault's discussion of verticality, especially prominent in his earlier work, tends to appear in some of the more

¹⁵⁴ At least one thinker has, albeit in limited fashion, offered a conceptual treatment of Foucauldian verticality: namely, Louis Althusser, who interpreted the vertical as an "original or transcendental abyss," the "conceptual foundation of the transcendentalist tendency" that Foucault would subsequently overcome through a more properly historical account of constitutive division (Warren Montag, "Foucault and the Problematic of Origins": Althusser's Reading of *Folie et déraison*," *borderlands e-journal*, Vol. 4 No. 2, 2005: §29-31). This view will be discussed below. In addition, Timothy O'Leary has identified Foucault's concept of the "'verticality' of literary language," linking verticality to a fundamental doubling or mirroring relation between language and death (O'Leary, *Foucault and Fiction: The Experience Book*, 45-6); we will return to this interpretation in our discussion of literary verticality below.

abstruse passages of his corpus: for example, in his analyses of the existential coordinates of the death dream in Binswanger; the tragic expression and experience of unreason in *History of Madness*; and the being of literary language made manifest in writing from Mallarmé to Klossowski. Nevertheless, as I hope to show, the concept of the vertical is a key for grasping the trajectory of Foucault's thought, opening a new interpretation of his oeuvre that sets into relief the basic philosophical problematic to which his work would serve as a response.

Foucault's formulation of verticality can be roughly divided into three periods: (1) an extended early period (1954-1970), from his initial work on Binswanger and madness through *The Birth of the Clinic* to his many essays on literature; (2) a brief middle period (1970-1971), centered around Foucault's engagement with Deleuzian metaphysics and Nietzsche's *Genealogy*; and (3) a late period (1979ff.), in which the vertical resurfaces in Foucault's writings on revolt and historico-critical ontology. In what follows in this chapter, I will map and analyze the first period.¹⁵⁵ Our peregrination from the death dream, through unreason, to vertical critique and literary language will provide the resources for a preliminary conceptual treatment, showing how verticality grounds Foucault's early politics of transgression and epistemic transformation. In turn, the results of this analysis will prepare the account of political agency given in Chapter 6; for, as already indicated by the Kantian sublime, the concept of the vertical refers to both a form of *experience* and a form of *critique*, and these two aspects of verticality serve, respectively, as necessary conditions for the possibility and sustainability of political agency.

¹⁵⁵ The middle and late periods of Foucauldian verticality are the topic of Chapter 6.

3.1 *The 'Vertical Axis' of the Death Dream: Foucault's Existential Poetics of Tragic Expression*

Foucault's first published essay, an introduction to Binswanger's "Dream and Existence," explores the application of existential psychology's Dasein analysis to dreams, or to that "most original form of human freedom," the existentially singularizing self-constitution of the dreaming imagination.¹⁵⁶ Like the dizzying freedom of anxiety, the dream is a transcendent¹⁵⁷ limit-experience – what Heidegger, referring to the "moment of vision" by which one's being-toward-death is disclosed, calls a "limit-Situation"¹⁵⁸ – in which Dasein hovers relationless, suspended beyond the limits of the diurnal world before its originary encounter with the nothing.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ "[T]he dream is the bearer of the deepest human meanings ... insofar as it brings to light the freedom of man in its most original form. ... [The dream] is free genesis, self-accomplishment, emergence of what is most individual in the individual" (Foucault, *Dream and Existence*, translated by Forrest Williams, 53-4). Although Foucault will come to problematize this 'original freedom of man,' ceaselessly critiquing humanism and the 'man-form' of the subject, this appeal to 'what is most individual in the individual' will remain central to his thought. See, for example, "The Subject and Power," where Foucault lists as a fundamental feature of the forms of resistance he champions that they "are struggles that question the status of the individual. On the one hand, they assert the right to be different and underline *everything that makes individuals truly individual*. On the other hand, they attack everything that separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Power*, 330, my emphasis).

¹⁵⁷ "The imagination, sign of transcendence; the dream, experience of this transcendence under the sign of the imaginary" (Foucault, *Dream and Existence*, 45, translation slightly modified).

¹⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 400, II.4, "Temporality and Everydayness."

¹⁵⁹ On the relations among transcendence, freedom, and anxiety as the experience of the nothing, see Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics": "Anxiety reveals the nothing. We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves – we humans who are in being – in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. *At bottom therefore it is not as though 'you' or 'I' feel ill at ease; rather, it is this way for some 'one.'* In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there. ... Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This being beyond beings we call 'transcendence.' ... If in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never be related to beings nor even to itself. Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom" (Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics," *Basic Writings*, 101-3, my emphasis). Note that the seat of this limit-experience of the nothing is not the subject, which could be designated by a personal pronoun in the first or second person, but 'some "one"'; as such, it is already quite close to the experience of the being of literary language, or the thought of the outside, that Foucault will locate in the works of Blanchot, Bataille, and others.

The dream is the work of existence making itself into a world prior to and as a condition for its entrance into the public world: “it’s the originary movement of freedom, the birth of the world in the very movement of existence.”¹⁶⁰ In dreams, then, the being of Dasein can be grasped in the primordial movement of its becoming, which “is why the analysis of dreams is decisive for bringing to light the fundamental meanings of existence.”¹⁶¹ True to early Heideggerian form,¹⁶² for Foucault, it is the death dream that “fulfills the ultimate vocation” of the dream insofar as the dreamer encounters her proper being-toward-death and experiences the authenticity or inauthenticity of her ownmost mode of existence: “In the depth of his dream, what man encounters is his death, a death which in its most inauthentic form is but the brutal and bloody interruption of life, yet in its authentic form, is his very existence being accomplished. ... The dream of death appears as what existence can learn that is most fundamental about itself.”¹⁶³ The death dream is thus a privileged mode of access for Dasein, by way of the dreaming imagination, to encounter its ontological ground in the very movement of its self-constitution; and the experience of death in the dream as either “anguished or serene”¹⁶⁴ expresses the existential inauthenticity or authenticity of the dreamer.

¹⁶⁰ Foucault, *Dream and Existence*, 51.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 59. See also, from the preceding paragraph: “The dream is existence carving itself out in barren space, shattering chaotically, exploding noisily, netting itself, a scarcely breathing animal, in the webs of death. It is the world at the dawn of its first explosion when the world is still existence itself and is not yet the universe of objectivity. To dream is not another way of experiencing another world, it is for the dreaming subject the radical way of experiencing its own world. This way of experiencing is so radical, because existence does not pronounce itself world. The dream is situated in that ultimate moment in which existence still is its world; once beyond, at the dawn of wakefulness, already it is no longer its world” (ibid).

¹⁶² In addition to being strongly suggested by his discussion of Dasein analysis in Binswanger, Foucault confirms the Heideggerian tenor of his early interest in existential psychology in an interview with Duccio Trombadori from 1978. See Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 257.

¹⁶³ Foucault, *Dream and Existence*, 54-5.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 55.

Now, crucially, within the “primitive coordinates” of “oneiric space” that disclose the existential-temporal modality of the dreaming imagination, it is the *vertical* axis of the death dream, “the movement of ascent and fall,” that indicates the form of authenticity or inauthenticity of the dreamer.¹⁶⁵ Simplifying somewhat: when Dasein falls, it flees from the nothing before which it is suspended, and its death in the dream is experienced as sinking or violent anguish; on the other hand, when Dasein ascends, it confronts the nothing serenely and experiences in its own death the joy of existential achievement. “It is along this vertical direction of existence, and according to the structures of temporality, that the authentic and inauthentic forms of existence can best be allocated. . . . One must turn to the vertical dimension to grasp existence making itself, turn to the vertical dimension in that form of absolutely original presence in which *Dasein* is defined.”¹⁶⁶

The vertical axis thus holds the key for understanding the primordial directionality and existential authenticity of a singular existence (*Dasein*) as it constitutes itself through the radical expressive freedom of the dreaming imagination. Foucault emphasizes that this vertical form of expression is decidedly tragic in structure: a limit-experience at the summit of existence by which one encounters the nocturnal face of death in an authentic mode, the very accomplishment of which, however, anticipates already the imminence of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 60-4. “Binswanger himself analyzed *the vertical axis of space* in its existential meaning: the theme of the slow, raw power of enthusiasm, of joy; the theme of the glittering peak where the light mingled with shadow is purified into an absolute brightness, whose movement is fulfilled and comes to rest in the serenity of the movement. But upward movement does not imply only an existence transcending itself in enthusiasm. It is not only the direction of that selfsurpassing by which man, torn from himself, accedes, according to Fink, to ‘the greatest being,’ to the ‘theon’. The vertical axis can also be the vector of an existence that has lost its place on earth Then it indicates flight into excess, and from the start is marked by the vertigo of a fall. . . . *With the movement of ascent and fall, . . . one can grasp temporality in its primitive meaning*” (ibid, 62-4, my emphasis).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 65-6.

one's fall. "[T]he axis of tragic expression is located along the vertical axis of existence. The tragic movement is always of the order of ascent and fall. Its special mark is that privileged moment in which it completes its rise, and balances imperceptibly, still, yet oscillating, before faltering."¹⁶⁷ Yet if the 'privileged moment' of ascent is always followed by a downward collapse, the vertex always succumbing to vertigo, then this raises the problem of how to maintain oneself authentically in the space of this limit-experience through the freedom of vertico-tragic expression – a problem which we will see reappear at the heart of *History of Madness*.

In addition, there is a more general problem with dreams as forms of limit-experience. On the one hand, dreams are perhaps the most universal form of limit-experience, one to which everyone has access. But on the other hand, the dream is in effect universally inaccessible since the waking light of day and the reified images it recollects from the preceding night never fail to betray the nocturnal movement of the dreaming imagination. If oneiric experience is divided from diurnal consciousness as a limit one can only traverse by falling into dream, how can the freedom of the dreamer be connected back into that social world in which Dasein, precisely as being-in-the-world, must necessarily dwell? Indeed, Foucault specifically raises the question of this "paradox" as his chief interest in Binswanger, this "gamble to want to circumscribe the positive content of existence by reference to a mode in which it is least engaged in the world."¹⁶⁸

Foucault's own response here to this problem is suggestive but sketchy: "to be authentic," the imagination must be "purified in the fire of the dream" so that it can

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 64.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 33, translation modified.

express – “as its absolute truth, its ‘unshatterable kernal of night’” – the elemental movement of existence constituting itself.¹⁶⁹ “But on the other side of the dream, the movement of imagination continues”: having experienced, in the depths of oneiric space, “that which in existence is *most irreducible to history*,” the nocturnally sanctified powers of imagination must now be deployed in the socio-historical world, “taken up in the work of expression that gives a new meaning to truth and freedom.”¹⁷⁰ That is, the imagination must learn to express, without the betrayal of reification, the vertical axis of existence in concrete works; and this expressive project, which directs the imagination on “its path of freedom,” constitutes “an ethical task and an historical necessity”: “expression is language, work of art, the ethical....”¹⁷¹

Thus, anticipating by nearly three decades a convergence of the historical, ethical and aesthetic lines that will later appear in his notion of an ‘aesthetics of existence,’ Foucault calls for a kind of existential poetics as a practice of freedom. The task is to cultivate a form of tragic expression, faithful to the vertical limit-experience of the death dream, that could open the dreaming imagination onto the world and thereby create new possibilities for thought. And far from being merely the enigmatic and little known fancy of a young Foucault, this vertico-existential poetics is Foucault’s first response to a fundamental problem that will continue to orient the direction of his work: namely, what I will term the *problem of material expression*.

At this early stage, the problem might be put thusly: how can the force of that which is ‘most irreducible to history’ – that which, at a remove across the oneiric divide from

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 73-4, translation modified.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 74, my emphasis.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

the world of social reality and historical causation, nevertheless discloses a more originary truth about the constitution of that public world and those existences which compose it – be expressed, realized, sustained in the form of a work, such that it be capable of both crossing over the limit that separates it from the socio-historical world and transforming the conditions of the latter? In other words, if the concept of the vertical designates an axis of existence that is irreducible to history, situated at its (history's) limit or degree zero; then the problem of material expression refers to the challenge of realizing or constructing the force of this verticality so that it can act upon history – the work of vertical expression thereby constituting transformative agential force, or freedom. And if Foucault's initial response to this problem remains underdeveloped, the problem itself will not cease to function as the obscure impetus animating his thought.

In sum, then, we may conclude that the death dream is a kind of tragic limit-experience by which the dreaming imagination expresses, along its vertical vector, the mode of in/authenticity proper to the movement by which existence constitutes itself. Further, precisely in light of this basic existential movement, the death dream can be understood as an ontologically productive event of thought, for as we have seen, thought's passage along the vertical axis of the dream expresses 'the originary movement of freedom, the birth of the world in the very movement of existence.' In short, the death dream is a vertical form of experience and expression by which the auto-generative event of (an) existence constituting itself is realized. The ethical task becomes one of introducing this eventual force or constituent power into historical reality through forms of expression and experience that would not fall on the other side of the oneiric limit. Perhaps it is for this reason that Foucault ultimately leaves Binswanger's Dasein-analysis

behind, proceeding toward other forms of tragic limit-experience and -expression: namely, unreason and literature.

3.2 *The 'Constant Verticality' of Unreason in History of Madness*

3.2.1 *The 'Vertical Dimension' of Tragic Experience in Foucault's 'History of Limits'*

The second place to locate Foucault's concept of verticality is in the figure of unreason in the *History of Madness*, where Foucault imports something like the vertical analysis of ontologico-existential authenticity from *Dream and Existence*. Foucault situates his work on madness "beneath the sun of the great Nietzschean quest"¹⁷² in *Birth of Tragedy*, according to which the history of reason begins with Socrates misunderstanding, forgetting and excluding the truth of tragic experience. What tragic works of art express is a disquieting vision of the nothing, 'the gaze seared by gruesome night' (Nietzsche)¹⁷³: an abyssal vision that discloses the intrinsic groundlessness and contingency not only of human being, but of existence itself, or the structure, foundation and intelligibility of reality (and with it, reason, morality, religion, etc.). Foucault's thesis, in brief, is that the exclusion of this limit-experience of the tragic – which opens onto and

¹⁷² Foucault, *History of Madness*, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, xxx.

¹⁷³ See Nietzsche's account of Sophocles and the optical inversion produced by tragic expression: "If we penetrate to the myth which projects itself in these bright reflections, we suddenly experience a phenomenon which inverts a familiar optical one. When we turn away blinded after a strenuous attempt to look directly at the sun, we have dark, coloured patches before our eyes, as if their purpose were to heal them; conversely, those appearances of the Sophoclean hero in images of light . . . are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature—radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, translated by Ronald Speers, §9, 46). Note also the implicit inversion of the Platonic regime of light, which held the sun to be the analog in the world of sense to the form of the good.

discloses “the nothing of existence,”¹⁷⁴ or what he sometimes calls the “void”¹⁷⁵ – grounds and makes possible the historical formation of western reason and culture:

We could write a history of *limits*—of those obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten as soon as they are accomplished, through which a culture rejects something which for it will be the Exterior [T]his is the originary thickness in which a culture takes shape. To interrogate a culture about its limit-experiences is to question it at the confines of history about a tear that is something like the birth of its history. ... At the center of these limit-experiences of the Western world is the explosion, of course, of the tragic itself—Nietzsche having shown that the tragic structure from which the history of the Western world is made is nothing other than the refusal, the forgetting, and the silent collapse of tragedy.¹⁷⁶

The world of reason constitutes itself, to use Foucault’s earlier Heideggerian terminology, ‘inauthentically’ insofar as it repels the tragic encounter with the groundless void of existence and then disavows this originary gesture of exclusion – the very act of division by which a culture “gives itself the face of its positivity”¹⁷⁷ –, instead assuming for itself a putatively necessary foundation and installing itself along a line of teleological progress. It is therefore by contrast to this ‘horizontal’ vector of western reason that Foucault locates a vertical vector, which “would confront the dialectics of history with

¹⁷⁴ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 31.

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, Foucault’s discussion of “classical unreason” as “*reason dazzled*. Dazzlement is night at noon [*la nuit en plein jour*] Dazzled reason opens its eyes to the sun and sees *nothing*, i.e. it *does not* see. ... To say that madness is dazzlement is to say that the madman sees the day, the same day that rational men see, as both live in the same light, but that when looking at that very light, nothing else and nothing in it, he sees it as nothing but emptiness [*comme vide*], night and nothingness. Darkness for him is another way of seeing the day” (Foucault, *History of Madness*, 243). It will be the ruse of tragic works of unreason to transvalue this optical relation to light and dark: rather than one who cannot see, the poet of unreason will become the one who sees the nothing, who possesses, as Artaud puts it, the ‘superior lucidity’ of abyssal vision; rather than *la nuit en plein jour*, unreason will behold *le jour en plein nuit*, just as Nietzsche’s madman, beholding the death of God and lighting “a lantern in the bright morning hours,” sees the world “straying as through an infinite nothing” and feels “the breath of empty space” (Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufman, §125, 181). For another instance of Foucault referring to ‘void,’ see his discussion of Nietzsche’s madness, which “is the way in which that thought opens onto the modern world. ... By the madness that interrupts it, an œuvre opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without an answer, opening an unhealable wound that the world is forced to address” (Foucault, *History of Madness*, 537).

¹⁷⁶ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxix-xxx, trans. Murphy and Khalfa.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, xxx, translation modified.

the immobile structures of the tragic,¹⁷⁸ contesting the dominant historical forms and practices of western culture from the site of its exclusion:

Where might this interrogation lead, following not reason in its *horizontal* becoming, but seeking to retrace in time this *constant verticality*, which, the length of Western culture, confronts it with what it is not, measuring it with its own extravagance [*démesure*]? Towards what region might it take us, which is neither the history of knowledge nor history plain and simple, which is commanded neither by the teleology of the truth nor the rational concatenation of causes, which only have value or meaning beyond the division? A region, no doubt, where it would be a question more of the limits than of the identity of a culture.¹⁷⁹

Just as in *Dream and Existence*, where the ‘vertical direction of existence,’ that which is ‘most irreducible to history,’ alone renders graspable, through a mode of tragic experience, the auto-generative event of ‘existence making itself’; so, too, verticality here refers to a liminal dimension or ‘region’ of existence – accessible through a tragic form of limit-experience, irreducible to conditions of historical causation, and unintelligible according to the standards of diurnal consciousness – that discloses the ontologically productive movement of a world constituting itself. However, while the vertical axis of the death dream opens onto the ‘absolutely original presence’ proper to Dasein, in the *History of Madness*, the origin made manifest along the tragic-vertical vector, like the “original contradiction and original pain at the heart of the primordial unity”¹⁸⁰ in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, is riven by division. Or rather, what is originary is the very activity of division itself: “The gesture that divides madness is the constitutive one.... The caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason is the origin [*originnaire*]....”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, xxx.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, xxix, translation slightly modified, my emphasis.

¹⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, §6, 36.

¹⁸¹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxviii.

In the theoretical development, then, from the existential-phenomenological framework of Dasein analysis to a tragic proto-genealogical one – which is to say, in the philosophical movement from Heidegger to Nietzsche¹⁸² – Foucault’s concept of verticality attains critical political force, positing the thought of constitutive division and thereby anticipating his later formulation of historical ontology.¹⁸³ Indeed, in opposition to the teleological horizontality of the human sciences – e.g., psychiatry, which “grows up in the calm that returns after the division is made”¹⁸⁴ and narrates reason’s progressive mastery or neutralization of non-reason –, the excessive and ‘constant verticality’ that is excluded as an exterior limit of the social formation ‘confronts the dialectics of history’ by attesting to the unacknowledged and unjustifiable first condition of reason, the groundless ground of western culture.

As a vertical mode of ‘interrogation,’ the *History of Madness* is thus a ‘history of limits’ in at least two senses: (1) because madness in its tragic form is itself an experience of the limit, “the still undivided experience of division itself”¹⁸⁵; and (2) because this very

¹⁸² This interpretation of the successive Heideggerian and Nietzschean moments in Foucault’s thought would account for Foucault’s well-known late claim that while Heidegger had always been for him “the essential philosopher,” his reading of Heidegger had been transported, swept along, or prevailed over (*emporté*: the word is translated as “outweighed” by Thomas Levin and Isabelle Lorenz, which is not incorrect but fails to convey the sense of ‘being carried along by’) by his reading of Nietzsche. See Foucault, “The Return of Morality,” *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, 250.

¹⁸³ Two years later in “Preface to Transgression,” with reference to Nietzsche’s thought of the ‘origin’ in *Birth of Tragedy* (as the ‘original contradiction and original pain at the heart of the primordial unity’ (Nietzsche)), Foucault will depict this thought of constitutive division – of “the instantaneous play of the limit and of transgression” – as “the essential test for a thought that centers on the ‘origin,’ for that form of thought to which Nietzsche dedicated us from the beginning of his works and one that would be, absolutely and in the same motion, a *Critique and an Ontology*, an understanding that comprehends both finitude and being” (Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” 75, my emphasis). Foucault will later develop this simultaneous ‘critique and ontology’ into his method of historico-critical ontology; see, e.g., “What is Enlightenment?” We will return to this point in our discussion of late vertical critique in Chapter 6.

¹⁸⁴ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxviii.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

division, situated at the “degree zero of the history of madness,”¹⁸⁶ is *constitutive* not only for madness but for western culture, a ‘tear’ at the ‘confines of history’ that ushers in ‘the birth of its history.’ The limit-experience of madness, in other words, bears witness to the originary or genetic violence that institutes the order of the social world and must be covered over as a condition for that order’s retroactive and tacitly reactive self-legitimation. Foucault’s work will thus function both as “the archeology of that silence,”¹⁸⁷ aiming to recover the vertical experience of the tragic and make visible the arbitrary violence of its refusal, as well as a critical counter-history of reason, locating in this ‘silent collapse of tragedy’ a singular and contingent (rather than universal and necessary) condition of possibility for the western social formation. A vertical history of limits, then, conducted at the vertical limits of history.

Further, within the history of madness itself, there is a division between two different regimes of madness that correspond to the horizontal and vertical vectors, respectively: *mental illness*, which becomes the object of scientific knowledge and medico-juridical discourse, undergirded by institutional structures of confinement and subjection; and *unreason*, which is a form of tragic limit-experience expressed through works of art, contesting the authority of rationalist thought and its horizontal history. The cleft between these two regimes first emerges during the early Renaissance in the disparity between the moralizing humanist discourse on folly (Erasmus) and the apocalyptic phantasmagoria of tragic painting (Bosch).¹⁸⁸ Along the horizontal line, which ultimately issues into the positivism of clinical psychiatry, madness becomes

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, xxvii.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, xxviii.

¹⁸⁸ For Foucault’s historical overview of the division and opposed trajectories of these two regimes, see *ibid*, 26-8.

appropriated by the language of reason to designate the broad field of abnormal human attributes and activities: to use Foucault's language, madness takes the form *within man* of an errant and defective self-relation for which he is ultimately to blame. An experience of madness thus emerges that is bound up in normalizing relations of moral guilt, social division and political exclusion, all of which constitutes the continuity of "the passage from the medieval and humanist experience of madness to the experience that is our own, which confines madness in mental illness."¹⁸⁹

Along the vertical line, by contrast, the tragic-cosmic experience of madness discloses "the vertiginous unreason of the world"¹⁹⁰ through the painterly delirium of chaotically concatenated bestial images, which, unmoored from the rigorous theological organization of Gothic symbology, herald a double revelation: (1) that madness, as "that which goes against nature, or the seething mass of a senseless presence immanent in the earth,"¹⁹¹ expresses an abyssal or subterranean truth beyond the order of God; and (2) that this terrible truth is none other than the secret of man's own nature in its infernal and contingent animality,¹⁹² "the experience of an *animal unreason* that formed the absolute limit of the incarnation of reason, and the scandal of the human condition."¹⁹³ We can

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, xxxiii. Cf.: "The dark cosmic forces at work in madness that are so apparent in the work of Bosch are absent in Erasmus. Madness no longer lies in wait for man at every crossroads; rather, it slips into him, or is in fact a subtle relationship that man has with himself. ... In that respect, madness now opens out onto an entirely moral universe. Evil was no longer a punishment or the end of time, but merely a fault or flaw... – in short, every possible irregularity invented by man himself [*tout ce que l'homme a pu inventer lui-même d'irrégularités dans sa conduite*]" (ibid, 23-4).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁹² "By a strange paradox, that which was born of the most singular delirium was already hidden, like a secret inaccessible truth, buried in the bowels of the earth. When the arbitrary nature of madness was exhibited, man encountered the sombre necessity of the world: the animal that haunted his nightmares and visions born of ascetic deprivation was man's own nature, revealed in the unpitiful truth of hell" (ibid, 21).

¹⁹³ Ibid, 158, my emphasis. Cf.: "The animality that raged in madness dispossessed man of his humanity, not so that he might fall prey to other powers, but rather to fix him at the *degree zero of his own nature*" (ibid, 148, my emphasis).

thus already see that the tragic expression of unreason in apocalyptic painting cryptically announces the double death of God and man, which will find its fuller articulation centuries later in the works of Nietzsche,¹⁹⁴ Artaud,¹⁹⁵ and Bataille – that is, the discovery that the “death of God restores us not to a limited and positivistic world but to a world exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by that excess which transgresses it.”¹⁹⁶ Indeed, this disclosure of radical finitude through the limit-experience of unreason is the key for threading together “the great broken line that stretches from the Ship of Fools to the last words of Nietzsche and perhaps Artaud’s cries of rage...”¹⁹⁷

Taken as a whole, then, the *History of Madness* tells the story of the fracture and divergence within the experience of madness of its horizontal and vertical vectors.¹⁹⁸ As in *Dream and Existence*, Foucault orients his project along the privileged vertical axis,

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Foucault’s remarks on Nietzsche at the end of *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, Foucault’s secondary doctoral thesis, which was written contemporaneously with *History of Madness*: “The Nietzschean enterprise can be understood as at last bringing that proliferation of the questioning of man to an end. For is not the death of God in effect manifested in a doubly murderous gesture which, by putting an end to the absolute, is at the same time the cause of the death of man himself? For man, in his finitude, is not distinguishable from the infinite of which he is both the negation and the harbinger; it is in the death of man that the death of God is realized. Is it not possible to conceive of a critique of finitude which would be as liberating with regard to man as it would be with regard to the infinite...?” (Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, translated by Roberto Nigro and Kate Briggs, 124)

¹⁹⁵ See Artaud’s pithy formulation in “To Have Done with the Judgment of God”: “although nobody believes in god any more everybody believes more and more in man. / So it is man whom we must now make up our minds to emasculate” (*Antonin Artaud, Selected Writings*, edited by Susan Sontag, translated by Helen Weaver, 570).

¹⁹⁶ Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 72.

¹⁹⁷ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 344. As suggested in the last chapter, it is this tragic tradition, here characterized by Foucault in terms of unreason, that finds its distinctively modern philosophical expression in the Kantian sublime.

¹⁹⁸ Cf.: “In this disparity between the consciousness of madness and the consciousness of unreason, we find, in the late eighteenth century, the starting point of what was to be a decisive moment, where the experience of unreason, such as is evident in Hölderlin, Nerval and Nietzsche, always leads back to [*remonter toujours plus haut vers*] the roots of time – unreason thereby becoming the untimely within the world *par excellence* – while the knowledge of madness sought on the contrary to situate it ever more precisely within the direction of nature and history in their development. It is from this period onwards that the time of unreason and the time of madness were to be affected by *two opposing vectors*: unreason becoming an unconditional return, and an absolute plunge; madness developing along the chronology of a history” (ibid, 363-4, my emphasis).

only now the tragic structures that this axis expresses, the same which ‘confront the dialectics of history,’ are “the great structures of unreason in their most general form – those which slumber beneath the surface of Western culture, just below the temporality of historians”¹⁹⁹:

The linearity that led rationalist thought to consider madness as a form of mental illness *must be reinterpreted in a vertical dimension*. Only then does it become apparent that each of its incarnations is a more complete, but more perilous masking of tragic experience – an experience that it nonetheless failed to obliterate. When constraints were at their most oppressive, an explosion was necessary, and that is what we have seen since Nietzsche.²⁰⁰

When reinterpreted ‘vertically’ – that is, from the perspective of tragic limit-experiences and the constitutive force of their exclusion –, the history of the discursive and institutional forms by which reason apprehends madness as mental illness can be grasped as so many attempts to refuse and forget the tragic truth of groundlessness at the heart of existence. And if tragic experience fails to be ‘obliterated’ under the ‘linearity’ of rationalist thought, this is owed to the works of unreason that provide it with a form of expression through literature, painting, and philosophy.

3.2.2 *The Critical Force of Tragic Expression: ‘Ruse and New Triumph of Madness’*

Along the vertical axis of Foucault’s counter-history, then, there emerges a discontinuous lineage of artists and poets – from Bosch, through Goya and Sade, to Nietzsche, Van Gogh, and Artaud – who give voice and force to the tragic. As we have seen, the limit-experience of unreason is akin to that of the death dream, for both concern

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 344. Note that this phrase ‘just below the temporality of historians’ anticipates Foucault’s depiction of revolt 18 years later as that which, “a bit beneath history, ... cleaves it and stirs it” (Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, *Power*, 453).

²⁰⁰ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 28, my emphasis.

‘the nothing of existence’ and the fundamental finitude it discloses; but whereas death is the terminal external expression of this nothingness as the end of an existence, unreason expresses the internal folding of the nothing at the core of existence itself: “The substitution of the theme of madness for that of death is not the sign of a rupture, but rather of a new twist within the same preoccupation. It is still the nothingness of existence that is at stake, but this nothingness is no longer experienced as an end exterior to being, a threat and a conclusion: it is felt from within, as the continuous and constant form of existence.”²⁰¹ Though Foucault is here discussing the emergence of the tragic-cosmic experience of madness within the cultural imagination of the early Renaissance, his own substitution of a history of madness for the previous death dream analysis suggests that unreason provides a response to the problem of material expression first posed at the end of *Dream and Existence*: namely, the problem of realizing a vertical form of tragic expression that, by opening onto the social world, would in turn transform that world by giving ‘a new meaning to truth and freedom.’

Whereas the dream had provided a form of access to one’s ownmost being-toward-death that nevertheless remained on the other side of the oneiric limit, unreason opens a new relation to the nothing at the heart of diurnal existence, which is to say, historical reality. Articulating the conditions for sustaining the expression of this relation thus becomes one of the central problems taken up in *History of Madness*. Though cast within a more complex historico-political framework than the work on Binswanger, this problem is still inflected by the existential accents of Dasein analysis, for the tragic vision of unreason contests the normative and exclusionary ordering of reality precisely by

²⁰¹ Ibid, 15, translation slightly modified.

disclosing the most singular and primordial forms of human experience. Like the dream, both an expression and experience of transcendence where man, in the night of his solitude, encounters what is most fundamental about himself: “But in that night [of Goya’s *Sleep of Reason*], man communicates with what is deepest in himself, what is most solitary. ... Through Sade and Goya, the Western world received the possibility of transcending its reason in violence, and of recovering tragic experience beyond the promises of dialectic.”²⁰²

Rather than revealing ‘the freedom of man in its most original form,’ however, the vertical axis of tragic expression now instead bespeaks “the end of man, who sinks into [*sombre dans*] the night.”²⁰³ Rather than unveiling the temporal forms of authenticity as the truth of existence, the vertical vector discloses the inauthenticity of a primary act of division, the sovereign and dominant gesture of reason, which founds and cleaves the modes of being of western culture, constituting the very form of man qua subject. And thus, if transcendence is still a vertical limit-experience or ‘original revelation of the nothing’ (Heidegger), what arises in the depths of this experience is no longer akin to the Heideggerian ‘being beyond beings’ but, rather, something closer to the ‘original contradiction and original pain’ invoked by Nietzsche: an abyssal vision, given expressive force through unreason’s tragic poets, of genetic violence, that is, of an originary rupture which, in its absolute contingency, serves as the unjustifiable and

²⁰² Ibid, 531, 535.

²⁰³ Ibid, 517-8.

disavowed condition of possibility for the constitution of given historico-ontological and -epistemic forms.²⁰⁴

The subversive effect of the works of unreason is therefore to call into question the authenticity and positivist foundation of reason and its sciences of man, arrainging reason before its inauthentic fleeing of groundlessness by which it expels the tragic from itself:

“Ruse and new triumph of madness: the world that thought to measure and justify madness through psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles [effort] and agonies [débats] it measures itself by the excess [démésure] of works like

²⁰⁴ As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Althusser is one of the few to have treated Foucauldian verticality as a concept. As Warren Montag shows, Althusser takes verticality in *History of Madness*'s original preface to refer to an “original or transcendental abyss... , an atheology that would preserve the place of God in the order of creation, even as it left that place empty” (Montag, “‘Foucault and the Problematic of Origins’: Althusser’s Reading of *Folie et déraison*,” *Borderlands E-journal*, 4: 2, 2005, §29): “Foucault’s book is thus really as much a book about reason as about madness... This border freely constituted is haunted by the temptation of being an original abyss, a verticality that is no longer a break (*coupure*) in history but the originary rupture of time” (Althusser, cited in Montag, §2). Althusser then contrasts the vertical dimension of *History of Madness*, which would attest to “the transcendentalist tendency in Foucault’s preface,” to its properly historical dimension: “To the search for the genesis of the opposition of reason and madness in that original negativity that is itself negated even as it remains present in its negation and thus to the ‘verticality’ of an ever present origin, Althusser counterposes, by citing Foucault against himself, the notion of ‘a history of limits’” (Montag, §31). Althusser is correct to link verticality to a kind of abyssal degree zero; and his identification of a ‘transcendentalist tendency’ in Foucault would be especially appropriate to a reading of verticality in *Dream and Existence* (which, however, neither Montag nor Althusser mention), where the vertical axis is privileged insofar as it discloses that absolutely original presence of Dasein in the limit-Situation by which it encounters the nothing. However, in insisting on a movement in *History of Madness* “from the abyss to the limit” that he then construes as Foucault’s passage “from a transcendental conception to a historical conception” (Althusser, cited in *ibid*), Althusser’s mistake is to *oppose* the originary abyss and the limit. For Foucault, the limit itself *is* originary insofar as division is constitutive. Indeed, this is precisely the insight that Foucault, on the topic of Bataille, attributes to Nietzsche as the first thinker of *critical ontology*, which he will later call ‘genealogy’ and the ‘historical ontology of ourselves’: “In our day, would not the instantaneous play of the limit and of transgression be the essential test for a thought that centers on the ‘origin,’ for that form of thought to which Nietzsche dedicated us from the beginning of his works and one that would be, absolutely and in the same motion, a Critique and an Ontology, an understanding that comprehends both finitude and being?” (Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 75). In other words, Althusser neglects the critical aspect of verticality – the sense in which Foucault’s ‘history of limits’ is itself an explicitly *vertical* form of critical analysis, that is, an interpretation from the perspective of constitutive division –, identifying only verticality’s ‘ontological’ aspect as abyss or groundless ground. It is symptomatic of this neglect that Althusser and Montag cite only the one reference to ‘constant verticality’ in the original preface, and not the reference to ‘reinterpreting’ the history of madness ‘in a vertical dimension,’ which appears in the first chapter of *History of Madness*. More generally, the recurrence of the concept of verticality throughout Foucault’s oeuvre, which we will chart over the remainder of this chapter and Chapter 6, also demonstrates that the concept is not merely a remnant of Foucault’s early ‘transcendental conception.’

those of Nietzsche, of Van Gogh, of Artaud. And nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures the world that it is justified by such works of madness.”²⁰⁵

Like the death dream, unreason is also a tragic mode of limit-experience that beholds the abyssal forces of the night; but this mode of experience is now imbued with an explicit political charge because the nocturnal forces it expresses – which doubly displace the forms of God and man that organized the epistemic formations of the classical and modern periods, respectively²⁰⁶ –, threaten to destabilize the foundations of western reason and culture:

This madness, which knots and divides time, which curves the world in the loop of night, ... does it not utter to those who can hear them, like Nietzsche and Artaud, the scarcely audible words of classical unreason, where all was nothingness and night, but now amplified into screams and fury? Giving them for the first time *expression*, a *droit de cité* [‘right of abode’], and a grasp on Western culture, a point from which *all contestation becomes possible, as well as the contestation of all things* [la contestation totale]?²⁰⁷

The historical, aesthetic, and ethical task outlined at the end of *Dream and Existence* to develop a vertical existential poetics thus becomes, in addition, a political project to recover and give voice to unreason as the vertical form of tragic expression uniquely capable of transforming the conditions of the social world. Indeed, it is precisely at the point where unreason acquires the powers of expression that ‘all contestation becomes possible.’ And this ‘work of expression’ is thus a necessary condition of

²⁰⁵ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, translated by Richard Howard, 289; cf. *History of Madness*, 538. I have cited Howard’s older translation of this passage because, among other advantages, it retains Foucault’s language of ‘justification,’ which is a more faithful rendering. The original French reads: “Ruse et nouveau triomphe de la folie: ce monde qui croit la mesurer, la justifier par la psychologie, c’est devant elle qu’il doit se justifier, puisque dans son effort et ses débats, il se mesure à la démesure d’œuvres comme celle de Nietzsche, de Van Gogh, d’Artaud. Et rien en lui, surtout pas ce qu’il peut connaître de la folie, ne l’assure que ces œuvres le justifient” (Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, 663).

²⁰⁶ For an analysis of the God-form and Man-form that organized the classical and modern historical formations, see “Appendix: On the Death of Man and Superman” in Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Sean Hand, 124-7.

²⁰⁷ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 532, my emphasis.

possibility for radical contestation because the expulsion and silencing of unreason institutes the historical unfolding of reason. Foucault's theorization of transformative political agency first emerges, then, through this concept of the verticality of unreason that disrupts the horizontal history of reason, problematizing the latter's forms of thought and institutional structures and practices. In other words, *the problem of material expression becomes the problem of resistance*.

However, if, from the perspective precisely of expression, the promise unreason holds as a form of limit-experience is that it opens on the near side of the oneiric limit, the downfall is that its painters and poets collapse into madness. Like the unsustainability of the dreamer's ascent to the summit of the vertical axis, the tragic artists of unreason are deprived the support necessary to prolong their limit-vision, and the height of their lucidity anticipates or even precipitates their breakdown into catatonia or suicide. Here again, the vertical vector has become political, for the dividing practices of western culture that exclude the tragic are the very same that render the experience of unreason unsupportable.²⁰⁸ And if the expression of unreason is a condition of possibility for 'the total contestation' against the organization and structure of western culture and society,

²⁰⁸ Foucault here follows Artaud, whose thesis in his essay on Van Gogh is that the 'authentically insane' – those artists, such as Hölderlin, Nerval, Nietzsche and Van Gogh, who possess a form of 'superior lucidity' that psychiatry institutionalizes and treats as mental illness – become suicided by society because the dangerous subversive force that their works express would undermine the foundation of social institutions. See Artaud, "Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society": "And what is an authentic madman? / It is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor. / So society has strangled in its asylums all those it wanted to get rid of or protect itself from, because they refused to become its accomplices in certain great nastiness. / For a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths" (Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 485). See also: "This is why a tainted society has invented psychiatry to defend itself against the investigations of certain superior intellects [*lucidités supérieures*] whose faculties of divination would be troublesome. / ...For it is not a certain conformity of manners that the painting of van Gogh attacks, but rather the conformity of institutions themselves" (ibid, 483-4).

an analysis of the conditions of impossibility for sustaining this expression will pose a problem of power that is central to the very ‘essence of the modern world.’ Naming Hölderlin, Nerval, Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Roussel, and Artaud, all of whom pursued the experience of unreason unto death, Foucault writes:

And each of those existences, each of the words that made up those existences repeats with the insistence of time the same question, which probably concerns the essence of the modern world: why is it not possible to remain in the difference that is unreason? Why is it that unreason always has to separate from itself, fascinated in the delirium of the sensible and trapped in the retreat that is madness? How was it at this point deprived of language? What is this power that petrifies all those who dare look upon its face, condemning to madness all those who have tried the test [l'épreuve] of Unreason?²⁰⁹

This set of questions cuts to the heart of Foucault’s work and allows us to summarize his conceptual development from *Dream and Existence*, where the problem was one of maintaining oneself authentically in the vertical space of a nocturnal limit-experience and transposing the truth of this transcendence into the historical world through the expressive freedom of the imagination. Foucault’s reformulation of this problem in *History of Madness* is twofold. First, it is in artistic works of unreason that we can locate a vertical mode of tragic expression in the world, one which restores to the world a form of limit-experience that it has systematically excluded, and which contests the horizontal course of rationalist thought. The transposition of the truth of transcendence through a vertico-existential poetics, which was already a question of crossing over a limit (the oneiric divide), now attains political force as transgression. Second, if the fugitive vertical space of unreason remains irrespirable – such that its tragic poets, like the ‘authentically insane’ in Artaud who are ‘suicided by society,’

²⁰⁹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 352, translation slightly modified.

cannot maintain themselves in its difference and collapse instead into madness –, this is both an indictment of the inauthenticity of western culture and an insight into the fundamental violence that founds the modern world.

The vertical dimension thus performs two functions in Foucault’s analysis, both of which culminate in the event of the ‘ruse and new triumph of madness’ with which the *History of Madness* ends: (1) the critical function of confronting and arresting the linear development of reason (and the forms of mental illness through which rationalist thought seeks to apprehend, institutionalize and control madness) by disclosing the historically contingent and arbitrarily violent dividing practices that betray reason’s own lack of ground and justification; and (2) the affirmative function of manifesting and realizing, through the transgressive force of tragic expression, the abyssal vision of groundlessness at the heart of existence – which is to say, the radicalization of finitude that the death of God had enabled, but which had been defused and territorialized in the form of man.²¹⁰ In other words, the ‘constant verticality’ of unreason (1) suspends and breaks with the dominant organization of the epistemic and social formations of western culture, and it does so (2) by recovering or realizing a form of limit-experience and -expression along the vertical axis that opens thought (and, through it, the social world) to a production of the new.

²¹⁰ See Deleuze’s analysis of the two moments or phases of finitude that follow the fall of the form of God and usher in that of man: “While we were once told only that man becomes aware of his own finitude, under certain historically determinable causes Foucault insists on the necessity of introducing two distinct phases. The force within man must begin by confronting and seizing hold of the forces of finitude as if they were forces from outside: it is outside oneself that force must come up against finitude. Then and only then, in a second stage, does it create from this its own finitude. All this means that when the forces within man enter into a relation with forces of finitude from outside, then and only then does the set of forces compose the Man-form (and not the God-form). *Incipit Homo.*” (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 127.)

This double critical-affirmative function of verticality helps to unpack the two senses of the vertical operative in our earlier formulation of Foucault's work on madness as a *vertical history of limits at the vertical limits of history*. In the first instance, the vertical refers to a form of historico-critical analysis – here, an ‘archeology of silence’ – that takes as its object the constitutive dividing practices through which western reason, as both epistemic and social formation, takes shape and takes hold. In the second instance, the vertical refers to the experience of a dimension or axis of existence *of* and *at* the limit: that is, a limit-experience situated at the degree zero of history, hence irreducible to historical determination and thereby capable, in principle and by virtue of its exteriority, of generating a kind of radically transformative force. There are thus two aspects or dimensions of verticality – Critique and Experience – that form essential moments in the process of transformative political agency, entering into complex relations with one another. Here, they function as each other's double, which is to say, their relation is one of (1) reciprocal determination – critique serves as the condition for recovering the experience (archeology of silence), while experience provides the condition for directing the critique (experience of the limit qua constitutive division) – and (2) superimposition, for the *History of Madness* is composed as a critical counter-history that is itself a tragic work, giving expression to a kind of disquieting limit-experience that would prepare the conditions for ‘total contestation.’²¹¹

At its most ambitious, then, the *History of Madness* can be read as Foucault's own answer to the problem of material expression: that is, as an effort to realize a vertical-

²¹¹ It is in just this sense that *History of Madness* as a book is itself an experience. Cf. Foucault's interpretation of his own books as forms of limit-experience (or, as Timothy O'Leary in his *Foucault and Fiction* puts it, ‘experience-books’): “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 239ff.

tragic poetics that would facilitate emergent forms of thought and practices of freedom. In this way, Foucault quite clearly positions his own work within the disrupted and disruptive lineage of unreason – precisely there, in the wake of Nietzsche and Artaud, where the tragic limit-experience has acquired ‘for the first time expression,’ and thereby a grip on and against western culture. More modestly, the aim of the book would be to attune its readers to the transformative force of such limit-experiences, given expression along the broken chain of unreason, as well as to the myriad marks of silencing and exclusion that scar the confines of history. In both capacities, the political problem, which is also (and still) the ‘ethical task and historical necessity’ from the end of *Dream and Existence*, is ultimately to provide the conditions of material expression that would support and sustain the vertical limit-experience of unreason. And as we will see, this exigency will inform Foucault’s literary politics of transgression over the following decade.

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Before proceeding to map the vertical axis in Foucault’s thought throughout the 1960s, let us pause to venture some brief interpretive hypotheses, both to distill where we have come and to signpost where we are going. First, the problem of material expression, whether with respect to the radical freedom of the poetic imagination or the radical resistance of unreason, orients the direction of Foucault’s early work; one of the exegetical aims of this thesis going forward will be to show how this problem remains fundamental in determining the trajectory of Foucault’s thought, from his work on aesthetics and epistemology through his analytic of power to his late ethico-politics. Second, the problem of material expression is itself indexed on the concept of verticality,

for it is the tragic-expressive force of the vertical axis, at the irreducible limit of history, that must be provided with the conditions of support necessary for its realization within historical reality, precisely in order to transform the normalizing and impoverishing conditions governing the social order; verticality is thus the first concept through which Foucault theorizes resistance, and it will remain essential to his political thought. Third, verticality is analyzable in general according to its two attributes or aspects: (1) the verticality of critical thought and (2) the verticality of the limit-experience.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to analyzing the two attributes of verticality through to the end of Foucault's early period: that is, the vertical critique of positivism and the vertical experience of literature.

3.3 *Early Critique: The 'Vertical Investigation' of Positivism*

3.3.1 *The Medical Capture of Death in The Birth of the Clinic*

Having established a form of 'vertical reinterpretation' as the analytical method for an archeology of silence, Foucault will deploy a similar kind of critical-vertical analysis in his subsequent book. While smaller in scope than the work on madness, *The Birth of the Clinic*, set at the same historical moment as the 'birth of the asylum,'²¹² "concerns one of those periods that mark an ineradicable chronological threshold: the period in which illness, counter-nature, death, in short, the whole dark underside of disease came to

²¹² This phrase, the title of the penultimate chapter of *History of Madness*, announces the transformation from the classical to the modern period in the late 18th century, marked iconically in the history of psychiatry by the image of Philippe Pinel 'liberating' the mad from their shackles at Bicêtre.

light, at the same time illuminating and eliminating itself like night, in the deep, visible, solid, enclosed, but accessible space of the human body.”²¹³

Just as unreason, as ‘that which goes against nature,’ had constituted the tragic inner torsion of the relation with the nothing at the heart of existence, so, too, the ‘dark underside of disease’ is a nocturnal and counter-natural force by which the relation to existential void becomes internalized, experienced obscurely from within. And just as the tragic threat of unreason is defused and silenced by the reassuring monologue of reason about madness (psychiatry), appropriated as the naturalized and normalized phenomenon of mental illness and thus captured as an object of medico-moral positivism; so, too, the threat of disease in its cryptic relation to death and transgression of right natural order is “exorcized” insofar as disease itself, rather than being linked to “the metaphysic of evil,” becomes the object of a medical positivism that can know and master it.²¹⁴

This abrupt shift in the structure of medical discourse, which announces a more fundamental transformation in the epistemic formation of western culture, emerges historically together with “the anatomo-clinical method” of pathological anatomy, in which the previously sealed off contours of the corpse become an operable field of visibility and intelligibility. The definitude of death thereby becomes situated in the body with surgical precision and etiological clarity:

Conceived in relation to nature, disease was the non-assignable negative of which the causes, forms, and manifestations were offered only indirectly and against an

²¹³ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, 195.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 196-8. The fuller passage reads: “This structure, in which space, language, and death are articulated – what is known, in fact, as the anatomo-clinical method – constitutes the historical condition of a medicine that is given and accepted as positive. Positive here should be taken in the strong sense. Disease breaks away from the metaphysic of evil, to which it had been related for centuries; and it finds in the visibility of death the full form in which its content appears in positive terms” (ibid, 196).

ever-receding background; seen in relation to death, disease becomes exhaustively legible, open without remainder to the sovereign dissection of language and of the gaze. It is when death became the concrete a priori of medical experience that death could detach itself from counter-nature and become *embodied* in the *living bodies* of individuals. It will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death. ... [F]rom the experience of Unreason was born psychology, the very possibility of psychology; from the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as a science of the individual.²¹⁵

The limit-relation to death, emplaced in the body as the ‘concrete a priori of medical experience,’ is akin to the limit-experience of unreason, due not only to its tragic dimension or proximity to nothingness, but also to the fact that its confinement, neutralization, or corporeal circumscription is a condition of possibility for the horizontal development of a form of rationalist thought that would take as its object the individual subject. In both cases, what was once a terror linked to obscure cosmic forces becomes territorialized in the form of man.

Indeed, among all the human sciences, clinical medicine enjoys not only a “methodological” privilege, but an “ontological” one “in that it concerns man’s being as an object of positive knowledge. The possibility for the individual of being both subject and object of his own knowledge” – which, for Foucault, will later come to define the individualizing process of subjection²¹⁶ – “implies an inversion in the structure of finitude.”²¹⁷ Whereas finitude in the classical period, having “no other content than the

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ See Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Power*: “There are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (331). Moreover, already in the *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, Foucault underscores as the hallmark of anthropological thought that man becomes tied to his own identity as an object through a form of self-knowledge of which he is also subject: anthropology “is the knowledge of man, in a movement which objectifies him,” and, “at the same time, it is the knowledge of the knowledge of man, and so can interrogate the subject himself” (Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*: 117).

²¹⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*: 197.

negation of the infinite,” had been grasped privatively in relation to the God-form that organized the production of knowledge and subjectivity, “the thought that was born at the end of the eighteenth century gave it,” finitude, “the powers of the positive: the anthropological structure that then appeared played both the critical role of limit and the founding role of origin.”²¹⁸

At the philosophical level, this “reversal”²¹⁹ is inaugurated through the Copernican turn of Kantian critique, whereby the finite conditions of the transcendental subject, rather than the infinitude of God, become constitutive for knowledge. Yet precisely what interested Foucault in Kant’s *Anthropology*, which he had translated and written an introduction to as his secondary doctoral thesis two years prior, is the slippage from critical to anthropological thought, in light of which the three Critiques appear to have taken as their “secret guide” “a certain concrete image of man.”²²⁰ Thus, while Kant’s thought of “constituent finitude” displaces the idea of “original infinity”²²¹ as epistemic foundation, thereby opening a new form of possible thought, “Kant ended by closing this opening when he ultimately relegated all critical investigations to an anthropological question. . . .”²²²

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, 19. Four years later in *The Order of Things*, Foucault will locate the explicit mark of this slippage in “Kant’s *Logic*, when to his traditional trilogy of questions he added an ultimate one: the three critical questions (What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope?) then found themselves referred to a fourth, and inscribed, as it were, ‘to its account’: *Was ist der Mensch?*” (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 371).

²²¹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 127.

²²² Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 76. It is worth noting that this essay, Foucault’s homage to Bataille, was published in 1963, the same year as *The Birth of the Clinic*. While I cannot develop the point here, I would suggest that “A Preface to Transgression” serves as a kind of minor double to *The Birth of the Clinic*; and that a similar relation obtains between “The Thought of the Outside,” Foucault’s homage to Blanchot, and *The Order of Things*, both of which were published in 1966.

Rather than conceiving constitutive finitude in a way that, by deposing God, unmoors reason from any positive foundation, grasping the absolute contingency and arbitrary violence of ‘a world exposed by the experience of its limits’ – which is to say, rather than conceiving the finite tragically –, the Kantian critical turn surreptitiously installs a kind of anthropological positivism: “the *Anthropology* indicates the absence of God, and occupies the void that the infinite leaves in its wake.”²²³ This double movement in Kant, which collapses a more radical possibility for critical thought by referring it to the horizontal enterprise of reason, reflects, as though in germ form, the birth of the modern episteme and its circumscription by the ‘anthropological circle,’²²⁴ wherein man serves as both the starting-point in the inquiry for truth and the end-point to which this knowledge refers back.²²⁵ Whence arises the need for “the Nietzschean figures of tragedy, of Dionysus, of the death of God, of the philosopher’s hammer, of the overman approaching with the steps of a dove, of the Return,”²²⁶ to which Foucault’s early work is devoted and which would restore to the finite its tragic force, thereby contesting the socio-epistemic formation of man.²²⁷

²²³ Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*: 120.

²²⁴ This phrase is the title of the last chapter of Foucault’s *History of Madness*.

²²⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 342.

²²⁶ Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 76, translation slightly modified.

²²⁷ We have already detailed one version of this Nietzschean project: namely, the thesis in *History of Madness* that tragic works of unreason, be they Bosch’s paintings or Artaud’s ‘cries of rage,’ herald the double death of God and man. For Foucault as for Nietzsche, what the abyssal vision of groundlessness discloses is the intrinsic contingency of existence and the radical finitude of human being; and what the modern founding act of reason institutes through its exclusion of this ‘tragic truth’ (Nietzsche) is the reign of man, which is to say, a socio-epistemic formation (a set of discursive and social dividing practices productive of the major form of subjectivity proper to western culture) that takes as its positive ground the very finitude of human being. In a sense, the man-form doubles the God-form, repeating the latter’s ultimately groundless claims to a foundational moral and rational order. The ‘ruse and new triumph of madness’ with which Foucault’s work ends would thus consummate the death of God through the death of man by restoring to the tragic the full violence of its ungrounding insight, thereby unmasking the unjustifiable pretenses of the positivist human sciences.

Now, if the ‘anthropological structure’ of thought establishes “the philosophical condition for the organization of a positive medicine,” conversely, the latter provides the former with the empirical condition for its realization as a form of experience: “medicine offers modern man the obstinate, yet reassuring face of his finitude; in it, death is endlessly repeated, but it is also exorcized; and although it ceaselessly reminds man of the limit that he bears within him, it also speaks to him of that technical world that is the armed, positive, full form of his finitude.”²²⁸ The development of clinical medicine introduces “that fundamental relation that binds modern man to his original finitude”²²⁹ by positing as an object of knowledge his own death, situated in the living body as disease; yet insofar as modern man is also the subject of this knowledge, he retains a measure of control over its object, which is to say, over his proper death, the tragic force of which he has through ‘armed’ expulsion ‘exorcized,’ repelled from the ‘limited and positivistic world’ in which he would install himself. In such a way, Foucault’s project in *The Birth of the Clinic* once again suggests the problem of recovering a counter-natural force of the tragic from its neutralization, appropriation, or exclusion by the anthropological circle of rationalist thought.²³⁰

Foucault will thus characterize his critical counter-history of ‘positive medicine’ precisely as “a *vertical* investigation of this positivism.”²³¹ As in *History of Madness*, vertical critique, rather than following the progressive linearity of reason, locates this so-

²²⁸ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 198.

²²⁹ Ibid, 197.

²³⁰ *The Birth of the Clinic* is smaller in scope than *History of Madness* in two ways: most obviously, in the shorter duration of the historical period it concerns; but more fundamentally, in the fact that it does not, in addition to its critical project, give itself the task of an affirmative realization of vertical-tragic experience (in this case, the limit-experience of, or limit-relation to, death). This affirmative task will be taken up in Foucault’s writings on the thought of transgression and the thought of the outside articulated through modern literature (especially Bataille and Blanchot).

²³¹ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 199, my emphasis.

called positivism (whether psychiatry or clinical medicine) in the historically contingent conditions of its realization. And like the vertical re-interpretation of mental illness, so, too, this ‘vertical investigation’ of clinical disease situates these conditions for the emergence of modern medicine in the experience of a limit (in this case, death, or the ‘original finitude’ of human being), the tragic force of which is rejected, forgotten, or silenced beneath the reassuring monologue of reason. In other words, a critical vertical analysis will be one that confronts a form of rational positivism, grounded in the epistemic formation of man, with the contingent conditions of its own historical emergence (*‘Pudenda origo,’* as Foucault was fond of citing from Nietzsche²³²); and these conditions are themselves shown to be rationally unjustifiable insofar as they betray a reactive or inauthentic gesture that would seek to exorcise the thought of tragic groundlessness and its threat to any horizontal form of knowledge.

3.3.2 *‘For That I Must Ascend into the Depths’*: Critical Renewal along the ‘Vertical Line’ of Nietzschean Interpretation

From *History of Madness* to *The Birth of the Clinic*, then, there is the continuity of a vertical critique mounted against the positivism of the human sciences, understood broadly as the dominant form of thought and experience of modern western culture. This line of critical verticality – which, beginning ‘under the sun of the great Nietzschean quest,’ is first oriented by the double death of God and man and will later issue into the

²³² See, e.g., Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 370. Cf.: Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” *ibid*, 395. The Latin phrase means ‘shameful origins.’

more fully articulated concept of genealogy – receives further elaboration in the essay

Foucault presented in 1964 at a conference on Nietzsche organized by Deleuze:²³³

There is in Nietzsche a critique of ideal depth, of depth of conscience [*conscience*], which he denounces as an invention of philosophers; this depth would be the pure and interior search for truth. Nietzsche shows how it implies resignation, hypocrisy, the mask; so that the interpreter must, when he examines signs in order to denounce them, *descend along the vertical line and show that this depth of interiority is in reality something other than what it says*. Consequently, it is necessary that the interpreter descend, that he be, as Nietzsche says, ‘the good excavator of the lower depths.’ But, in reality, when one interprets one can *trace this descending line only to restore the glittering exteriority that was covered up and buried*. For if the interpreter must go to the bottom himself, like an excavator, the movement of interpretation is, on the contrary, *that of a projection* [surplomb], *of a more and more elevated projection*, which always leaves depth above it to be displayed in a more and more visible fashion; and depth is now restored as an absolutely superficial secret, in such a way that the flight of the eagle, the ascension of the mountain, *all the verticality that is so important for Zarathustra* is in the strict sense the reversal of depth, the discovery that depth was only a game and a surface fold.²³⁴

²³³ Several years later, Foucault will twice refer to his books on madness and illness as vertical works: first, in “On the Ways of Writing History” (1967), and then again in “Interview avec Michel Foucault” (1968). In the former, Foucault, commenting on his archeological method for analyzing discursive formations in *The Order of Things*, insists that “there is nothing to be gained from describing this autonomous layer of discourses unless one can relate it to other layers, practices, institutions, social relations, political relations, and so on. It is that relationship which has always intrigued me, and in *Histoire de la folie* [*Madness and Civilization*] and *Naissance de la clinique* [*Birth of the Clinic*], I tried to define the relations between these different domains..., the discursive domain and the nondiscursive domain. In *The Order of Things* I covered the horizontal axis [‘of the theoretical models common to several discourses’], in *Madness and Civilization*, the vertical dimension of the figure” (Foucault, “On the Ways of Writing History,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 284-5). In other words, the vertical “axis of description” anticipates the inquiry into power-knowledge relations that Foucault will pursue throughout the 1970s. Further, in another interview the following year, Foucault again comments that both *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* “treat of this vertical dimension,” which is to say, “the relations that are able to obtain between a form of knowledge and the social, economic, political, and historical conditions in which this knowledge is constituted” (Foucault, “Interview avec Michel Foucault,” *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 684-5, my translation). The vertical axis of critical analysis thus situates any given form of knowledge or discourse in relation to the set of historical (read: economic, social, political) structures and processes that both make it possible and are impacted by it, in turn. That is, the vertical dimension of analysis concerns the event of thought itself, in all its historical contingency and effectivity, in terms of its immanent emplacement in the materiality of practices, discursive and non-discursive alike – practices which, as we have seen, can take the violent form of constitutive division. It is therefore the critical mode of verticality that grasps the production of thought: both in the sense of thought as the object of production, a historically contingent product, and in the sense of thought as itself a productive or potentially transformative force. We can already see, perhaps, the outlines of genealogical critique emerging through this sketch of the vertical ‘axis of description’ and the relation between thought and historical force relations.

²³⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 273, my emphasis.

In order to understand this paradoxical vertical movement of Nietzschean interpretation, let us first briefly examine Nietzsche's critique of the 'depth of conscience,' noting before doing so that Foucault's phrase, *la profondeur de conscience*, can equally mean 'the depth of conscience' and 'the depth of consciousness.' While the former is the more natural rendering, especially given the context of Nietzsche's critique of bad conscience, both senses must be kept in mind simultaneously since, on Nietzsche's account, the historical origin of bad conscience, "the *internalizing* of man,"²³⁵ is the same process that gives rise to the idea of the soul, that is, the 'ideal depth' which would house consciousness as the seat of the subject. Indeed, it is precisely the consciousness of rational thought that purports to be 'the pure and interior search for truth,' a positivist mask belied by vertical critique, which will 'show that this depth of interiority is in reality something other than what it says.' And on Nietzsche's view, in reality, the birth of bad conscience or the modern soul is the result of a doubly reactive process proper to herd society: namely, that of *ressentiment* turning against itself.

Ressentiment, as exemplified in slave morality, is a reactive structure of identification predicated upon a kind of constitutive division, a primary gesture of rejection that "says 'no' to an 'outside,' to a 'different,' to a 'not-self' [T]he very nature of *ressentiment* [...is to] need, psychologically speaking, external stimuli in order to be able to act at all, – its action is, from the ground up, reaction."²³⁶ In this light, the structure of positivism itself – that is, the form of rational thought that requires the exteriorization and rejection of the tragic as its own condition of possibility – is

²³⁵ Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen, Second Treatise, §16, 57.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, First Treatise, §10, 19.

fundamentally reactive in nature, a reactivity that must be constantly covered over on pain of exposing reason's lack of founding justification. Such is also the case for modern morality, which emerges through what Nietzsche terms 'the slave revolt in morality,' the original gesture of which is to reject as 'evil' what had previously constituted the 'good' of noble morality (in brief, auto-affirmative active force); only afterward is a new 'good' then posited, namely, as what is not-evil (that is, precisely what is opposite active force and had designated the 'bad' in the older system of values). The modern value of the good, which purports to serve as the positive foundation of moral truth, is thus, in fact, merely the derivative of this primary rejection.

Now, for Nietzsche, the formation of any herd society is contingent upon some "stronger power" establishing, through force and "as soon as it is in any way strong enough to do so," a system of law or "justice" to control and "put an end to the senseless raging of *ressentiment* among weaker parties subordinated to it (whether groups or individuals)."²³⁷ Individuals within a herd society therefore cannot exercise their desire for revenge upon others; yet the motive principle of agency for these individuals, precisely as creatures of *ressentiment* (for whom 'action is, from the ground up, reaction'), *is* this very desire. Thus, rather than somehow disappearing through an historical process of acculturation and domestication, such reactive drives, blocked from external realization, become re-directed internally; there is a kind of second order reaction where the desire for revenge, itself a reaction, reacts in the face of what blocks it and returns within and against the one who desires it. The interior dimension carved out

²³⁷ Ibid, Second Treatise, §11, 48-9.

through this process of folding or doubling back defines the psychical topos of modern man:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn themselves inwards* – this is what I call the *internalizing* of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his ‘soul.’ The entire inner world, originally thin as if inserted between two skins, has spread and unfolded, has taken on depth, breadth, height to the same extent that man’s outward discharging has been *obstructed*. . . . Hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction – all of that turning itself against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of ‘bad conscience.’²³⁸

Through Nietzsche’s critique of the ideal depth of conscience and consciousness, the soul, as both subject and object of a certain moral positivism, is unmasked as ‘in reality something other than what it says.’ That is, the coordinates of psychological inwardness proper to modern man, rather than defining the mental or spiritual domain of the ‘pure and interior search for truth,’ are instead disclosed as the historically contingent effect of the play of forces in herd society. Depth’s ‘absolutely superficial secret’ is that the seat of reason is neither a divine trace nor itself a rational ground, but the product of a reactive modality of will to power, a ‘surface fold’ in the historical field of force relations.

Nietzschean interpretation thus functions as a form of vertical critique insofar as it unearths the singular and contingent conditions of realization for a form of positivism, illuminating the disavowed reactive structure that belies this positivism’s own claims to rational justification and, in the same movement, ‘restor[ing] the glittering exteriority that was covered up and buried.’ Hence Foucault’s assertion that ‘the interpreter must

²³⁸ Ibid, §16, 57. Nietzsche continues: “The man who, for lack of external enemies and resistance, and wedged into an oppressive narrowness and regularity of custom, impatiently tore apart, persecuted, gnawed at, stirred up, maltreated himself; this animal one wants to ‘tame’ and that beats itself raw on the bars of its cage; this deprived one, consumed by homesickness for the desert, who had to create out of himself an adventure, a place of torture, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness – this fool, this longing and desperate prisoner became the inventor of ‘bad conscience.’”

descend along the vertical line' to reveal the depth of man's interiority as other than what it claims. Foucault's formulation here strongly suggests the opening movement of Zarathustra – the passage initially published as the final paragraph of *The Gay Science*, entitled "*Incipit tragoedia*,"²³⁹ and doubling as the first paragraph of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – when, greeting the sun, Zarathustra announces his 'going-under': "For that I must descend to the depths [*Dazu muss ich in die Tiefe steigen*], as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and still bring light to the underworld, you over-rich star."²⁴⁰

Nietzsche's very language, in fact, provides a key to understanding Foucault's counter-intuitive imagery of an excavation of the depths that gives rise to 'a more and more elevated projection [*surplomb*],' for the German word translated as 'descend,' *steigen*, refers to a rise or upward climb.²⁴¹ Thus, in order to begin his tragic undergoing, Zarathustra must *ascend into the depths*. And this is not merely a semantic 'reversal of depth' at the level of diction or image, for unlike the ideal depth of psychological inwardness, which would belong to the diurnal coordinates of consciousness, what opens in Nietzsche's 'abyss-deep thought,' expressed through 'all the verticality that is so important for Zarathustra,' is the nocturnal or tragic dimension of the vertical axis – the privileged point of which remains, as in *Dream and Existence*, that instant of hovering at the vertex, overhanging and projected out into the nothing.

²³⁹ The Latin title means 'The tragedy begins.' This paragraph, the end of Book IV, served as the original conclusion of *Gay Science*, which Nietzsche first published only in four parts.

²⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §342.

²⁴¹ *Steigen*, which is related to the obsolete English verb, 'sty' (to go up, ascend), derives from the Indo-European root *steigh-* (to climb, ascend, rise; to go, stride, march) – a fact of which Nietzsche, trained in philology, was doubtless aware.

Indeed, Foucault describes the activity of Nietzschean critique precisely in terms of such an overhanging projection: Foucault's word, *surplomb*, translated as 'projection,' principally means 'overhang' and is defined in French as both (1) the part that is '*en saillie*' in relation to the base, i.e., the vertical position projected above, out and over empty space, and (2) the position of that which *fait saillie*, i.e., that which advances out into the void. Unlike the 'tragic movement' of the dreaming imagination, however, which 'completes its rise' at the summit of the authentic death dream, 'the movement of interpretation is that of a more and more elevated projection': the motive force of critique is never completed and, like 'the sun of the great Nietzschean quest' or Zarathustra's line of becoming (metamorphosis, going-under), passes ever along its vertical axis, crossing over the limit of the horizon.

The trajectory of vertical critique thus constitutes a kind of transgressive experience of continuous passage that would 'restore the glittering exteriority,' the silenced Exterior, that had been 'covered up and buried' beneath the reactively structured foundations of positivism. And in this affirmative dimension of critique – as in the recovery of the limit-experience of unreason and the project of vertical-existential poetics –, Foucault formulates a response to the problem of material expression that would be situated along the vertical vector. If the tragic expression of the dreaming imagination ran aground of the oneiric divide; and if the tragic expression of unreason faltered at the intensive threshold where its poets fall into madness; the movement of critical interpretation, by contrast, bears within itself the principle of its proper motility, providing the conditions to

restore and sustain the force of vertical expression and thereby ‘bring light to the underworld’ (Nietzsche), which is to say, to the social world of man.²⁴²

What, then, accounts for this auto-recreative activity of vertical interpretation, this ceaselessly renewed labor of critique?²⁴³ Foucault provides a clue at the end of “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” when he writes that “interpretation finds itself with the obligation to interpret itself to infinity, always to resume. ... [A] hermeneutic that wraps itself in itself enters the domain of languages which do not cease to implicate themselves, that intermediate region of madness and pure language. It is there that we recognize Nietzsche.”²⁴⁴ Because Nietzschean interpretation, by contrast to semiology, eschews any appeal to essences as a foundational bedrock of meaning, it follows that the hermeneutical task is infinite: not in the sense of a pernicious regress but, rather, in the sense that there are only interpretations, so interpretation will necessarily take itself as an object, referring back to, implicating, or doubling itself in an infinitely recursive process. It is this doubling or auto-implicative function that imbues interpretation with its powers

²⁴² I hope it is clear that I am using gender-specific language to indicate the man-form that structures the dominant mode of modern subjectivity in herd society, a thesis shared by Nietzsche and Foucault.

²⁴³ This notion of the permanent reactivation of critique will remain something of a constant in Foucault: see, for example, his formulations in “What is Enlightenment?” of “a permanent critique of our historical era,” “a permanent critique of ourselves,” and “the principle of a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy” (Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 312-4). We will return to this point in Chapter 6 when discussing the conditions of sustainability of political agency.

²⁴⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” 278. In this same paragraph, Foucault writes: “The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primarily, originally, actually, as coherent, pertinent, and systematic marks. The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there are only interpretations. It seems to me necessary to understand what too many of our contemporaries forget, that hermeneutics and semiology are fierce enemies. A hermeneutic that in effect falls back on a semiology believes in the absolute existence of signs: it abandons the violence, the incompleteness, the infinity of interpretations in order to enthrone the terror of the index or to suspect language. Here we recognize Marxism after Marx” (ibid). This ‘death of interpretation,’ which is also the death of critique, is the very founding of a positivism, e.g., historical materialism, which takes Marxist critique to be the ground for a positive science. It is a similar ‘semiological’ failure, the arresting of auto-critical interpretation, that can lead to the political failures of revolutions, as Foucault will later point out a propos of the Iranian revolution. We will return in detail to this crucial point in Chapter 6.

of intrinsic renewal, linking it to the obscure liminal or ‘intermediate region of madness and pure language’ – the region, that is, of intransitive expression that does not take the extensive or diurnal world of things or objects as its field of reference. The general name Foucault will reserve for this vertical dimension of language is ‘literature.’

3.4 *Early Experience: The Verticality of Literary Language*

3.4.1 *The ‘Vertical Writing’ of Transgression: Literature’s Recursive Auto-Doubling Function*

Throughout the 1960s, and in conjunction with his development of vertical critique as a historico-philosophical form of analysis, Foucault will pursue the space of literature as a contemporary response to the problem of material expression; and the project of political contestation that first surfaces in *History of Madness* will take form as a certain literary politics of transgression. Indeed, the key to understanding “that strange proximity between madness and literature”²⁴⁵ and the political project emerging therein is once again provided by the concept of the vertical, for (as with critique) it is the verticality of literary language that accounts for its subversive and auto-transformative force.

Now, notwithstanding Foucault’s wide-ranging impact on literature and language fields in the humanities,²⁴⁶ remarkably little scholarship has taken up Foucault’s conceptual treatment of literature itself in any great detail. One notable exception is

²⁴⁵ Foucault, “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre,” *History of Madness*, 548.

²⁴⁶ “At the first decade of the 21st century, Foucault is the author most frequently cited in the humanities in general” (Mark Kelly, “Michel Foucault (1926-1984),” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/foucault>).

Timothy O’Leary’s recent book, *Foucault and Fiction*,²⁴⁷ which is also one of the only texts on Foucault that identifies the concept of verticality. Indeed, O’Leary, though without developing the concept, locates its centrality with respect to Foucault’s work on literature. Referring to Foucault’s essay “Language to Infinity,” O’Leary writes that for Foucault,

... literature is born from a certain use of language as a means of keeping death at bay. ... Language, in the image Foucault uses, sets up a vertical mirror in the face of death; and in the virtual space between this mirror and death an infinite mirroring and doubling is made possible. ... For Foucault, therefore, literary language can be defined in terms of the virtual space that is created when a vertical mirror is set up in the face of death, thus creating the possibility of an infinite murmuring of language; while the non-literary or more straightforwardly communicative use of language is defined as a horizontal conveyance of meaning. ... It is this relation between language and death, and the corresponding function of literature to keep open and constantly explore this relation, which Foucault characterized as the ‘verticality’ of literary language.²⁴⁸

O’Leary thus provides the argument that literature, for Foucault, is a specifically vertical form of language: if literary language is defined by the ‘virtual space’ it creates through a certain mirroring or doubling relation with death; and if ‘this relation between language and death’ is ‘characterized as the “verticality” of literary language’; then it will be verticality that defines literature as such. Literature would thus be contrasted to ‘horizontal’ modes of language (e.g., any discourse that takes language to be a representational medium), the principle function of which is to communicate or convey a set of established meanings.

We will return at greater length below to “Language to Infinity” and O’Leary’s interpretation of, as he puts it, the ‘vertical mirror’ that literary language erects ‘in the

²⁴⁷ O’Leary himself makes mention of this “surprising” paucity of “sustained engagement with Foucault’s work on literature,” giving credit to Simon During’s *Foucault and Literature: Toward a Genealogy of Writing* as the “major exception” (O’Leary, *Foucault and Fiction: The Experience Book*, 151n.).

²⁴⁸ O’Leary, *Foucault and Fiction*, 45-6.

face of death.’ By way of approach, let us prepare a more thorough conceptual analysis of literary verticality by mapping its emergence in two of Foucault’s earlier essays.²⁴⁹

Following *History of Madness*, the first major instance²⁵⁰ of Foucault discussing what he will term ‘vertical writing’ appears in 1962 in his “Introduction to Rousseau’s

²⁴⁹ For purposes of economy, I will merely note in passing four other instances of the concept of verticality in Foucault’s writings on literature. The first occurs in “Distance, aspect, origine” (1963) when, on the topic of tense in the literature of the Tel Quel group (including J.-L. Baudry, M. Pleyne, and P. Sollers), Foucault writes that the past “assumes a *vertical posture of superposition* where the oldest is paradoxically the nearest the summit, ridgeline [*ligne de faîte*] and line of flight [*ligne de fuite*], high place of reversal” (Foucault, “Distance, aspect, origine,” *Dits et écrits I*, 304, my translation and emphasis). Note the similarity between this vertical superimpositional structure, ‘where the oldest is the nearest the summit,’ and the paradoxical movement of Nietzschean interpretation, which, in excavating the depths of historical time, gives rise to an upward movement of ever-elevating superimposition or overhanging projection. This passage may also be the first instance of the phrase ‘line of flight’ in Foucault’s work. The second case of verticality occurs in “Un «nouveau roman» de terreur” (1963), in which Foucault, discussing *Les Aventures d’une jeune fille* by Jean-Edern Hallier, describes how the novel constructs a fundamental spiraloid space “around the vertical axis of the double” (Foucault, “Un «nouveau roman» de terreur,” *Dits et écrits I*, 315, my translation). The third instance of the vertical appears in Foucault’s “Afterword to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*” (1964), which is cited in the following footnote and concerns a profound vertical organization of the text. Finally, the fourth instance occurs in “Les mots qui saignent” (1964), where Foucault, reviewing Klossowski’s translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, characterizes it as a “vertical translation” (Foucault, “Les mots qui saignent,” *Dits et écrits I*, 452). A natural or horizontal translation would be one, based on a relation of resemblance, that tries to communicate the same meaning of words in a different language; by contrast, Klossowski renders a vertical translation, which does not juxtapose the original language with the one translated into but, instead, is ‘supra-linear,’ attentive to the poetics of the ‘verbal site,’ that is, the spatial order of the work (the poetic order of emplacement), making this structure visible while maintaining at a remove the syntactic network necessary for meaning. There are thus two kinds of translation: one, horizontal or linear, that aims to retain the identity (meaning, aesthetic beauty, etc.) of what it transposes from one language into another; and another, vertical, that pits one language against another, taking the original text as a projectile and aiming it at the secondary language as at a target, deforming the latter, opening it to new expressive possibilities. In this regard, vertical translation or literature would be opposed to the horizontal as, a decade or so later, Deleuze and Guattari oppose minor to major literature.

²⁵⁰ There is one earlier, somewhat marginal instance of Foucault using verticality to describe a mode of textual organization, which occurs in his *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, submitted (without being published) as a doctoral thesis in 1961. Here, Foucault refers to ‘the vertical dimension of the text,’ which is to say, a deeper textual logic or organization by contrast to a superficial linear or horizontal order: “On the surface, as if on the level of quasi-synonyms, Kant joins words designating other forms of invention, whether psychological or technical, together: *entdecken, entfinden, etwas ausfindig, machen, ersinnen, ausdenken, erdichten*. But if we look at the **vertical dimension of the text**, and follow the thread of the mental powers, we find first the ‘*Vermögen Ideen zu schaffen*’ in a broad sense.” (Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, 99, my bold). This contrast between the vertical organization of a text and its superficial linear order will recur several years later in Foucault’s “Afterword to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*”: “The linear and visible sequence of sins, heresies, divinities, and monsters is merely the superficial crest of an *elaborate vertical structure*. . . . Each element (setting, character, speech, alteration of scenery) is effectively placed at a definite point in the linear sequence, but each element also has its *vertical system of correspondences* and is situated at a specific depth in the fiction” (Foucault, “Afterword to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 117-8, my emphasis).

Dialogues” – an essay closely aligned with the *History of Madness* insofar as the *Dialogues* compose a work of unreason, written at the limit of an imminent madness. What sets the *Dialogues* apart from the majority of Rousseau’s oeuvre is their stark contrast to the use of “linear” language, which is the “genre of writing,” exemplified by the *Confessions*, that Rousseau had “always privileged ... because he saw it – in music and in language – as the most natural kind of expression, the one in which the speaking subject is fully present, without reserve or reticence, in each of the forms of what it says.”²⁵¹ Such a horizontal form of writing, composed on the model of musical melody, issues from an immediately self-present, original, natural subject and aims for the pure transparency of a “continuous expression, indefinitely faithful to the course of time, and following it like a thread.”²⁵²

As opposed to the linearity of this communicative discourse, “The *Dialogues*, on the contrary, are constructed on a vertical writing. The subject that speaks in that disciplined [*dressé*²⁵³], harmonically structured language is a disunited subject, superimposed on itself, lacunar, and incapable of being made present except through an addition that is never completed – as if it appeared at a receding point [*un point de fuite*] that only a certain convergence would enable one to locate.”²⁵⁴ What had been the absolute sincerity and immediate self-presence of the confessional subject’s continuous chronology now becomes a vertically fractured or schizoid subject, a discordant harmony

²⁵¹ Foucault, “Introduction to Rousseau’s *Dialogues*,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 37.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ This term anticipates Foucault’s formulation in “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre” of literature as an excluded language that is *dressé à la verticale au-dessus de lui-même*, “erected vertically above itself” (Foucault, “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre,” *History of Madness*, 549; cf. Foucault, “La folie, l’absence d’œuvre,” *Dits et Écrits I*, 448). We will return to this passage below.

²⁵⁴ Foucault, “Introduction to Rousseau’s *Dialogues*,” 38.

of multiple conflicting subjects: the “Jean-Jacques Rousseau” who had been author and subject of the *Confessions* “in his concrete unity is absent from the *Dialogues* – or, rather, through them, and perhaps by them, is disunited.”²⁵⁵

Through the latter text, the speaking subject is fragmented into four characters: “an anonymous Frenchman,” who represents the French people “who have stolen Rousseau’s name”; his interlocutor, “a certain Rousseau, who, without any concrete determination other than his honesty, bears the name that the public has robbed from the real Rousseau,” and who knows the works that properly belong to Rousseau; “a third [*tierce*²⁵⁶] but constant presence, one who is no longer called anything but *le Jean-Jacques*,” the “singularity” about whom the Frenchman and Rousseau speak; yet, since the Frenchman envisions Jean-Jacques as the “author of crimes” while Rousseau knows him as the “author of books,” *le Jean-Jacques* is himself subdivided into Jean-Jacques-for-the-Frenchman and Jean-Jacques-for-Rousseau, between whom there is an impossible relation (“since the author of the crimes cannot be the author of the books whose sole purpose is to win hearts over to virtue”).²⁵⁷ If the subject of language is split into the subject who speaks and the subject that is spoken about, then we can say that whereas the horizontal language of the *Confessions* posits an indissociable subjective unity (the speaking subject and the subject spoken being exactly identical in the immediate self-presence of a reflexive first person singular), the *Dialogues*, by contrast, mine and multiply the division, splitting in turn the subject who speaks (the Frenchman and

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ The French *tierce* can mean ‘third’ precisely in the sense of a musical third: that is, a vertical or harmonic interval.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 38-9.

Rousseau) and the subject spoken about (Jean-Jacques-for-the-Frenchman and Jean-Jacques-for-Rousseau).

In such a way does vertical writing dislocate and disperse the position of the speaking subject. The ‘disunited subject,’ having proliferated into mutually exclusive parts, becomes both ‘superimposed on itself’ and ‘lacunar,’ marked by the fundamental or constitutive absence of a unity whose promised presence is but a ‘receding point’ that remains at an unbreachable distance, an irrecoverable limit:

It is through these four characters that the real Jean-Jacques Rousseau (the one who said so simply and supremely ‘myself alone’ in the *Confessions*) is gradually identified. Even so, he is never presented in flesh and blood, and he never speaks.... That is how distant and inaccessible that character is now whose immediate presence made possible the language of the *Confessions*; henceforth he will be positioned at the outer limit of speech, already beyond it, at the virtual, never-perceived vertex of the triangle formed by the two interlocutors and the four characters defined by their dialogue.²⁵⁸

This impossible vertical ‘*point de fuite*’ indicates the Exterior, the ‘outer limit of speech,’ which is to say, the outside in relation to the conditions of enunciability and intelligibility that govern both the subjective investment of a speaker in language and the horizontal transmission of discourse. As with the exteriority of unreason in relation to the horizontal history of reason that excludes it; and as with the Nietzschean interpretation of ideal depth from the perspective of the vertical critique that transgresses it; so, too, vertical writing undoes the positivism of the rational subject in its original or ‘immediate presence,’ displacing the seat of thought in its fundamental self-relation and thereby calling into question the ground of socio-epistemic order.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 39.

The vertical space of language that structures Rousseau's *Dialogues* thus constitutes a 'virtual' region that is irreducible to history – which, in this context, means irreducible to the conditions of possibility that determine what can be said, perceived, or thought in a given episteme. Whence the subversive, anti-normalizing, and potentially transformative force of such literature, which, qua work of unreason, remains anterior and hostile to the division that would found the psychological category of mental illness: “The categories of the normal and the pathological, of madness and delirium, cannot be applied to this language; for it is a primary breakthrough [*franchissement*], a pure transgression.”²⁵⁹

Foucault's literary politics thus emerges from this conception of a transgressive limit-experience of language, the expression of which, by undermining the major form of subjectivation proper to the modern period (i.e., the man-form), would constitute a kind of contestation to the dominant discursive (hence social, historical) conditions of thought in western culture. Moreover, it is precisely this kind of transgressive vertical writing that takes as its task the recovery or recreation of those forces of 'counter-nature' which, as we have seen in *The Birth of the Clinic*, were exorcized by positive medicine. As Foucault suggests in “So Cruel a Knowledge” (1963), the “truly transgressive forms of eroticism are now found ... in the direction of the counternatural,”²⁶⁰ a region mapped out and maintained through certain subversive literary works in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

One such example is *Les Egarements du coeur et d'esprit*, an erotic novel of terror by Claude-Prosper Crébillon. What this work gives voice to is the “deep geometry” that

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 50-1.

²⁶⁰ Foucault, “So Cruel a Knowledge,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 67.

structures the “system of ‘erotic knowledge,’” or that counter-knowledge proper to the modern period, in terms of “the experience of the Limit and that of the Light.”²⁶¹ Here again, the concept of verticality will play an important role in Foucault’s analysis, for the figure of the veil, vital to the novel’s intimation of the “obscure, essential link ... between Knowledge and Desire,” manifests the vertical line of this ‘deep geometry’:

The veil is that thin surface which chance, haste, and modesty have placed and do their best to maintain; but *its line of force is dictated by the vertical of the drop* [chute]. The veil unveils, through a fatality which is that of its light fabric and its supple form. To play its role, which is to cover and to be exact, the veil must conform precisely to the surfaces, repeat the lines, course over the volumes without superfluous discourse, and highlight the forms with a glittering whiteness, stripping them of their shadow. ... It plays its opaque and protective role well but only for the one who uses it to cover herself, for the groping, fumbling, feverish hand that defends itself. But for the one who witnesses all these efforts and who remains on the watch from a distance, this veil is revealing. Paradoxically, the veil hides modesty from itself and draws its attention away from its main object of caution; but in manifesting this caution to the indiscreet, it allows him to see indiscreetly that which it withholds. Doubly traitorous, the veil shows what it averts and conceals, from what it is meant to hide, the fact that it unveils it.²⁶²

The vertical is thus an expressive ‘line of force,’ defining the trajectory of the fall, along which a ‘traitorous’ doubling function is performed, for the veil constitutes a kind of subversive repetition that unveils, by the very exactitude of its veiling, the fact and stark outlines of the object that it veils. Yet the structure is complicated further insofar as this simple betrayal of a concealment that reveals also conceals the fact of this reveal to the one who would remain concealed – and this, precisely, by virtue of the original enclosure of concealment. That is, the verticality of the veil is ‘doubly traitorous’: to the indiscreet gaze ‘at a distance,’ outside, the veil reveals *what* it conceals; and to the discrete one close at hand, inside, the veil conceals *that* it reveals. Like the vertical

²⁶¹ Ibid, 57. Erotic knowledge is a counter-knowledge specifically in the sense that it is “anti-Platonist,” refusing to see between knowledge and desire a relation of impossibility. See Ibid, 57.

²⁶² Ibid, 58.

writing of the *Dialogues* that doubles both sides of an already doubled subject, the doubling function of the veil is itself double: the vertical line of force thus enacts a kind of recursive doubling procedure.

3.4.2 *Radical Finitude and the Immanent Infinity of Literature's 'Vertical System of Mirrors'*

We can perhaps begin to see in what sense the virtual space of literature is infinite: namely, in the vertical movement by which the doubling function of literary language is raised to an ever higher order or power. In this light, let us return to “Language to Infinity” and the discussion of the vertical mirroring relation between language and death.

For Foucault, as we have seen O’Leary point out, literature begins as the power of language to hold death at bay:

Before the imminence of death, language rushes forth, but it also starts again, tells of itself, discovers the story of the story and the possibility that this interpretation might never end. Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power – that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits.²⁶³

Like the vertical trajectory of Nietzschean hermeneutics, which recursively interprets interpretations to infinity, literary language is auto-implicative, endlessly doubling back on itself. Taking as examples certain moments of language’s implicit self-reference – “in *The Thousand and One Nights*, where an episode recounted by Scheherazade tells why she was obliged for a thousand and one nights, and so on”; and “an episode in [Diderot’s] *The Nun* where Suzanne explains the history of a letter to a correspondent ...[,] of

²⁶³ Foucault, “Language to Infinity,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 90.

precisely this letter in which she explains to her correspondent, and so on” –, Foucault argues that “the forms of this superimposition” are “essential to the construction of any work”: “The reduplication of language, even if it is concealed, constitutes its being as a work....”²⁶⁴ And in this ceaseless movement of auto-relay, as in the eternally returned reflection of infinite mirror play, there opens a “virtual space” where an actual infinite is immanent and “where speech discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image.”²⁶⁵

In this way, the recursive doubling function proper to vertical writing makes possible the infinite virtual space of literature, such that language constitutes a work (literature) only if it is a vertical writing, for “in every work language is superimposed on itself in a secret verticality.”²⁶⁶ The vertical dimension opened by this “mirror to infinity, to which every language gives birth once it erects itself vertically against death,”²⁶⁷ “forms one of the most decisive ontological events of language,”²⁶⁸ establishing the historico-transcendental condition for the emergence of literature: “The possibility of a work of language finds its original fold in this duplication.”²⁶⁹ As in *Dream and Existence*, the vertical axis of existence, disclosed through the experience of an originary limit-relation with death, marks the site of an ontologically productive event of thought: in this case, the limitless auto-doubling of language, which constitutes the becoming-literature of language, “a murmuring that repeats, recounts, and redoubles itself

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 92-3.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 91. fl.a

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 93. Foucault begins this phrase by writing “It is possible that...” I believe it is justified to leave out the initial and rhetorical qualifying remarks since we have seen Foucault already, if implicitly, argue for this claim: above, he declaratively states that the ‘reduplication of language’ constitutes its ontological status as a work, and this reduplication is precisely the vertical doubling function of literary language.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 94.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 90.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 91.

endlessly.”²⁷⁰ However, unlike the undeveloped project of the earlier existential poetics, in which it remained unclear how the tragic vertical force of the dreaming imagination could translate across the oneiric limit, the ‘mirror to infinity’ provides the conditions for realizing and sustaining an irreducible vertical space; and unlike the tragic expression of unreason, which ultimately breaks down into the suicided silence of madness, literary language finds the principle of its auto-generative becoming precisely in the self-relation it maintains at the limit with death.

Now, while Foucault suggests that speech in general may contain “an essential affinity between death, endless striving, and the self-representation of language,”²⁷¹ he nevertheless argues that, strictly speaking, literature proper only appears in the modern period, emerging in the empty epistemic space left vacant by the death of God.

It seems to me that a change was produced in the relationship of language to its indefinite repetition at the end of the eighteenth century – nearly coinciding with the moment in which works of language became what they are now for us, that is, literature. This is the time (or very nearly so) when Hölderlin became aware, to the point of blindness, that he could only speak in the space marked by the disappearance of the gods, and that language could only depend on its own power to keep death at a distance. Thus, an opening was traced on the horizon toward which our speech has ceaselessly advanced.²⁷²

The vertical mirroring movement of a language that ‘discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image’ is thus born from “a lyrical experience ... bound up with a return to the forms of finitude”²⁷³: in the wake of the epistemic transformation by which an original infinite is displaced by a constituent finitude, language harnesses its own ‘power’ qua literature to ‘keep death at a distance.’ If literature, defined in terms of

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 91.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 90.

²⁷² Ibid, 94.

²⁷³ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 198. Foucault here is specifically discussing Hölderlin’s *Empedocles*.

the auto-superimposition or self-doubling of language, thus only appears at the advent of the modern epoch, in the “transformation ... roughly indicated by the simultaneous appearance at the end of the eighteenth century of the works of Sade and the tales of terror”²⁷⁴; then this is because the infinity it constructs no longer refers to the immortalized glory of the epic – where, as with the transcendent God-form, “the work placed the infinite outside of itself,”²⁷⁵ in the promise of a heroic hereafter (that is, its reception and transmission across the ages) – but to an immanent infinitude generated through its intrinsic verticality. Literature is thus “a language fated to be infinite because it can no longer support itself upon the speech of infinity. But within itself, it finds the possibility of its own division, of its own repetition, the power to create a vertical system of mirrors, self images, analogies[,] ... postpon[ing] death indefinitely by ceaselessly opening a space where it is always the analogue of itself.”²⁷⁶

It is thus necessary to amend O’Leary’s reading of literary verticality when he writes that for Foucault, language ‘sets up a vertical mirror in the face of death; and in the virtual space *between this mirror and death* an infinite mirroring and doubling is made possible.’ Such an interpretation gives the impression that, by erecting a mirror ‘in the face of death,’ literature in some sense reflects the face of death, forming ‘an infinite mirroring and doubling’ ‘between this mirror and death’: thus, something like the mirror as a shield that, through the dazzling surface effect of its reflection, would captivate Medusa’s gaze, transfixing and neutralizing death. However, the mirror-play in Foucault’s image does not occur between language (or the mirror) and death; rather, as

²⁷⁴ Foucault, “Language to Infinity,” 95.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 94.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 100.

Foucault writes, language ‘encounters something like a mirror’ when, ‘headed toward death, language turns back upon itself.’ It would therefore be more accurate to say that the mirror constitutes the doubling function of the relation of language with itself when language, ‘returning to the forms of finitude,’ enters into proximity with death (the liminal region of the vertical dimension, precisely): that is, an auto-mirroring self-relation that effects the becoming-literature of language, raising language to a higher order or power and thereby satisfying the condition of possibility for the language-work.

Thus, when approaching the limit of death, language, discovering within itself this higher power – that is, constructing the vertical, virtual space proper to it as literature –, expresses an immanent, actual infinite capable of staying the imminence of death as a limit: not insofar as the poet would be immortalized, as in the Homeric model; nor, despite appearances, insofar as language would internally reflect back on itself in a perfect circle of incessant self-reference; but, rather, insofar as literary language opens onto the thought of the outside, the dispersal of the speaking subject, and hence the displacement of death itself as a limit. For none such exists for language in the infinite streaming of its abyssal and subjectless auto-production:

...the event that gave rise to what we call ‘literature’ in the strict sense is only superficially an interiorization; it is far more a question of a passage to the ‘outside’: language escapes the mode of being of discourse – in other words, the dynasty of representation – and literary speech develops from itself, forming a network in which each point is distinct, distanced even from its closest neighbors, and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all. ... The ‘subject’ of literature (what speaks in it and what it speaks about) is less language in its positivity than the void that language takes as its space when it articulates itself in the nakedness of ‘I speak.’²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Foucault, “The Thought of the Outside,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 148-9.

Along the vertical vector of literature's line of force, generated through the event of language's infinitely recursive auto-doubling function, 'literary speech develops from itself,' breaking with the classical epistemic formation (which had been governed by 'the dynasty of representation,' the horizontal mode of language's being qua discourse) by giving voice to that which is irreducibly exterior to that episteme's archaeological conditions (conditions of intelligibility, enunciability): in other words, by attaining, through the expression of vertical writing, to 'the outer limit of speech.'

Through the self-disclosure of the naked abyssal being of language, achieved through a fractured lineage of writers bearing remarkable resemblance to the tragic tradition of unreason (Sade, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Nietzsche, Roussel, Artaud, Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot²⁷⁸), 'an opening was traced on the horizon toward which our speech has ceaselessly advanced.' It is the same opening that emerged in the radical possibility of Kantian critique, which was closed off by Kant himself within the anthropological circle and remained philosophically shuttered until the tragico-critical thought of Nietzsche; and it will be the same portentous opening that recurs in *The Order of Things*, "a sign of the approaching birth, or, even less than that, of the very first glow, low in the sky, of a day scarcely even heralded as yet, but in which we can already divine that thought . . . is about to re-apprehend itself in its entirety, and to illuminate itself once more in the lightning flash of being."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ In Foucault's books, such as *History of Madness*, the conclusion of *Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*, this literary lineage most often begins with Sade and Hölderlin and ends with Roussel and Artaud. In Foucault's essays, the line of writers is expanded to include his (near-) contemporaries, notably, "these extreme forms of language in which [Georges] Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Pierre Klossowski have made their home, which they have made the summits of thought" (Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," 76).

²⁷⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 306.

Indeed, what we may now conclude is that it is precisely the verticality of literary language, as with the verticality of unreason before it, that opens this form of limit-experience bespeaking the death of man and auguring thought's production of the new: "From within language experienced and traversed as language" – which is to say, from within the virtual (vertical, infinite) space of literature –, "what emerges is that man has 'come to an end' [*l'homme est «fini»*], and that, by reaching *the summit of all possible speech*, he arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him.... [T]he void left by man's disappearance ... is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think."²⁸⁰

Just as the anthropological structure of thought is transgressed and arraigned before the vertical critique that overhangs and ungrounds it, so, too, is the positivism of the man-form undone when, at the vertical, exterior limit of language, it is confronted with its radical finitude by the experience of literature. Modern works open a 'void' in which the speaking subject is fractured and dispersed by the endless redoubling of the being of literary language. And like the tragic expression of the 'gaze seared by gruesome night' (Nietzsche), literature illumines 'in the lightning flash of being' the abyss in which the subject is scattered and language, freed.

3.4.3 *The Structural Esotericism of Madness and Literature: On the Material*

Expression of Transgression

We are also now better positioned to understand the 'strange proximity' that connects the tragic experience of unreason with that of literature, as well as the

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 383, 342, my emphasis.

conceptual movement that takes Foucault from the question of madness to that of literary language. If the experience of “madness *par excellence* – which psychiatrists term schizophrenia” – is that by which one “sees welling up ... the very hollowness of our existence [...] the finitude upon the basis of which we are, and think, and know”²⁸¹; then it will be vertical writing, through the thought of the outside it makes possible, that best expresses this limit-experience of radical finitude:

It was inevitable that this new mode of being of literature should have been revealed in works like those of Artaud or Roussel And as if this experiencing of the forms of finitude in language were insupportable, or inadequate (perhaps its very inadequacy was insupportable), it is within madness that it manifested itself – the figure of finitude thus positing itself in language (as that which unveils itself within it), but also before it, preceding it, as that formless, mute unsignifying region where language can find its freedom.²⁸²

As in *Dream and Existence*, where oneiric space opens onto ‘the world at the dawn of its first explosion’ and the dreaming imagination expresses ‘the birth of the world in the very movement of existence,’ the matutine, still-obscure region from which vertical-tragic expression issues is both site and source of freedom. And as in *History of Madness*, the experience of this irreducible virtual dimension, deprived an adequate system of supports, is consigned to madness.

In a manner still to be elaborated, the limit-experiences of literature and unreason thus bleed together as expression and content of a common vertical experiential form. This relation between unreason and literature receives perhaps its fullest articulation in “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre,” an essay from 1964 which Foucault appended eight years later to the second edition of *History of Madness* at the behest of Deleuze.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Ibid, 375.

²⁸² Ibid, 383.

²⁸³ See *Dits et écrits I*, “Chronologie,” Juin 1972, 56. This is the same year that *Anti-Oedipus* was published.

Taking up again the theme of the divergence, within the experience of madness, of its horizontal and vertical trajectories, Foucault locates in his historical present the near completion of their disassociation:

We are at that point, that fold [*repli*] in time, where a certain technical control of sickness hides rather than designates the movement that closes the experience of madness in on itself. But it is precisely that fold [*pli*] that allows us to unfurl [*déployer*] that which has been curled up [*impliqué*] for centuries: mental illness and madness – two different configurations, which came together and became confused from the seventeenth century onwards, and which are now moving apart before our eyes, or rather *inside our language*. . . . To say that madness is disappearing today is to say that the implication that included it in both psychiatric knowledge and a kind of anthropological reflection is coming undone. But it is not to say that the *general form of transgression* of which madness has been the visible face for centuries is disappearing. Nor that transgression, just as we are beginning to ask what madness is, is not in the process of giving birth to a new experience.²⁸⁴

The neuro-pharmacological control over mental illness, in which the positivism of psychiatry is doubled by that of clinical medicine, naturalizes madness as sickness so thoroughly that it, in fact, conceals the very effacement of madness itself as an essential problematic of human being. Whether as the scandal of an animal unreason that constitutes the degree zero of man's nature and shows itself obscurely in the painterly bestial forms of the Renaissance; or as the modern experience of unreason "in the burgeoning transcendence of any act of expression [*la transcendance naissante de tout acte d'expression*], from the source of language itself, in the initial and final moment where man is suddenly [*devient*] exterior to himself"²⁸⁵; unreason had been that tragic form of experience by means of which man posed to himself the problem of his proper

²⁸⁴ Foucault, "Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre," 544, my emphasis.

²⁸⁵ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 349-50. It is worth noting that the earlier tragic experience from the seventeenth century is a cosmic experience of unreason "as the furtive presence of the other world," whereas the transcendence of modern unreason is located "right here [*ici même*]" (ibid, 349). In other words, what was once the trace of an other-worldly transcendence has been transformed, through the work of language, into a kind of immanent transcendence.

being. In other words, if the distinguishing aspect of the being of human being (Dasein) is to be that being which takes up its own being as a problem, then unreason, for western culture, played a privileged existential role for over three centuries. It is this role, nearly forgotten in the contemporary social world, whose very erasure is covered over by positivism's mastery of madness as mental illness.

Yet if the vertical dimension of madness has all but disappeared, 'the general form of transgression' – that is, the fundamental limit-experience of the tragic, of which unreason had merely been the most recent historical visage – remains nonetheless; and the 'new experience' to which transgression is 'in the process of giving birth' will take form 'inside our language' as an excluded and subversive kind of vertical speech. Indeed, this is why, in a roundtable debate from the same year (1964), Foucault suggests that "[w]e now find the reason-unreason problem – in any case, the violence of the reason-unreason problem – at the interior of language.... In the field ... of language, what is fully at stake is most likely the possibility of contestation of our culture."²⁸⁶ Just as, in *History of Madness*, the problem of material expression becomes the problem of resistance, so that the expression of unreason, whose historically contingent unsustainability derives from the very violence of constitutive division that founds western culture, by the same token constitutes 'a point from which all contestation becomes possible, as well as the contestation of all things'; so, now, Foucault responds to the political problem of material expression by situating 'the possibility of contestation' against the dividing practices of the modern social formation within 'the field of language.'

²⁸⁶ Foucault, "Débat sur la poésie," *Dits et écrits I*, 426, my translation.

To account for this emergent political force of language, Foucault provides a general typology of the four forms of excluded speech proper to, and (at least in part) constitutive of, western culture.²⁸⁷ The first interdiction, which, “at the border between taboo and impossibility,” regulates the exterior limit of meaning, is provided by “the laws that govern the linguistic code (the things that are called, so clearly, *language faults* [fautes de langue])”²⁸⁸: that is, errors in speech, meaningless or babbling words, etc., which fail to meet the minimum conditions of intelligibility for a given language. Second, from inside the established linguistic code, there are “*blasphemous words*” that, while perfectly intelligible, are forbidden utterance.²⁸⁹ Third, there are those forms of expression whose very signification, rather than the choice of terms, is “the object of *censorship*”: that is, statements which are both intelligible and uttered using permitted words, “but whose meaning is intolerable for the culture in question at a given moment.”²⁹⁰ The expression of any of these three forms of speech is, in a sense, transgressive, since they are all prohibited from being spoken in their different ways.

However, Foucault’s chief interest lies elsewhere, in a mode of expression possessed, as he puts it in “Language to Infinity,” of a ‘secret verticality’ that will ultimately conjoin unreason’s vision and literature’s language:

²⁸⁷ To give the order of presentation of the essay, and thus the immediate context for Foucault’s typology, his argument begins with the claim that limits, prohibitions, exclusions, etc. (and hence, implicitly, a certain structure of transgression) are universal in all human cultures and serve as their starting point: “it has been known for some time that man does not begin with freedom, but with limits and the line that cannot be crossed” (Foucault, “Madness, The Absence of an (Euvre,” 544). Foucault then distinguishes between forms of prohibited acts, which are relatively “familiar” (e.g., incest taboos), and forms of prohibited speech, which remain “little understood”; and he proposes, in turn, to map out “the field of prohibitions in language” (ibid, 544-5).

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 545.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

Finally, there is a fourth form of excluded language: this consists of submitting speech that apparently conforms to the recognized code to a different code, whose key is contained within that speech itself, so that the *speech is doubled inside itself*; it says what it says, but it adds a *mute surplus* that silently states [*énoncé*] what it says and the code according to which it is said. This is *not a question of coded language*, but of a language that is structurally esoteric. Which is to say that it *does not communicate*, while hiding it, a forbidden meaning: it sets itself up from the very first instant in an *essential fold of speech*. A fold that mines it from the inside, perhaps to infinity. What is said in such a language is of little importance, as are the meanings that are delivered there. It is this obscure and central liberation of speech at the heart of itself, its *uncontrollable flight* to a region that is always dark [*toujours sans lumière*], which no culture can accept immediately. Such speech is transgressive, not in its meaning, not in its verbal matter, but in its play.²⁹¹

Rather than either falling dumbly outside the governing conditions of a language or scandalizing from within these conditions (whether by force of diction or sense), ‘structurally esoteric’ forms of expression act upon the conditions themselves, transforming the very code that regulates a given language by ‘submitting speech to a different code.’ That is – and here we perhaps glimpse an aspect of Deleuze’s interest in this essay –, the ‘fourth form of excluded language’ produces a decoded flow of speech, a line of ‘uncontrollable flight’ within language that constitutes the ‘obscure and central liberation of speech at the heart of itself.’ In this region at once matutine and nocturnal, which is *toujours sans lumière* (‘still without light’), language, returning to and developing from out of itself, finds its freedom by escaping its codification within the representational dynasty of discourse; and it does so through an auto-implicative function by which ‘speech is doubled inside itself,’ containing within itself the key to the different code that governs it. Like the ‘duplication’ of the auto-mirroring self-relation of literary language depicted in “Language to Infinity,” in which the ‘possibility of a work of language finds its original fold,’ structurally esoteric speech generates, from out of its

²⁹¹ Ibid.

own intrinsic excess, the ‘mute surplus’ that stealthily announces the secret of its brute, abyssal being as language: that is, the secret, as in “The Thought of the Outside,” of ‘the void that language takes as its space,’ only here described as that ‘essential fold of speech’ which hollows language ‘from the inside, perhaps to infinity,’ and which consummates the double death of God and man in the dispersal of the speaking subject. In other words, a structurally esoteric language is one which, mined from within, opens thought to without.

By virtue, then, of an infinitely recursive auto-doubling function precisely akin to that of vertical writing, structural esotericism decodes what appears to be given as horizontal discourse, which is to say, what appears to conform to the established epistemic conditions of a discursive formation. Accordingly, Foucault privileges this mode of excluded speech, for its force as a form of transgression issues neither from its ‘meaning’ (as with censorship), nor from its ‘verbal matter’ (as with language errors and blasphemy), but from its ‘play,’ that is, from the line of flight or creative mutation that it produces in the field of language. The secret verticality of such a language, like the tragic expression of unreason, is thus intolerable to the culture whose codes it threatens and whose conditions of thought it undermines.

Now, having posited this general typology of excluded forms of speech, Foucault is able to rearticulate the project of *History of Madness* in terms of expression. Beginning with the Great Confinement of the classical period, madness enters into

...the universe of language prohibitions; with madness, classical confinement encloses libertinage of thought and speech, obstinacy in impiety or heterodoxy, blasphemy, witchcraft, alchemy – everything in short that characterizes the *spoken* and forbidden world of unreason: madness is the excluded language – the one which against the code of language pronounces words without meaning (the

‘insane’, the ‘imbeciles,’ the ‘demented’), or the one which pronounces sacred words (the ‘violent’, the ‘frenzied’), or the one which puts forbidden meanings into circulation (‘libertines,’ the ‘obstinate’).²⁹²

From the perspective of classical reason, as articulated by psychiatric discourse and reflected in institutional practice, the interdicted ‘world of unreason’ is organized according to the first three forms of excluded language and the species of mental illness that correspond to them.²⁹³ Indeed, the function of ‘classical confinement,’ which is later only intensified through the birth of the modern asylum, is precisely to structure and enforce this set of exclusions, to impose the silence of which Foucault will write the archaeology.

The modern experience of madness, in turn, passes over into the fourth region of excluded speech. From reason’s horizontal point of view (and thus still in terms of mental illness), it is Freud who discovers in madness an esoteric language. Madness, no longer construed as “a language fault, a blasphemy spoken out loud, or an intolerable meaning,” appears “as speech wrapped up in itself, saying, *below* everything that it says, something else, for which it is at the same time the only possible code: an esoteric language perhaps, since its language is contained inside a speech that ultimately says nothing other than this implication.”²⁹⁴ As apprehended by psychoanalysis, madness is esoterically structured because it belongs to “the still transgressive region ... of languages that imply themselves”²⁹⁵: folding its speech back upon itself, madness doubles what it says with an announcement of the language in which it says it, an announcement which is the secret

²⁹² Ibid, 546.

²⁹³ To make this explicit: to the first form of excluded speech, language faults, correspond the insane, the imbeciles, and the demented; to the second, blasphemous words, correspond the violent and the frenzied; and to the third, censored meanings, corresponds the libertines and the obstinate.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 546, my emphasis.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

key to what is said – indeed, an announcement which, strictly speaking, is all that is said. For far from liberating madness to speak in its own name, Freud essentially disqualifies it from saying anything other than *that* it is mad, all the while compelling it to speak. All madness can now state is the language in which it speaks, namely, madness, i.e., that it is mad.

The expression of the mad is debarred any possible positive content other than implicating the mad in their own madness, thereby constituting an ever more repressive form of subjection:

Since Freud, Western madness has become a non-language because it has become a double language (a language which only exists in this speech, a speech that says nothing but its language) – i.e., a matrix of the language which, strictly speaking, says nothing. A fold of the spoken which is an absence of work. ...[W]hat [Freud] did was silence the unreasonable Logos; he dried it out, he forced its words back to their source, all the way back to that blank region of auto-implication where nothing is said.²⁹⁶

Here we see in what sense madness is the ‘absence of work’: namely, as the desiccation of a flow of speech, the silencing of a language which, divested of content and blocked from transitivity, becomes a useless and hollow ‘fold of the spoken.’ All such speech can communicate is that madness is its subject, that which speaks in it and that about which it speaks. And by saying the only thing it is authorized to state, madness undermines the very authority of the subject who speaks, who is indicted as mad and thus incapable of an *œuvre* – which is also to say, of producing a statement, of conveying an established meaning, of forming a work of expression that would take as its field of reference a shared world of objects. Thus, the ‘blank region of auto-implication’ to which the

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 547.

esoteric language of madness is forced back designates less the liberation of speech in its transgressive play than the rigorous exclusion of madness.

Yet it is precisely here that Foucault will stage a reversal, for it is this auto-implicative folding function of madness that enables it to make common cause with literature: “Literature (and this probably since Mallarmé), in its turn, is slowly becoming a language [*un langage*] whose speech states, at the same time as what it says and as part of the same movement, the language [*la langue*] that makes it decipherable as speech.”²⁹⁷ Indeed, by virtue of its structural esotericism – that secret verticality through which literary language doubles itself endlessly –, writing, in the modern period, became “a speech that inscribed inside itself the principle of its own decoding; or in any case, it supposed, *beneath* each of its sentences, each of its words, the sovereign power to modify the values and meanings of the language to which despite everything (and in fact) it belonged; it *suspended the reign of language* in the present of a gesture of writing [*dans un geste actuel d’écriture*].”²⁹⁸ The transgressive force of literature thus issues from its power as an esoteric language to act upon and transform the conditions of language itself, that is, the code governing the ‘values and meanings’ of any given speech. By submitting the language that makes up the materiality of its being to a different code than the one governing the horizontal conveyance of received meaning, literature ‘suspends the reign of language,’ which is to say, disrupts that dynasty of discourse which grounds the

²⁹⁷ Foucault, “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre,” 547. As we have already seen Foucault suggest in “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” this esoteric structure of literature explains its intimate proximity with critique (or ‘vertical interpretation’), for the “necessity for these secondary languages (what we call criticism, in short)” (ibid, 548) follows from the ontology of literary language. It is in this sense that the activity of critique is an infinite, auto-transformative task or process of becoming.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 547-8, my emphasis.

epistemic formation of positivism, opening, in the very experience of vertical writing, a space in which it may once again become possible to think.

It will be the space of literature, then, that comes to house the general form of transgression which had been the expressive charge of unreason. In other words, for Foucault, writing in the 1960s, the limit-experience of the tragic, delivered from its last remaining ties to mental illness, has become *l'expérience littéraire*. If madness qua mental illness is the absence of a work – “a language silencing itself in its superimposition on itself”²⁹⁹; a form of speech so radically excluded that those who would speak it collapse into catatonia or suicide –, then, inversely, unreason expressed through literature will constitute the language-work as such, relaying speech in its freedom to the original fold of its being as literary language. For this “being of literature,” which is “related to auto-implication, to the double and the void that is hollowed out within it,”³⁰⁰ provides the conditions of material expression for the vertical-tragic mode of experience that western culture violently divides from itself.

3.4.4 *Foucault's Literary Politics and Its Failure: Enter the Problem of Capitalism*

“Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre” thus allows us to take the full measure of the ‘ruse and new triumph of madness’ that completes Foucault’s work on unreason and orients his theorization of literature. At the very moment that reason appears to have confined madness in mental illness so completely that all that remains is a clinically masterable pathology, “madness releases itself from its kinship ... with mental illness,”

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 548.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

entering the “region of excluded language ... that is circumscribed, held sacred, feared, *erected vertically above itself* [dressé à la verticale au-dessus de lui-même], reflecting itself [*se rapportant à soi*] in a useless and transgressive Fold, and is known as literature....”³⁰¹

Escaping the medical gaze of psychiatry, madness is freed, through the formal esoteric structure of literature, to reconstitute a vertical line of force, just as speech is liberated at the heart of itself through the line of flight by which it is transported outside dominant discursive conditions. The ‘test, *l’épreuve*, of Unreason,’ which it had been the ‘essence of the modern world’ to ‘petrify’ and ‘deprive of language,’ finds its support now in the literary experience of transgression, in the vertical space of literature where the “anthropological unity” of man as founding subject of positivism is “disappearing” like “a passing postulate”: “an experience is coming into being where our thinking is at stake....”³⁰²

Indeed, the very traits that, from the horizontal perspective of reason, justify the silencing of madness, become transvalued when reinterpreted in a vertical dimension. The *History of Madness* had already performed one such reversal when the negative formulation by which classical reason defines unreason – namely, as reason dazzled, a thought which *cannot see* in the clear and distinct light of day – is transvalued by tragic works as the power of the ‘abyss-deep thought’ that can *see the nothing* bleeding through reason’s pale diurnal forms. Just so, now, the privative characteristics that since Freud have been ascribed to madness as an esoteric language become transfigured as

³⁰¹ Ibid, 549, my emphasis.

³⁰² Ibid.

affirmative features of unreason's subversive expression qua literature. That literature is a double or auto-implicative language does not mean that it says nothing other than the fact of its raving, but that it develops from out of itself a decoded flow of speech which breaks with the horizontal reign of discourse and calls into question the latter's conditions of intelligibility and enunciability. That literature's auto-mirroring self-relation constitutes 'a useless and transgressive Fold' does not indicate its sterility but its resistance to being consumed as communication. That literature is intransitive does not reduce it to the poverty of a fold of speech that refers nowhere, but opens language to the infinite resourcefulness immanent to its own image, to the 'vertical system of mirrors' that gives form to the irreducible virtual space of its abyssal being. That literature undermines the authority of the speaking subject does not disqualify its right to speak, but displaces any such subject-position through the thought of the outside that exceeds and undoes it, thereby preparing a form of radical contestation.

In short: by way of response to the double problem of resistance and material expression, Foucault will advocate a literary politics of transgression; and the conceptual key to this politics – which also accounts for the strange proximity of madness and literature, as well as the passage of Foucault's thought from the former to the latter – is the expressive form of verticality, that auto-superposition of a language 'erected vertically above itself.' For, as Foucault will remark six years later, it is the "vertical and nearly untransmissible activity of writing" that accounts for literature's isomorphism with madness, with that excluded "language that takes up a vertical position [*se tient à la verticale*] and is no longer transmissible speech, having lost all value as currency of

exchange.”³⁰³ And it is by virtue of this vertical remove at the ‘outer limit of speech’ that literature can contest the coding of language that circulates throughout the social field and conditions what it is possible to think and say within the horizon of a given episteme.

The political force of literary verticality, then, is twofold. First, literature expresses and sustains a form of thought, made possible philosophically by a minor strain of Kantian thought, that breaks with the epistemic formation of man – a break that is political precisely “to the extent that all the regimes of the East or the West peddle their defective wares under the banner of humanism.”³⁰⁴ Second, vertical writing, as “an act placed outside the socio-economic system,” remains exterior to the horizontal circuits of social production and exchange, existing “manifestly for itself and ... independently of all consumption, all readership, all pleasure and all utility.”³⁰⁵ That is, literature’s “function of transgression” derives from “the intransitive character of writing,” which, by opposing the mode of value production proper to social circulation, constitutes “a force of contestation in relation to society.”³⁰⁶ As Deleuze puts it, “the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance”³⁰⁷; and the subversive political charge of literary verticality issues from its irreducible exteriority to the modern social formation.

If Foucault’s politics of literary transgression has received little scholarly attention, however, this may be because he himself largely abandoned it just before undertaking what is considered to be his more properly political work: namely, his critical analytic of

³⁰³ Foucault, “Folie, littérature, société,” *Dits et écrits I*: 982, my translation.

³⁰⁴ Foucault, “Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal,” *Dits et écrits I*, 544, my translation.

³⁰⁵ Foucault, “Folie, littérature, société,” 982, my translation.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 90.

power throughout the 1970s. For Foucault, the worldwide “revolutionary movements”³⁰⁸ of the late 1960s – including the Cultural Revolution in China; the student struggles of May 1968 in Paris; and the student revolts of March 1968 in Tunisia, in which he directly participated³⁰⁹ – called into question the potency of writing, whether literary or otherwise, as a transformative political tactic. Signaling a turning point if not a crisis in his thought, Foucault confronts this problem in an interview conducted in Japan between September and October of 1970:

Does the subversive function of writing still remain? Hasn't the time already past when the sole act of writing ... sufficed for expressing a form of contestation against modern society? Hasn't the time now come to move on to truly revolutionary actions? Now that the bourgeoisie and capitalist society have totally dispossessed writing of these actions, doesn't the fact of writing serve only to re-enforce the repressive system of the bourgeoisie? Mustn't we cease writing? Please understand that I am not kidding when I say all this. It is someone who continues to write who is speaking to you.³¹⁰

The issue, in short, is the problem of capitalism: whereas the activity of literary writing could be said to have subversive force in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the becoming-commodity of art has defused and re-appropriated this force.

Indeed, Foucault sketches the historical trajectory of literature's transgressive function in terms of the modern emergence and contemporary collapse of the vertical (virtual, infinite) space proper to literary language. Until the end of the seventeenth century, the practice of writing had implied writing for an audience, communicating

³⁰⁸ Foucault, “Folie, littérature, société,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 983, my translation. Foucault will return to the importance of these political movements in his dialogue with Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power,” which we will discuss in the following chapter.

³⁰⁹ These events in Tunisia constituted, for Foucault, ‘*une expérience politique*’ – one, precisely, which takes a vertical form as the limit-experience of revolt, and which Foucault considered to be personally formative (see Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 278-282). We will return to this in detail below in Chapter 6.

³¹⁰ Foucault, “Folie, littérature, société,” 983, my translation.

something (whether to teach, to inform, to entertain, etc.) by “circulating” a meaning “inside of a social group.”³¹¹ As we saw in Foucault’s “Introduction to Rousseau’s *Dialogues*,” such is the communicative function of linear or horizontal writing. By contrast (as we have also seen), modern literature “is oriented in another direction” insofar as it constitutes a ‘vertical and nearly untransmissible activity of writing’; and it is by virtue of its verticality or structural esotericism that literary language occupies a position of exteriority in relation to “the socio-economic system, such as the circulation and formation of values.”³¹² At least, that is how literature “has functioned until now,”³¹³ “until recently.”³¹⁴

The problem is precisely that literature’s vertical “exteriority”³¹⁵ has been captured, absorbed, and reduced by the bourgeoisie’s “great force of assimilation”: literary writing has been divested of its subversive charge, reintegrated “inside of the social system” and repossessing the kind of “normal social function” it had performed before the modern period.³¹⁶ That is, literary works have become horizontal once again, now as so many readily consumed commodities re-inscribed into the circuits of social circulation as

³¹¹ Ibid, 981-2, my translation.

³¹² Ibid, 982, my translation. Cf.: “I believe that in Europe, until the 19th century, literature was still a deeply institutionalized form of discourse. To write a play essentially meant wanting to please a well-defined group of people; to write a book or novel meant wanting to please a certain category of individuals, or wanting to edify, or wanting to impart a lesson in morality. On the other hand, beginning in the 19th century, literature in Europe was in a way de-institutionalized, freed from its institutional status, and in its most elevated formulations, which alone can be considered valid, tended to become absolutely anarchic speech, institutionless speech, profoundly marginal speech that crosses and mines all the other forms of discourse” (Foucault, “La folie et la société,” *Dits et écrits II, 1976—1988*, 489-490, my translation).

³¹³ Foucault, “Folie, littérature, société,” 982, my translation.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 995, my translation.

³¹⁵ Ibid, my translation.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 987, my translation.

products of “our ‘system of writing,’” “a system that is absolutely characteristic of capitalist bourgeois society.”³¹⁷

Foucault thus concludes that “the bourgeoisie has succeeded in defeating literature,”³¹⁸ a conclusion that will compel him to rethink his conception of political contestation; for the failure of the literary politics of transgression indicates “the strength of the enemy that we must combat and the weakness of the weapon that is literature.”³¹⁹ The problem is once again that of material expression: indeed, the precise deficiency of literary politics is that capitalism has neutralized its power to realize and sustain a vertical form of experience. *L’expérience littéraire* thereby goes the way of the tragic experience of madness, and in its wake, the problem must be posed anew of how to give expression to that which, at an irreducible remove from the contemporary social formation, would radically resist or transform it.³²⁰ This, in turn, will entail rethinking the irreducibility proper to the vertical.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 994, my translation. Foucault gives as an example the contrast between Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) – “a story of adulterers and suicide,” which caused a scandal simply by “reproducing in a work the everyday reality of a bourgeois family” – and Pierre Guyotat’s *Éden, Éden, Éden* (1970), which was socially accepted as a work despite depicting homosexual practices that in actual fact went legally punished: “The transgressive force of literature has at this point been lost” (ibid, 985-6, my translation).

³¹⁸ Ibid, 987, my translation.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 988., my translation

³²⁰ In a lecture given during the same trip to Japan, Foucault is explicit in linking the modern form of madness as mental illness to capitalism: “It is said that Pinel liberated the madmen in 1793, but those he liberated were only sick people, old people, idlers, prostitutes; he left the madmen in the institutions. This took place when it did because, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the speed of industrial development accelerated, and, in accordance with the first principle of capitalism, the hordes of unemployed proletarians were regarded as a reserve army of labor power. For that reason, those who did not work but were able to work were let out of the establishments. But there, too, a second process of selection took effect: not only those who were unwilling to work, but those who did not have the ability to work, namely the mad, were left in the establishments and regarded as patients whose troubles had characterological or psychological causes. ... [I]f this medicalization [of the madman] occurred, it was ... essentially for economic and social reasons: that was how the madman was made identical to the mentally ill individual and an entity called ‘mental illness’ was discovered and developed. ... It could be said that the madman is an avatar of our capitalist societies” (Foucault, “Madness and Society,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 341-2). In this way, whether with respect to unreason or to literature, the political problem of material expression is also the problem of capitalism.

There are two directions that Foucault's thought will take in response to this new formulation of the problem of material expression as the problem of capitalism. One of these directions, oriented by an engagement with Deleuze's metaphysics of intensive difference and Nietzsche's genealogical critique of historical force relations, will subtly reformulate the concept of the vertical, preparing its subsequent reappearance at the end of the 1970s in Foucault's writings on revolt as '*l'expérience politique*.' Thus, though Foucault ultimately leaves behind the literary politics that had guided his work over the prior decade, he does not jettison its conceptual key. Yet while verticality will remain in a way irreducible to the horizontality of historical causation, it will no longer be posited as a spatial concept of exteriority³²¹, but will instead be rearticulated in the language of intensities, events, and forces. Although this conceptual development begins contemporaneously with Foucault's rejection of literary politics, we will be better situated to give a full interpretation of it in Chapter 5, after having elaborated in detail Foucault's philosophical relationship or 'block of becoming' with Deleuze.

The other direction Foucault's thought will take, emerging precisely over the course of his relation to Deleuze, proposes the concept of 'transversality' as the basis for a new theory of political struggle – one that would better respond to the problem of material expression proper to capitalist society. It is this trajectory that we will explore at length in the following two chapters.

³²¹ Foucault and Deleuze will both later provide a non-spatial conception of the thought of the outside, namely, as the 'line of flight,' a term which we have already seen Foucault use in "Distance, aspect, origine" with respect to the verticality of literary language. Deleuze, in reference to Foucault, will also call this the 'line of the outside.' In this case, the 'outside' will refer not to an Exterior, but to an intensive vector that describes the centrifugal movement of force. We will return to this point at length below in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4. *THE CONCEPT OF TRANSVERSAL CONNECTION: CAPITALISM, POWER, AND RESISTANCE*

“A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation of distant or contiguous points. ... If becoming is a block (a line-block), it is because it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man’s-land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points....”

— Deleuze and Guattari³²²

Between Foucault and Deleuze, cutting across three decades, there runs a transversal line whose trajectory impels both thinkers in a reciprocal process or block of becoming. This line, shaping the contours of an exceedingly rich philosophical friendship, charts a common project of transversal resistance, which, I will argue, is indispensable for understanding the political thought of both Deleuze and Foucault. Indeed, it is the concept of transversality that allows Foucault to escape the impasse of his literary politics, develop an analytic of power in response to the problem of capitalism, and, together with Deleuze, formulate a more compelling solution to the problem of material expression.

Over the following two chapters, this ‘line-block’ of becoming will be mapped according to four segments: the first, running from Foucault’s *History of Madness* (1961) to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), posits in incipient form the political

³²² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, 293-4, translation slightly modified.

project of transversal resistance as a response to the problem of capitalism³²³; the second, running from *Anti-Oedipus* to Foucault's analytic of power (1970s)³²⁴, prepares the critical ground necessary for the positive elaboration of such a political project; and the third and fourth, running from the analytic of power through Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) to Foucault's late ethico-politics (1981-1984)³²⁵, undertake this positive elaboration.

More specifically, the first segment concerns unreason and schizophrenia as absolute exterior limits of the social formation, intensive forms of experience and expression that scramble the dominant codifications of social order. Freeing and

³²³ In truth, this first segment could begin before *History of Madness*, with an article by Deleuze in 1959 on Nietzsche and tragedy, "Sens et valeurs" (which would become a chapter in Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* three years later). Warren Montag makes a convincing case for situating this article in proximity to Foucault's original preface to *History of Madness*, especially with regard to the ideas of constitutive division (originary difference, difference in itself) and tragic affirmation: "The placing of 'the refusal, forgetting and silent disappearance of tragedy' at the center and origin of the Occidental world, together with the opposition of 'the immobile structures of the tragic' to a 'dialectics of history,' suggests that Foucault's reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in its themes and concerns, not to mention the particulars of its interpretation of this notoriously obscure text, coincides with, even if it is not derived from, that of Deleuze. ... For Deleuze, the 'real opposition' in *The Birth of Tragedy* is not the 'wholly dialectical opposition of Dionysos and Apollo, but the more profound opposition of Dionysos and Socrates' (Deleuze 1959: 15). Moreover, Deleuze's hostility to any notion of the dialectic compels him to argue that in fact Nietzsche has advanced a thoroughly non-dialectical account of the Dionysian-Apollonian relation, that is, the 'original' (Deleuze places the term in quotation marks) contradiction between a 'primitive' unity and individuation. We can already see the paradox at the heart of Deleuze's reading (which, further begins to suggest its relevance for Foucault): the contradiction between these terms is original and thus there can be no inquiring back before, even as one of the terms is said to be primitive or primary in relation to the other. Deleuze suspends the possibility of a unity that would precede its division into two parts.... Diversity and difference are original: unity is always secondary and derivative.... The Nietzschean tragic for Deleuze is 'affirmative': not only the affirmation of original difference, but even the affirmation of the difference between the same and the different, the multiple and the one. The tragic affirms the essential diversity of being and becoming" (Montag, "'Foucault and the Problematic of Origins': Althusser's Reading of *Folie et déraison*," §20).

³²⁴ In particular, I have in mind Foucault's two major books from this period, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1976), as well as his lecture courses at the Collège de France (especially those running from *Psychiatric Power* in 1974 through *The Birth of Biopolitics* in 1979) and numerous other essays and interviews (in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988*, some of which are translated in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault Volume 3*), extending until "The Subject and Power" (1982).

³²⁵ See Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. In particular, I will focus on "Friendship as a Way of Life" (1981), "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will" (1981), "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" (1982), "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Works in Progress" (1983), and "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations" (1984).

transversally connecting these lines of flight becomes the project of 'schizo-political' struggle: if *History of Madness* had politicized the problem of material expression, *Anti-Oedipus*, in turn, develops a general theory of society and transformative politics based upon this problem. The second segment, in turn, provides a micro-political theory that poses the problem of power and resistance in capitalist society in terms of the production of two different kinds of multiplicity: one that is denumerable and controllable, and another that is non-denumerable and unruly. While the second segment prepares and begins the positive articulation of transversal resistance, the third treats of it systematically through the concept of minoritarian becoming, understood as the collective creation of a transverse multiplicity and instructively exemplified through the prison movement. Finally, the fourth segment singularizes this concept by developing a particular example through which the operation of power would be thwarted: namely, the Foucauldian project of becoming-queer.

Taken in its full trajectory, what emerges over the course of this Foucault-Deleuze block of becoming is a theory of transversal political struggle. Whereas Foucault's literary politics of transgression had posited a form of exteriority since collapsed by capitalism, transversal resistance will propose a different response to the problem of realizing and sustaining a collective mode of political agency capable of transforming the conditions of the social formation. Ultimately, in the account of political agency that I will propose, the necessary condition of realization for such agency is articulated through the concept of transversal connection.

4.1 *Schizo-Politics: A Transversal Response to the Political Problem of the Two Regimes of Madness*

Anti-Oedipus can be understood as the development and sophistication of the core project given in *History of Madness*, for both works pose and respond to a common problem as the key for a general social theory and political strategy of contestation: namely, the problem of the two regimes of madness.³²⁶ The distinction between these two regimes is drawn as follows: the first – the ‘breakthrough’ – is characterized as a kind of radical limit-experience, expressed through works of art, that ruptures or calls into question the order of social reality; the second – the ‘breakdown’ – is characterized as a catatonic collapse that follows the initial breakthrough.³²⁷ The problem, then, is the seemingly inexorable slippage from the first regime to the second: why and how is it that the ‘authentically insane,’ as Artaud puts it – those schizophrenic artists who (as Deleuze says) “live in an almost unbearable proximity to the real”³²⁸ – are deprived the support necessary to sustain their intensive mode of becoming, falling instead into the ravages of madness and suicide?³²⁹

³²⁶ In this regard, both thinkers are profoundly Artaudian – and indeed, Artaud is a common early reference point for both. On Artaud’s thesis regarding Van Gogh and the ‘authentically insane,’ see our discussion of Foucault’s *History of Madness* above in Chapter 3.

³²⁷ Deleuze borrows the terminology of ‘breakthrough’ and ‘breakdown’ from R.D. Laing’s *The Politics of Experience*; he also notes the close connection with Foucault’s account in *History of Madness* of the historical separation of madness as unreason (breakthrough) from madness as mental illness (breakdown). See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, 131-2.

³²⁸ Deleuze, “Schizophrenia and Society,” in *Two Regimes of Madness*, edited by David Lapoujade, translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, 27.

³²⁹ That is, why and how does the schizophrenic ‘visionary’ (Artaud) become consigned to break down into “the autistic schizophrenic, who no longer moves, and who can remain motionless for years” (Deleuze, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia,” in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1975*, edited by Lapoujade, 240). As Deleuze puts it, “What can we do so the break-through does not become a break-down?” (Deleuze, “Schizophrenia and Society,” 28).

For both Foucault and Deleuze, this question speaks to something fundamental about the way society functions. Indeed, the problem of the two regimes of madness has significant *political* stakes because the practices that reduce the first form of madness to the second are the very constitutive processes by which the social formation is organized and reproduced; that is, something about the intensive experience of the schizophrenic breakthrough poses a grave danger to the social order, and the expulsion of this threat is formative for the foundation and development of society. I will refer to this claim, which bears the unmistakable stamp of Artaud's essay on Van Gogh, as the *Artaud thesis*. The problem of the two regimes of madness thus opens onto a more general theory of the constitutive exclusions by which the socius is formed, and it suggests a possible strategy of resistance that would privilege the schizoid 'line of the outside' as a site for political contestation.

In the last chapter, we saw how Foucault poses the problem of the two regimes of madness in terms of an opposition between unreason and mental illness. The political task that follows from this initial formulation of the problematic is to provide the conditions of material expression that would support and sustain the limit-experience of unreason. However, as we have also seen, the resultant literary politics of transgression runs aground of the problem of capitalism, leading Foucault to direct his conception of political resistance away from unreason and literature toward an analytic of power.

Foucault's analytic of power, however, is first made possible by the work of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. On the one hand, *Anti-Oedipus* is profoundly continuous with *History of Madness*, for unreason and schizophrenia are analogous in at least three ways: *limit-experientially*, as modes of intensive becoming, which stand in

direct relation to the outside,³³⁰ breakthroughs always in danger of breaking down into mental illness,³³¹ *historically*, as absolute exterior limits of the socius, the exclusion of which is constitutive to the functioning of society; and *politically*, as the basis for conceiving a strategy of resistance to the violence of this social production. However, what Deleuze and Guattari add is an analysis of schizophrenia conducted specifically in relation to capitalism, which allows them to go beyond Foucault's transgressive politics toward a transversal politics of connection.

Anti-Oedipus articulates the two regimes of madness as two forms of schizophrenia: (1) "the schizo-as-entity," the broken down or catatonic schizophrenic subject corresponding to mental illness; and (2) schizophrenia as process, that is, the pure, universal process of production, or decoded flows of desire. In turn, Deleuze and Guattari formulate their version of the Artaud thesis: these decoded flows or lines of flight of the schizophrenic process threaten to scramble the social codes and thus subvert the functioning of the socius, since social formations organize and reproduce themselves on the basis of ordering, coding, or re-territorializing flows of desire.³³² Thus, schizophrenia – as a pure process of desiring-production – is exorcised from the socius, forming its

³³⁰ "There is a schizophrenic experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable – a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form. ... A harrowing, emotionally overwhelming experience, which brings the schizo as close as possible to matter, to a burning, living center of matter" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19).

³³¹ Echoing Foucault's questions in *History of Madness* concerning why those who attempted the test of unreason are consigned to fall into madness or suicide, Deleuze and Guattari write: "How is it possible that the schizo was conceived of as the autistic rag – separated from the real and cut off from life – that he is so often thought to be? Worse still: how can psychiatric practice have made him this sort of rag, how can it have reduced him to this state of a body without organs that has become a dead thing – this schizo who sought to remain at that unbearable point where the mind touches matter and lives every intensity, consumes it?" (ibid, 19-20).

³³² "The prime function incumbent upon the socius, has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channeled, regulated" (ibid, 33).

absolute exterior limit. This movement of exclusion is integral to the very formation of society.

Like Foucault then, Deleuze and Guattari offer a general social theory and history of limits based on the Artaud thesis. Further, they distinguish three social formations on the basis of how they order decoded flows of desire. ‘Primitive’ societies ward off the threat of schizoid deterritorialization by coding their flows, operating on the basis of mobile and finite blocks of debt that weave together an open system of alliances and filiations. ‘Imperial’ societies, in turn, over-code these flows, raising them into a new alliance and direct filiation with an eminent transcendent unity (the despotic State).

‘Capitalist’ societies, however, have a fundamentally different relation to the threat of schizoid decoding, for like the process of schizophrenia, capitalism operates on the basis of decoded flows (e.g., decoded flows of money and decoded flows of labor).³³³ The crucial difference between capitalism and schizophrenia is that the former axiomatizes the flows it decodes and thus subjects desiring-production to an ever more rigorous form of control. The deterritorializing “process is continually interrupted, or the tendency counteracted, or the limit displaced.”³³⁴ Rather than expelling the schizoid decoded flows as an exterior limit in the manner of primitive and imperial societies, capitalism displaces them by interiorizing them at the heart of social production, harnessing their force by converting them into capital. And this is just how the capitalist

³³³ In this way, capitalism and schizophrenia are “one and the same economy, one and the same production process,” (ibid, 245) for “the decoding and the deterritorialization of flows define the very process of capitalism” (ibid, 320).

³³⁴ Ibid. Thus, capitalism is the *relative* limit of all pre-capitalist societies – “it effects relative breaks, because it substitutes for the codes an extremely rigorous axiomatic that maintains the energy of the flows in a bound state on the body of capital” – whereas schizophrenia is the *absolute* limit of every social formation, capitalism included (ibid, 246).

machine operates, by “directly apprehending” decoded flows “in a codeless axiomatic”³³⁵: for any deterritorialized flow, such as that produced by a tragic work of unreason, an axiom can be added that absorbs it into a flow of capital.³³⁶ Indeed, this is precisely why Foucault’s literary politics of transgression failed.

This function of capitalism, in turn, is how Deleuze and Guattari account for the problem of the two regimes of madness.³³⁷ The sick schizo is an effect of the double process of production by which capitalism “axiomatizes with the one hand what it decodes with the other.”³³⁸ It is through this process that capitalism re-territorializes the flows it decodes so as to keep them from “escaping the system.”³³⁹ As a result, it falls to the lot of schizophrenic subjects alone to express the force of an absolute de-territorialization, and “a flow of madness ... is defined thus because it is charged with representing whatever escapes the axiomatic and the applications of reterritorialization in other flows.”³⁴⁰ Because this charge is too great to sustain, lacking the conditions of material expression that would support it, the schizoid breakthrough is consigned to a catatonic breakdown.

³³⁵ Ibid, 337.

³³⁶ “Then what becomes of the ‘truly’ schizophrenic language and the ‘truly’ decoded and unbound flows that manage to break through the wall or absolute limit? The capitalist axiomatic is so rich that one more axiom is added – for the books of a great writer whose lexical and stylistic characteristics can always be computed by means of an electronic machine, or for the discourse of madmen that can always be heard within the framework of a hospital, administrative, and psychiatric axiomatic” (ibid, 246).

³³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari pose this problem in strikingly Foucauldian terms: “Why does [capitalist production] confine its madmen and madwomen instead of seeing in them its own heroes and heroines, its own fulfillment? And where it can no longer recognize the figure of a simple illness, why does it keep its artists and even its scientists under such close surveillance – as though they risked unleashing flows that would be dangerous for capitalist production and charged with a revolutionary potential, so long as these flows are not co-opted or absorbed by the laws of the market?” (ibid, 245).

³³⁸ Ibid, 246.

³³⁹ Thus, for example, the decoded flow of labor is maintained “in the axiomatic framework of property,” and decoded libidinal flows are maintained “in the applied framework of the family” (ibid, 320).

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 320.

The schizo-political strategy of resistance that follows from this theory of society has two objectives. The first extends Foucault's project in *History of Madness*: namely, "undoing all the reterritorializations that transform madness into mental illness,"³⁴¹ and thus contesting the normalizing techniques of subjection and division that organize social reality. It is the second objective, however, that opens for the first time onto the thought of transversal resistance, namely, "liberating the schizoid movement of deterritorialization in all the flows, in such a way that this characteristic can no longer qualify a particular residue as a flow of madness, but affects just as well the flows of labor and desire, of production, knowledge, and creation in their most profound tendency."³⁴²

Given that the capitalist social formation produces a multiplicity of social flows and functions on the basis of their decoding and axiomatization, schizo-political resistance aims to undo the re-territorialization of these flows by freeing the de-territorializing tendency proper to each. Here it is essential that these lines of de-territorialization be interconnected, such that they "become parts and cogs of one another in the flow that feeds one and the same desiring-machine, so many local fires patiently kindled for a generalized explosion."³⁴³ In other words, the transversal connections between de-territorialized flows are what produce revolutionary force, since desire becomes productive (a desiring-machine) through the connection of decoded flows.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Ibid, 321.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid, 137.

³⁴⁴ See *ibid*, 224. Cf.: "Desire is revolutionary because it always wants more connections and assemblages" (Deleuze, *Dialogues*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, 79).

Thus, to the capitalist, axiomatic conjugation of decoded flows, schizo-politics would oppose a transversal connection of decoded flows, one that propels their collective becoming-revolutionary.³⁴⁵ Through this transversal weave of lines of flight, the form of intensive limit-experience proper to the schizoid breakthrough would receive its conditions of material expression:

Here, madness would no longer exist as madness, not because it would have been transformed into ‘mental illness,’ but on the contrary *because it would receive the support of all the other flows, including science and art* – once it is said that madness is called madness and appears as such only because it is deprived of this support, and finds itself reduced to testifying all alone for deterritorialization as a universal process. It is merely its unwarranted privilege, a privilege beyond its capacities, that renders it mad.³⁴⁶

4.2 *Foucault’s Debt to Deleuze: The Question of Transversal Resistance and the Micropolitical Problem of Power*

The schizo-political concept of resistance as the de-territorialization and transversal connection of flows therefore provides a response to both the problem of the two regimes of madness and the challenges of contesting capitalist social production more generally. If the re-territorializing and integrative operations of capitalism function on the basis of

³⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the distinction between connection and conjugation in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “At this point, we must introduce a distinction between the two notions of connection and conjugation of flows. ‘Connection’ indicates the way in which decoded and deterritorialized flows boost one another, accelerate their shared escape, and augment or stoke their quanta; the ‘conjugation’ of these same flows, on the other hand, indicates their relative stoppage, like a point of accumulation that plugs or seals the lines of flight, performs a general reterritorialization, and brings the flows under the dominance of a single flow capable of overcoding them.” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 220) I would emphasize that while this distinction between connection and conjugation is sharpened in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the concept of ‘transversal connection’ is already operative in *Anti-Oedipus*, particularly in regard to ‘subject-groups’ constructed as ‘transverse multiplicities’: see, e.g., *Anti-Oedipus*, 280, 287, 309, 319, and 349.

³⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 321, my emphasis.

totalizing axiomatization,³⁴⁷ then the appropriate form for contestation to take will be a de-territorializing and de-totalizing revolutionary movement, the force of which is generated through proliferating and connecting lateral lines of alliance.

However, the key problem remains how exactly to conceive and create this kind of transversal political project. This is precisely how Deleuze poses the question to Foucault in their exchange, “Intellectuals and Power,” from 1972:

We must set up lateral affiliations and an entire system of networks and popular bases; and this is especially difficult. ...[T]he present revolutionary movement has created multiple centers, and not as the result of weakness or insufficiency, since a certain kind of totalization pertains to power and the forces of reaction. ... But how are we to define the networks, the *transversal links* between these active and discontinuous points, from one country to another or within a single country?³⁴⁸

Foucault’s response to Deleuze indicates to what extent his analytic of power is made possible by *Anti-Oedipus*, for the question of how to connect lateral lines of struggle bespeaks a more basic problem of how to understand the nature and operations of power:

Isn’t this difficulty in finding adequate forms of struggle a result of the fact that we continue to ignore the problem of power? ... If the reading of your books (from *Nietzsche* to what I anticipate in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) has been essential for me, it is because they seem to go very far in exploring this problem: under the ancient theme of meaning, of the signifier and the signified, etc., you have developed the question of power, of the inequality of powers and their struggles.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ On the “co-opting power of capitalism” that derives from the totalizing function of the capitalist axiomatic, see *ibid*, 236.

³⁴⁸ Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power,” in Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 212-6, my emphasis.

³⁴⁹ Foucault, *ibid*, 212-4. It is notable that in crediting Deleuze with developing the problematic of power, Foucault refers to *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *Anti-Oedipus*, for both works articulate a view of resistance as the active-affirmative force by which a “new form of life” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Janis Tomlinson, 185) or mode of existence is produced. In other words, whether conceived through Nietzsche’s figure of the overman or the connective de-territorializing process of schizophrenia, political struggle is an intrinsically creative project, one that breaks with the forces of reaction (*ressentiment*, micro-fascism, totalization) by enabling an intensification and enrichment of what (and how) we may become. This will remain a fundamental tenet of both Deleuze and Foucault’s political philosophy.

Most fundamentally then, what *Anti-Oedipus* enables for Foucault is the development of a micro-political conception of power, anticipating his subsequent formulation, in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, of power “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization....”³⁵⁰ Indeed, Foucault credits Deleuze with casting the problem of power (and thus of resistance) in terms of the thousand tiny points of its exercise.³⁵¹ That is, rather than deriving from a central, unitary position, such as the State or ruling class, power must be grasped as an immanent multiplicity: one which constitutes the material basis for the ‘molar’ organization of a society’s institutional arrangements, but which functions by directly investing bodies and acting upon their forces, operating at what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the ‘molecular’ level.³⁵²

Thus, for instance, *Anti-Oedipus* poses the question of power in terms of the political problem of desire and its direct investment of the socio-historical field, which requires a functionalist, microphysical analysis of ‘desiring-machines’ and their

³⁵⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 92.

³⁵¹ “Each struggle develops around a particular source of power (any of the countless, tiny sources...)” (Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” 214).

³⁵² See, for example, Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of paranoia and schizophrenia as the two poles of social libidinal investment: “It might be said that, of the two directions in *physics* – the molar direction that goes toward the large numbers and the mass phenomena, and the molecular direction that on the contrary penetrates into singularities, their interactions and connections at a distance or between different orders – the paranoid has chosen the first: he practices macrophysics. And it could be said that by contrast the schizo goes in the other direction, that of microphysics, of molecules insofar as they no longer obey the statistical laws: waves and corpuscles, flows and partial objects that are no longer dependent upon the large numbers; infinitesimal lines of escape [*fuite*], instead of the perspectives of the large aggregates” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 280). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari will explicitly draw the connection between their notion of the molecular and Foucault’s notion of discipline: “It requires a whole organization articulating formations of power and regimes of signs, and operating on the molecular level (societies characterized by what Foucault calls disciplinary power)” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 67).

constitutive role in social production.³⁵³ In this way, Deleuze displaces a transcendent, hierarchical or representational conception of power in favor of one that is immanent, decentralized, and direct.

This micro-political theory of bodies and forces in turn enables a properly transversal conception of resistance in terms of a multiply-centered revolutionary³⁵⁴ movement. The key to answering Deleuze's question about how to define the lateral alliances between various political struggles is to first develop an adequate understanding of the common mode of power they are allied against, for the "generality of the struggle specifically derives from the system of power itself, from all the forms in which power is

³⁵³ On the "molecular, micrological, or microphysical" analysis of desiring-production – which is conducted in terms of "the molecular elements that form the parts and wheels of desiring-machines," and which "searches for the way in which these machines *function*, for how they invest and underdetermine the social machines they constitute on a large scale" – by contrast to a representational, Oedipalizing analysis – which frames desiring-machines in terms of "*what they mean*" by referring them to "large molar aggregates," e.g., the family – see *Anti-Oedipus*, 182-3. In addition to anticipating Foucault's 'microphysics of power,' this passage illustrates Foucault's comment, cited above, that 'under the ancient theme of meaning,' Deleuze has 'developed the question of power, of the inequality of powers and their struggles.'

³⁵⁴ While this is not the place to develop a full account of Foucault's evolving views on revolution, it should be noted that the term is not uncommonly used by Foucault during the early 1970s, as here in "Intellectuals and Power." In fact, Foucault defines the aims of the political activist group that he helped to organize, the GIP (*Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, or Prison Information Group), precisely in terms of "revolutionary action": see Foucault, "Par delà le bien et le mal," *Dits et écrits I*: 1099; cf. Foucault's remarks on the "truly revolutionary forces" of minoritarian struggle in "Michel Foucault on Attica: an Interview," *Social Justice*, vol. 18, no. 3 (45), Attica: 1971-1975 A Commemorative Issue (Fall 1991), 34. By the time of 1976, Foucault will have modified his view on what constitutes revolution, defining it in general as a transformation in the codification of the multiplicity of power relations, with the consequence that "there are as many types of revolutions as there are possible subversive codifications of power relations" (Foucault, "Entretien avec Michel Foucault," *Dits et écrits II*, 151, my translation). In the year or two that follow, confronted by the increasingly bleak fate of revolutionary leftist politics (whether China, the USSR, the Soviet satellite countries, Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia, etc.), Foucault's view will darken on the concept of revolution: see Foucault, "La torture, c'est le raison," *Dits et écrits II*, 397-8; cf. "Non au sexe roi," *Dits et écrits II*, 266-7. By 1978, he will have essentially stopped using the concept of revolutionary politics, associating it with a hierarchical, centralized and totalizing strategy, and advocating instead the "immediacy" and "anarchic" quality of transversal, minoritarian struggles; see "La philosophie analytique de la politique," *Dits et écrits II*, 542-7). And even on the topic of the Iranian revolutionary movement of 1978-1979, he will distinguish between "revolution" (institutionalized in the Islamic Republic) and "revolt" (the collective movement of popular political uprising); see, e.g., "Useless to Revolt?" In this regard, the distinction that Foucault draws between revolution and minoritarian struggle, or between revolution and revolt, is consistent with the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between revolutions and becoming-revolutionary; thus, there will be no inconsistency between Foucault's transversal minoritarian politics and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the revolutionary war machine.

exercised and applied.”³⁵⁵ If this mode of power is grasped as an immanent multiplicity, then different resistance struggles will be both singular, with respect to the immediate conditions in which power is exercised over them, and connectable, insofar as they stand in immanent relation to one another by virtue of suffering the same regime of power. Speaking of all those who are subjected to the exercise of a power they find intolerable, and still by way of response to Deleuze, Foucault writes:

In engaging in a struggle that is properly their own, whose objectives they clearly understand and whose methods only they can determine, they *enter into a revolutionary process. They naturally act as allies of the proletariat, because power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation. They genuinely serve the cause of the proletariat by fighting in those places where they find themselves oppressed. Women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals have now begun a specific struggle against the particularized power, the constraints and controls, that are exerted over them. ... And these movements are linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat to the extent that they fight against the controls and constraints which serve the same system of power.*³⁵⁶

It is often thought that unlike that of Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault’s political philosophy does not deal with the problem of capitalism per se. Yet seen in light of this dialogue with Deleuze, all of Foucault’s critical histories – from *History of Madness* and *Birth of the Clinic* to *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* – take as their object a common system of power the strategic function of which, in Foucault’s view, is to ‘maintain capitalist exploitation.’ Thus, the localized forms of resistance that Foucault supports, and for which his intellectual work is intended to provide arms, are transversally connectable precisely insofar as they find common cause against the functioning of the capitalist formation. To the extent that these oppositional movements

³⁵⁵ Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” 217.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 216, my emphasis, translation slightly modified.

singularize their proper modes of struggle, they ‘enter into a revolutionary process’ or, to use Deleuze’s later terminology, effect their own becoming-revolutionary; and to the extent that they form a lateral network ‘linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat,’ these struggles constitute a collective becoming-revolutionary that traverses the socius and contests the relations of power that reproduce capitalist social production.

It is likely in terms of this shared view on minoritarian political resistance, then, that Deleuze will later speak of the “common cause,”³⁵⁷ more profound than any methodological difference, that connects his work with Foucault’s. Perhaps we can also begin to see why Foucault, in a footnote at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, writes that he “could give no notion by reference or quotations what this book owes to Gilles Deleuze and the work he is undertaking with Félix Guattari.”³⁵⁸ Though Foucault does not detail this debt, to which he had already alluded in “Intellectuals and Power,” another indication of its import can be gleaned from a passage in *Psychiatric Power*, where Foucault distinguishes between “two absolutely distinct types of power corresponding to two systems, two different ways of functioning: the *macrophysics of sovereignty*, the power that could be put to work in a post-feudal, pre-industrial government, and then the *microphysics of disciplinary power*....”³⁵⁹

Foucault here combines two sets of distinctions established by *Anti-Oedipus*: that between a macro- and microphysics of power, on the one hand, and the despotic and capitalist social formations, on the other. Historically, sovereign power is exercised in the societies that precede industrial capitalism – those which Deleuze and Guattari term

³⁵⁷ Deleuze, “Breaking Things Open, Breaking Words Open,” in *Negotiations*, translated by Martin Joughin, 85.

³⁵⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 309.

³⁵⁹ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 27, my emphasis.

“barbarian” and analyze in terms of “the ‘megamachine’ of the State,” which over-codes primitive social flows and extracts surplus value from them³⁶⁰ –, and this form of power functions by imposing levies, whether on the products, stores or services of its subjects.³⁶¹ By contrast, disciplinary power, which emerges alongside early industrial capitalism, more insidiously invests the social field, for it functions through the “exhaustive capture of the individual’s body, actions, time, and behavior. It is a seizure of the body, and not of the product...”³⁶² Disciplinary institutions, such as prisons, schools, factories, and asylums, are thus so many apparatuses of capture,³⁶³ by which power apprehends “bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces.”³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 195-6.

³⁶¹ In other words, levying is the overcoding activity of surplus value extraction proper to the sovereign or despot. For Foucault’s analysis of the basic levying-deductive function of sovereign power, see Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 42.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁶³ In *Psychiatric Power* (six years before the publication of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*), Foucault in fact uses the term ‘apparatus of capture’ twice to refer to the institution of the asylum: specifically, with regard to “neurology’s clinical apparatus of capture,” (*ibid.*, 307) which was the neuropathological technique developed in response to the widespread problem of simulation among psychiatric patients, and which made possible “a clinical analysis, an analysis in terms of physical ascription, of the individual’s intentional attitude. Consequently, a capture of the subject’s attitude, of the subject’s consciousness, of the will itself within his body, becomes possible. ... It was the will, in fact, on which and to which disciplinary power had to be applied; it really was the vis-à-vis of disciplinary power. ... Neuropathology now provides the clinical instrument by which it is thought the individual can be captured at the level of the will itself” (*ibid.*, 302). It is notable that Foucault refers to the “untruthfulness of simulation, madness simulating madness,” as “the anti-power of the mad confronted with psychiatric power” (*ibid.*, 136) and “the militant underside of psychiatric power ...[,] the insidious way for the mad to pose the question of truth forcibly on a psychiatric power that only wanted to impose reality on them” (*ibid.*, 138). With respect to the historical regime of power, the neuropathological apparatus of capture is thus the strategic response to the collective resistance struggles among the mad themselves, which is to say, the operation of disciplinary power by which so many lines of flight are reterritorialized. By genealogically analyzing the exercise of power in strategic terms, Foucault gives primacy (both historically and, as it were, logically) to collective forms of resistance (lines of flight) in relation to apparatuses of capture (see Foucault’s final lecture in *Psychiatric Power* (February 6, 1974), pp. 297-323). This important point is often missed in interpretations of Foucault’s analytic of power, including Deleuze’s in “Desire and Pleasure” (see Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 122-134) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (see 530-1, fn. 39). By the time of his more considered view in *Foucault*, however, Deleuze will emphasize that Foucault’s “final word on power is that *resistance comes first*” (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 89). I would simply note that this had been Foucault’s ‘first word’ all along, as early as the tragic expression of unreason in *History of Madness*.

³⁶⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

In other words, to borrow from Deleuze's later terminology, sovereign power is the diagram of force relations that corresponds to the despotic social formation; and insofar as these relations are juridically organized and centralized through the State, sovereign power is macro-physical in its functioning. By contrast, disciplinary power is the diagram proper to the industrial capitalist social formation; and it constitutes "a micro-physics of power" insofar as it does not merely impose a system of levies upon the products of a populace, but takes hold directly as an "infinitesimal power over the active body"³⁶⁵ and thus as "a specific mode of subjection ... in which the body itself is invested by power relations."³⁶⁶ Therefore, if the global thesis of *Discipline and Punish* is that the widespread changes in the techniques, apparatuses, and legal coding of punishment, contemporary with the historical shift from the classical to the modern period, reflect a more fundamental transformation in the regime of power by which Western societies are organized and governed; then it will be Deleuze and Guattari's micro-political conception of power and analysis of social formations that enable Foucault to map this mutation from sovereign to disciplinary power.

Moreover, the debt can be specified further, for between Deleuze and Foucault there emerges a concept of power as productive, operating through the double technique of (1) individualizing subjection and (2) the denumeration of human multiplicities. In contradistinction to sovereign power, the "chief function of the disciplinary power is to 'train', rather than to select and to levy.... *It 'trains' the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements* Discipline

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 137.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 24.

‘makes’ individuals, it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.”³⁶⁷ By shaping a disorderly mass into a multiplicity of “necessary and sufficient single units,”³⁶⁸ discipline produces the very form of the modern individual; and by directly investing the body to capture and control its forces, discipline fabricates this individual as “the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him.”³⁶⁹ Insofar as it thus “allows both the characterization of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity,”³⁷⁰ disciplinary power performs a simultaneously individualizing and totalizing productive function: it constitutes a “political technology of the body”,³⁷¹ by which the movements, activities, and forces of bodies are controlled and developed, and by which an unruly, unproductive or dangerous multitude is transformed into an organized, useful, governable multiplicity.

The relational arrangements by which the modern social formation is hierarchically segmented and the mode of self-relation by which the obedient subject is constituted, thus result from and reproduce the same regime of power. Indeed, Foucault credits Deleuze with the general form of this fundamental insight in the preface to the English translation of *Anti-Oedipus*, framing that work as an ethico-political project contesting the individualizing and totalizing effects of power through the creation of new kinds of

³⁶⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170, my emphasis.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 128-9.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 149.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 24.

multiplicity and practices of subjectivation.³⁷² Anticipating his own declaration five years later in “The Subject and Power” that “the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days” is “to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries,”³⁷³ Foucault lists as one of *Anti-Oedipus*’s “essential principles” that “[t]he individual is the product of power. What is needed is to ‘de-individualize’ by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization.”³⁷⁴

If *Discipline and Punish* is so indebted to Deleuze, then it is because *Anti-Oedipus* enables the problem of power to be posed in terms of an immanent microphysics of bodies and forces: one which emerges historically with industrial capitalism and ultimately functions to maintain capitalist exploitation by producing individuals as normalized subjects within hierarchically ordered multiplicities, thereby investing, capturing, and controlling bodies’ powers of activity. Further, we have seen that such an analytic of power is necessary to address the question of transversal resistance insofar as

³⁷² Foucault’s preface was published in 1977, just as he was developing his focus on ethics as a critical political activity. Compare, for example, his characterization of *Anti-Oedipus* as “a book of ethics, the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time” (Foucault, “Preface,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xiii), with his description from the same year of the ethos of critical thought as a form of virtue: “There is something in critique which is akin to virtue. And in a certain way, what I wanted to speak to you about is this critical attitude as virtue in general” (Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 43).

³⁷³ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 336.

³⁷⁴ Foucault, “Preface,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this qualitatively different mode of multiplicity as a ‘subject-group’ (by contrast to a ‘subjugated-group’), and its relational composition is transversal in nature: “A *subject-group*, on the contrary, is a group whose libidinal investments are themselves revolutionary; it causes desire to penetrate into the social field, and subordinates the socius or the form of power to desiring-production; ... it opposes real coefficients of transversality to the symbolic determinations of subjugation, coefficients without a hierarchy or a group superego” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 348-9). It is notable that for Deleuze and Guattari, this distinction between ‘subjugated-groups’ and ‘subject-groups’ – that is, between hierarchical, denumerable multiplicities and transversal, non-denumerable multiplicities – tracks with the distinction between macro- and microphysics, or between the molar and the molecular; see *Anti-Oedipus*, 280.

the connectivity of struggles against power is derived from the commonality of the system they contest. Whence the double task of *Discipline and Punish*: (1) to analyze the historical exercise of disciplinary power as a political technology for the production and administration of denumerable and controllable human multiplicities; and (2) to diagram the reciprocally conditioning relations between this micro-political regime of power and capitalism. Such a genealogical project will provide the critical propaedeutics for conceiving and creating a transversal form of struggle better suited than Foucault's earlier politics of literary transgression to resist the exercise of power in capitalist society.

4.3 *Assembling Denumerable Multiplicities: The Anti-Transversal Function of Disciplinary Power*

Foucault's first task, the analysis of disciplinary practices, illuminates the tactical importance of transversality from the sides of both power and resistance. In order to minimize the economic inefficiencies and political dangers of mass phenomena, discipline operates as "an anti-nomadic technique"³⁷⁵ that fixes and distributes somatic singularities, "arrests or regulates movements."³⁷⁶ In turn, in order to further defuse the threats of resistance intrinsic to any collection of bodies and forces – "agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions[,] anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions"³⁷⁷ – discipline constructs a striated space, one arranged according to "hierarchical networks" and structured by inserting "as solid separations as possible ...

³⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 218.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

between the different elements at the same level.”³⁷⁸ This double operation of discipline as anti-nomadic and striating is achieved through the technique of “partitioning,” which functions according to the “principle of elementary location” to “break up collective dispositions” and “analyse confused, massive or transient pluralities”: “Each individual has his own place, and each place, its individual.”³⁷⁹

It is thus by means of the partitioning of space that discipline is exercised as a “cellular” power, satisfying “the first condition for the control and use of an ensemble of distinct elements”:³⁸⁰ namely, the individualizing and totalizing distribution of bodies into a grid of separated cells that abolishes all collective effects of transversal group interaction. Within such an arrangement, which terminates “any relation that is not supervised by authority,”³⁸¹ individuals are both isolated and assembled “in a strict hierarchical framework, *with no lateral relation*, communication being possible only in a vertical direction.”³⁸² Whether the disciplinary apparatus of capture be a school, factory³⁸³, hospital, or prison, each individual (the student, worker, patient, or prisoner) is only ever set into relation with a centralized source of power, be it a teacher, overseer, doctor, or warden.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁸ Ibid, 220.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 143. Foucault continues: “Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration.”

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 149.

³⁸¹ Ibid, 239.

³⁸² Ibid, 238.

³⁸³ The factory in particular develops a more complex system of partitioning, one which is specifically suited for dividing and distributing labor power so as to control and maximize its production; see *ibid*, 145.

³⁸⁴ See Foucault’s discussion of this anti-transversal function, by which panopticism minimizes any collective effect, in *Psychiatric Power*, 75.

Indeed, it is precisely the blockage of transversal relations between the distinct elements of a disciplinary multiplicity that secures both the individualization of the former and the denumerability of the latter. Nowhere is this as clear as in Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, which, as "the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form," provides the "generalizable model of functioning" for the mode of power exercised in disciplinary society.³⁸⁵ Within a panoptic arrangement, which consists architecturally of a central watchtower surrounded by rings of partitioned cells, each individual is confined and isolated in his own cell, the front of which is subject to continual surveillance from without, and the side walls of which prevent the individual "from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, *imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order.*"³⁸⁶

While the political effect by which individuals, as objects of a constant 'axial visibility,' internalize and reproduce the operation of power may be what is best known in Foucault's analysis of panopticism, it is in fact the structure of 'lateral invisibility' that makes this system of subjection possible. If discipline is a technique for producing a certain order and functioning of human collectivities, then what 'guarantees' this order –

³⁸⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 205. Cf.: "panopticism could, I think, appear and function within our society as a general form; we could speak equally of a disciplinary society or of a panoptic society. We live within generalized panopticism by virtue of the fact that we live within a disciplinary system" (Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 79).

³⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200, my emphasis.

that is, what secures the use and control of a disciplinary multiplicity – will be the series of lateral blockages between subjected individuals:

The crowd, a compact mass, *a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together*, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by *a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised* [*une multiplicité dénombrable et contrôlable*]; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude. Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.³⁸⁷

A primary operation of panoptic arrangements, and thus a first condition for the exercise of power, is to block transversal connections and thereby defuse the economic and political dangers of inefficiency and revolt. This basic diagrammatic feature of panopticism is the key to the smooth functioning of any disciplinary apparatus: in factories, the severance of transversal ties prevents worker theft, coalitions, distractions, and accidents; in schools, cheating, talking, and time-wasting amongst students; in asylums, the danger of madmen harming each other or creating collective disturbances; in hospitals, the risk of contagion among patients; and in prisons, the threat of complots to escape or hatch future crimes.³⁸⁸

Foucault's micro-analytic of power thus allows the political problem of transversality to be framed in terms of two different forms of multiplicity. We have seen

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 201, my emphasis. Notice here that the non-denumerable multiplicity precedes the denumerable multiplicity, both in the sense of historical priority (e.g., the 'floating populations' that had to be transformed into an ordered accumulation of human beings) and logical priority (a denumerable multiplicity is the result of a technique of capture, which organizes itself by reacting upon, blocking and integrating lines of flight or deterritorializing processes of de-individuation). Foucault and Deleuze are thus in agreement here regarding the primacy of resistance. A more historically developed example of this primacy is given in the first section of *Discipline and Punish*, where the popular 'disturbances around the scaffold' erupt as so many deterritorializing points the emergence of which threatens to disrupt and reverse the sovereign exercise of punitive power in public executions; the political resistance of these lines of flight, in turn, prompts as a strategic response the emergence of disciplinary punitive power. See *Discipline and Punish*, 59-65.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 200-1.

that by Foucault's own lights, *Anti-Oedipus* had already posited a basic theoretical opposition between the group as 'a constant generator of de-individualization' and the group as 'the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals.'³⁸⁹ The relation between these two modes of collectivity is now given historical precision: the essential operation of disciplinary power is to transform a non-denumerable multiplicity, a plexus of 'multiple exchanges' where 'individualities merge together,' into 'a denumerable and controllable multiplicity.' In other words, in order for panoptic processes of individualizing subjection to achieve 'the automatic functioning of power,' a transient multitude that generates effects of de-individualization through the multiplication of lateral relations must be reassembled into a hierarchically segmented 'collection of separated individualities.' And this is achieved in the first instance by debarring transversal connections through the partitioning of disciplinary space.

It is therefore through the concept of the transversal, its blockage or proliferating connections, that power and resistance in disciplinary society can be grasped in their most fundamental operations. In both cases, what is at issue is the construction of multiplicities: on the side of power and the segmented space of its apparatuses of capture, the formation of denumerable multiplicities that individualize obedient subjects; and on the side of resistance, the creation of transverse or non-denumerable multiplicities that give rise to de-individualizing processes of collective subjectivation.

³⁸⁹ This is the distinction between what Deleuze and Guattari term 'subject-groups' and 'subjugated-groups.'

4.4 *Foucault's Economico-Political Thesis: Capitalism, Modern Power, and the Divided Plebe*

In order to understand how this incipient transversal politics of connection would respond specifically to the problem of capitalism, we must consider the second task of *Discipline and Punish*, the analysis of the relations between power and the capitalist social formation. We have seen that disciplinary power arises concurrently with the industrialization of economic production and includes the factory among its set of institutions. Far from being merely historically overlapping processes, however, a biconditional relation obtains between (1) the development of capitalism and (2) the great mutation in the technology of power through which the ‘macrophysics of sovereignty’ was supplanted by the ‘microphysics of disciplinary power.’

The very development of discipline as a set of individualizing techniques for organizing and controlling human multiplicities must be grasped in relation to “the well-known historical conjuncture” at the origins of industrial capitalism. This would be the conjuncture between, on the one hand, the “increase in the floating population” resulting from “the large demographic thrust of the eighteenth century,” and on the other, “the growth in the apparatus of production,” the increasing extension and complexity of which had driven up costs and required greater profitability.³⁹⁰ The administrative methods over the first process, the accumulation of displaced human populations, “made possible a political take-off” of “a subtle, calculated technology of subjection” that superseded traditional forms of sovereign power.³⁹¹ The techniques for developing the second

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 218.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 220-1.

process, capital accumulation,³⁹² precipitated “the economic take-off of the West.”³⁹³

Between these two processes, in turn, there obtained a relation of historical interdependency and reciprocal determination: “it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital.”³⁹⁴

However inseparable these processes turned out to be, the double accumulation of human beings and capital still had to be actively brought into conjunction. Hence the importance of discipline: the “primary, massive, overall function” of “the disciplinary systems,” arising in the 18th century, was “to adjust the multiplicity of individuals to the apparatuses of production, or to the State apparatuses which control them, or again, to adjust the combination of men to the accumulation of capital.”³⁹⁵ That is, as an emergent ‘technology of subjection,’ disciplinary power was necessary to help bring about the ‘well-known historical conjuncture’ that made the development of capitalism possible, operating, in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, a “conjunction of deterritorialized flows”³⁹⁶ (population flows and flows of capital) and thereby playing a constitutive role in the capitalist formation.

We can begin then, to better understand Foucault’s perhaps surprising claim in “Intellectuals and Power” that ‘power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation.’ Indeed, it is important to stress just how central this claim is to

³⁹² By ‘capital accumulation,’ I mean, generally speaking, the investment and increased returns of money-capital through the processes of industrial production and market exchange.

³⁹³ Ibid, 220.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 220-1.

³⁹⁵ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 110.

³⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 224.

Foucault's analytic of power, which advances what I will term the *economico-political thesis*. We encountered this thesis in the Introduction: if, in capitalist society, the *political* refers to the problem of the accumulation of human beings and the *economic* refers to the problem of capital accumulation, then the fundamental operation of modern power will be economico-political insofar as its 'primary function' is to adjust the 'accumulation of men' to the 'accumulation of capital.'³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Disciplinary power can thus be understood as an *efficient cause* of the development of capitalism insofar as it organized the floating population and integrated it into the economic apparatus in order to expand aggregate productive force. According to Foucault, this causal relation is suggested by Marx's analysis of how the division of labor was established through the disciplinary organization of factories and workshops (see "Les mailles du pouvoir" in *Dits et écrits II*: 1001-1020; translated into English, though without the discussion following Foucault's remarks, as "The Meshes of Power" in *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, edited by Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden, translated by Gerald Moore, 153-162). Discipline structures and mobilizes the work force according to a hierarchical and cellular system of partitioning and surveillance, aiming to maximize the composite forces of production (see *Discipline and Punish*, 221; cf. *ibid.*, 145). Yet if the disciplinary formation of the space and process of production made possible the division of labor that is integral to capitalism, conversely, the expansion of industrial production and capital accumulation are what rendered a division of labor, and hence the techniques to achieve it, necessary in the first place: "The division of labour was, at the same time, the reason for which this new workshop discipline had to be invented; but inversely we can say that this workshop discipline was the condition for the division of labour being able to take hold. Without this workshop discipline, which is to say without the hierarchy, without the overseeing, without the supervisors, without the chronometric control of movements, it would not have been possible to obtain the division of labour" (Foucault, "The Meshes of Power," 157). Thus, a relation of reciprocal causation obtains between disciplinary power and the division of labor: if discipline is an efficient cause in the development of the industrial division of labor, this division of labor, in turn, as 'the reason for which this new workshop discipline had to be invented,' serves as a *final cause* in the development of disciplinary power. That is, discipline is the means by which the industrial division of labor could take hold, and this division of labor is that for the sake of which these disciplinary means were 'invented.' This relation can also be posed in terms of mutual conditioning: discipline made the realization of the division of labor possible, in the strong sense that there could have been no industrial division of labor without disciplinary power; and this division of labor made discipline necessary, in the equally strong sense that the development of capitalism historically determined the rise of this modality of disciplinary power (see *Discipline and Punish*, 221). This is not to say that all disciplinary techniques are historically determined *only* by the capitalist requirement of the division of labor, for they first emerged in the Christian tradition of pastoral power in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (see Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique," in *Dits et écrits II*, 549-50; cf. "Le pouvoir, une bête magnifique," in *Dits et écrits II*, 375-6); nor is it to slip into economism and reduce micropolitical power in the autonomy of its exercise and subsequent proliferation to a base of economic production 'in the final analysis.' Rather, the claim is that the exigencies of capitalist production explain the emergence of disciplinary power *as the dominant form of political power and social control in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*. In other words, discipline may have existed in pockets independently of capitalism, but the major transformation in the exercise of power by which discipline supplanted sovereignty was both enabled and required by the development of industrial capitalism.

The economico-political function of disciplinary power operates at the microphysical level of bodies and their forces. In order to assemble the floating population into a well-organized workforce, individuals must be transformed into useful laborers and fitted to the apparatus of production, which in turn requires that they first be rendered controllable. As “the unitary technique by which the body is reduced as a ‘political’ force at the least cost and maximized as a useful force,”³⁹⁸ discipline thus produces and trains individuals as politically docile, but economically productive agents.³⁹⁹ Through the chronometric control of bodies’ actions and forces, which makes possible the “maximal extraction of time” and maximal development of aptitudes, discipline transforms the time of human existence into labor time and the somatic force of individuals into labor power,⁴⁰⁰ integrating the two in production and thereby satisfying “a condition of possibility of hyperprofit”⁴⁰¹: “in order for there to be hyperprofit, ... [a] web of microscopic, capillary political power had to be established at the level of man’s very existence, attaching men to the production apparatus, while making them into agents of production, into workers.”⁴⁰²

Thus, through this micro-politics of disciplinary power, which realizes the becoming-commodity of the time and corporeality of human life, capitalism penetrates

³⁹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 221.

³⁹⁹ See Foucault: “it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection...; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (ibid, 26). This relation of mutual conditioning can also be put in terms of the reciprocal causation we saw at work in the industrial division of labor: political subjection is the efficient cause for producing an economically useful agent of production; and economic production is the final cause for developing a generalizable system of political subjection.

⁴⁰⁰ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms”, in *Power*, 81-2.

⁴⁰¹ The word ‘hyperprofit’ translates Foucault’s term *sur-profit*, which he takes to be equivalent to surplus value, i.e., profit that allows for expanded investment. See ibid, 86.

⁴⁰² Ibid, 86-7.

ever “more deeply into our existence”⁴⁰³; and this process is necessary for the accelerated accumulation of capital and its attendant forms of exploitation. Conversely, the expanding scale of capital accumulation provided the impetus for the multiplication of disciplinary forms of subjection. If the requirements of industrial capitalism had determined the emergence of factory discipline historically, this particular disciplinary form, once established as a technique for producing, controlling, and using denumerable human multiplicities, could then be abstracted as a general technology of power and applied to any number of domains: “The growth of a capitalist economy gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power, whose general formulas, techniques of submitting forces and bodies, in short, ‘political anatomy,’ could be operated in the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses or institutions.”⁴⁰⁴

Thus, in effect, the process of capitalist economic production enabled the individualizing techniques of disciplinary power to proliferate throughout the social field, constituting a general mechanism of continuous political control and operating in a variety of governmental regimes (e.g., liberalism, communism) and extra-economic institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, prisons, asylums, families). Moreover, the dispersal of disciplinary techniques outside workhouses and factories not only enabled an

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 86. Indeed, according to Foucault, this disciplinary micro-politics is what, in fact, makes it possible for labor to appear to be the concrete essence of human being. Foucault’s argument here suggests that, at least as regards the early Marx (and much of the Marxist tradition), the critique of political economy has not been carried far enough, for it retains a naturalized ontology of labor. That is, the very category of labor, which Marx takes to be constitutive of human being, must itself be called into question, since this purported concrete essence, taken to be universal, is in fact the historically contingent product of the power relations proper to capitalist society. “In order for men to be brought into labor, tied to labor, an operation is necessary, or a complex series of operations, by which men are effectively – not analytically but synthetically – bound to the production apparatus for which they labor. It takes this operation, or this synthesis effected by a political power, for man’s essence to appear as being labor. ... I’m referring not to a state apparatus, or to the class in power, but to the whole set of little powers, of little institutions at the lowest level” (ibid, 86-7).

⁴⁰⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 221.

intensification of social controls, but also in turn re-enforced the capitalist system of economic production.

A particularly pertinent example of this is the modern police. According to Foucault, what distinguished industrial capitalism from other economic forms (e.g., feudalism and mercantilism) was the emergence of a new kind of wealth, one which was no longer chiefly monetary, but rather invested in the industrial apparatus of production itself.⁴⁰⁵ However, since this widespread investment of wealth in constant capital came into daily contact with the increasingly pauperized masses, it became more vulnerable, continually subject to the threats of theft and sabotage. Thus, as the potential for economico-politically subversive action increased, so did the need for more sophisticated mechanisms of subjection, which is to say, for the development of a “continuous, atomistic and individualizing power” that would function more effectively than the “lacunary, global power” of sovereignty.⁴⁰⁶ The various popular illegalisms to which sovereign power had turned a blind eye had to be brought under closer scrutiny: whence the emergence of the police as an organ for the exercise of power, as in the case of the London police, which “was born of the need to protect the docks, wharves, warehouses, and stocks.”⁴⁰⁷

In this way, the economic exigency to safeguard the productive apparatus gave rise to the development of an entire system of political power: namely, “panopticism,” which placed the “plebeian, popular, working, peasant population” under “general, continuous

⁴⁰⁵ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 68-9. As examples of feudal and mercantile forms of monetary wealth, Foucault mentions land fortunes, cash money, and bills of exchange; his examples of industrial wealth invested in constant capital include “stocks of goods, raw materials, imported objects, machines, and workshops” (ibid, 68).

⁴⁰⁶ Foucault, “The Meshes of Power,” 158-9.

⁴⁰⁷ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 69.

surveillance,⁴⁰⁸ and which was therefore crucial for protecting and strengthening not only the wealth but the “social hegemony”⁴⁰⁹ of the bourgeoisie. Such hegemony required, as a means of controlling the potentially dangerous underclasses, a socio-economic, political and cultural partition to be instituted between: (1) the proletariat; and (2) what Foucault variously refers to as “the non-integrated part of the marginal population,”⁴¹⁰ the “marginal plebeian,”⁴¹¹ and “the non-proletarianized plebe.”⁴¹² In effect, this diction stresses that proletarianization – as a process – is both productive and exclusionary, generating and exacerbating a division within the greater plebeian population that is necessary for the functioning of capitalism: “there is within the global mass of the plebe a divide between the proletariat and the non-proletarianized plebe, and I believe institutions like the police, the justice system, and the penal system, are one of the means used for endlessly deepening this divide, which capitalism requires.”⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁸ Foucault, “À propos de l’enfermement pénitentiaire,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 1305, my translation.

⁴⁰⁹ Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Gordon et al, 156. For Foucault, it is, indeed, the micropolitical technology of disciplinary power that enabled the bourgeoisie to remain the socially (and economically) dominant class following the French Revolution: “The bourgeoisie is perfectly well aware that a new constitution or legislature will not suffice to assure its hegemony; it realises that it has to invent a new technology ensuring the irrigation by effects of power of the whole social body down to its smallest particles. And it was by such means that the bourgeoisie not only made a revolution but succeeded in establishing a social hegemony which it has never relinquished” (ibid).

⁴¹⁰ Foucault, “Le grande enfermement,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 1171, my translation.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 1174, my translation.

⁴¹² Foucault, “Table ronde,” in *Dits et écrits I*, 1202, my translation. Cf. Foucault, “Sur la justice populaire: Débat avec les maos,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1219, 1220; the phrase is rendered by its English translator, John Mepham, as “non-proletarianised common people” and “non-proletarianised people” in “On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists,” *Power/Knowledge*, 14, 16.

⁴¹³ Foucault, “Table ronde,” 1202, my translation. Foucault continues: “Because, at bottom, what capitalism is afraid of, rightly or wrongly, since 1789, since 1848, since 1870, is sedition, insurrection.” This claim about sedition, which also appears in “On Popular Justice,” will be attenuated one year later, when Foucault comes to the view that protecting the wealth invested in industrial production was a more fundamental concern than sedition for the bourgeoisie in maintaining the divide between the proletarianized and non-proletarianized plebe. See “À propos de l’enfermement pénitentiaire,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1303-5. Nevertheless, the danger of seditious force will remain for Foucault an important strategic determinant in the development of panopticism. See, e.g., “The Birth of Social Medicine,” in *Power*, 143-4, 152; see also the discussion of the ‘disturbances around the scaffold’ in *Discipline and Punish*, 59-65.

In addition to protecting the extensive investment of wealth in industrial capital, the triple panoptic system of “courts-police-prison”⁴¹⁴ performs three political functions in service of bourgeois social hegemony. First, “it is a factor in ‘proletarianisation’: its role is to force the people to accept their status as proletarians and the conditions for the exploitation of the proletariat.”⁴¹⁵ Thus, for example, the criminalization, policing, and confinement of those parts of the population who remain unproductive (e.g., the unemployed, vagabonds, mendicants) enforced and normalized the general moral and economic imperative to work. In turn, by granting to workers a limited set of political rights, “the bourgeoisie obtained from the proletariat the promise of good political conduct and the renunciation of open rebellion.”⁴¹⁶ In this way, panopticism facilitated the process of proletarianization, by which a docile and useful labor force was constituted and attached to the apparatus of economic production.

Second, the reverse side of this process, the criminalization of the unproductive, produces marginalized or non-proletarianized groups, some of which can themselves be formed by means of the courts-police-prison system into artificial populations of use to capitalism. The panoptic exercise of political controls enables the isolation of the ‘violent’ and ‘dangerous’ elements of the plebeian population,⁴¹⁷ those who pose a threat similar to that of an unruly crowd or non-denumerable multitude, that is, “widespread plotting, a whole network of communications, within which individuals exchanged different

⁴¹⁴ Foucault, “On Popular Justice,” 14.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Foucault, “Le grande renfermement,” 1171, my translation.

⁴¹⁷ Foucault names as examples “farmers who were forced by debts to leave their land, peasants on the run from tax authorities, workers banished for theft, vagabonds or beggars who refused to clear the ditches, those who lived by plundering the fields, the small-time thieves and the highwaymen, those who, in armed groups, attacked the tax authorities and, more generally, agents of the state, and finally those who – on days of rioting in the towns or in the villages – carried weapons” (Foucault, “On Popular Justice,” 15).

roles.”⁴¹⁸ Historically, the three major ways of excluding the non-proletarianized plebe, all of which support the dominant economico-political system, were expulsion through colonization, conscription into the army, or confinement in prison. The prison, in particular, serves as an effective method of marginalization, insofar as it manufactures a delinquent population, which can then be “mobilize[d]” by the bourgeoisie “as soldiers, policemen, racketeers and thugs, and use[d] ... for the surveillance and repression of the proletariat.”⁴¹⁹ Further, this delinquent segment of the non-proletarianized plebe can be employed as scabs or temporary workers in the event of strikes or fluctuating economic demands, forming a particularly manipulable component of the ‘reserve army of labor’ required by capitalism.⁴²⁰ Thus, with regard to the new penal system at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “the real aim was to create a specific criminalized sphere, a sector that must be isolated from the rest of the population. ... [T]he capitalist system claims to combat criminality ... by means of this carceral system that precisely produces criminality. ... [T]he criminal produced by the prison is a useful criminal, useful for the system.”⁴²¹

Third, and consequently, by deploying these various “means for setting into opposition the plebe which is proletarianized and that which is not,”⁴²² the courts-police-prison system cleaves the common masses and defuses any potentially subversive forces of popular resistance: “Thus, the divide is ceaselessly reproduced and reintroduced between the proletariat and the non-proletarianized world because contact between the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, translation slightly modified.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁴²⁰ See Foucault, “Michel Foucault on Attica,” 30-1. For more on the constitution of a ‘reserve army of labor’ and its role in the history of confinement practices – specifically, in the transformation from the Great Confinement of the classical period to the rise of modern prisons and asylums – see Foucault, “La folie et la société,” in *Dits et écrits II*, 497-9.

⁴²¹ Foucault, “La torture, c’est la raison,” *Dits et écrits II*, 392-4, my translation.

⁴²² Foucault, “On Popular Justice,” 16, translation modified. Cf.: “ways of creating antagonism between the proletarianised and the non-proletarianised people”.

two was thought to be a dangerous ferment of insurrection.”⁴²³ The plebeian population, taken in its rent entirety, “find[s] itself disarmed,” no longer “dangerous as ferment, as hotbed of insurrection and possible sedition for the bourgeoisie.”⁴²⁴ In such a manner – the popular masses partitioned and the accumulation of human beings, controlled – the dividing practices instituted through the panoptic system of political power secure the social hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

4.5 *Connecting the Non/Proletarianized Plebe: Transversal Struggle and the Prison Movement*

We can therefore see the battle lines drawn for the earliest formulation of transversal resistance: since the opposition between the non-proletarianized and proletarianized plebe is fundamental to the economico-political operation of power in capitalist society, a transformative politics will seek to undermine this division by crossing over it, creating points of contact as so many bonds of potentially insurrectionary ferment between the marginalized and proletarianized segments of the underclasses. Such is already the project suggested in “Intellectuals and Power,” where the problem is one of constructing lateral lines of alliance, and where the aim is for the non-proletarianized (‘women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals’) to ‘enter into a revolutionary process’ that can be ‘linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat’ insofar as the controls they resist ‘serve the same system of power.’

⁴²³ Foucault, “Table ronde,” 1202, my translation.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, 1203, my translation.

Such, in turn, will be the project of the Prison Information Group, an activist group organized by Foucault and joined by Deleuze, which took as its “prime objective” the “reintegration into political struggles” of “that fringe of the lower class,” thereby seeking to connect the revolts of the non-proletarianized plebe to a greater strategy of popular resistance so as to help enable “different strata of the people ... to overcome conflicts and oppositions that had been established and maintained between them by the capitalist system.”⁴²⁵ If, at least for a time, Foucault places particular emphasis on prison revolts around the world as a form of minoritarian struggle – such revolts orienting both his political activism in the early 1970s and his genealogy of disciplinary power⁴²⁶ –, this will be precisely to the extent that the prison is the chief remaining mechanism for marginalizing and making use of the non-proletarianized population.⁴²⁷ Thus, what the prison revolts “call into question” is “the status of the marginal plebeian in capitalist society.”⁴²⁸ And therefore, in turn, the historico-critical function of Foucault’s analytic of power, aiming to “give direction to this incipient political struggle,” will be to map out the contingent political operations by which the marginal plebe has been produced, offering “a critique of the system that explains the process by which contemporary society marginalizes a part of the population.”⁴²⁹

In sum: the strategy of this early transversal politics, informed by a genealogical critique of the economico-political operation of power by which the popular masses are

⁴²⁵ Foucault, “Michel Foucault on Attica,” 31.

⁴²⁶ On the role of the “prison revolts [that] have occurred throughout the world” as the contemporary anchor for Foucault’s “history of the present,” see *Discipline and Punish*, 30-1.

⁴²⁷ The overthrow of colonialism and the changing function of the modern military eliminated direct colonization and the army as methods of mass expulsion; see Foucault, “On Popular Justice,” 17-8.

⁴²⁸ Foucault, “Le grand enfermement,” 1174, my translation.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, my translation.

set against each other, will be to resist these dividing practices by allying different minoritarian struggles and the workers' movement, establishing the basis of solidarity for creating such lateral linkages through the critical diagnosis of the common system of power they all struggle against. Thus, insofar as the individualizing and normalizing techniques of subjection proper to the modern microphysics of power – which irrigate “the whole social body down to its smallest particles,”⁴³⁰ and which deepen the division between the marginalized and proletarianized – function to adjust the double accumulation of human beings and capital, the myriad forms of resistance to the thousand tiny points of power's exercise will be aligned with the proletarianized plebe. As Deleuze puts it to Foucault, “Every revolutionary attack or defense, however partial, is linked in this way to the workers' struggle.”⁴³¹

However, to see what is specifically *transversal* about these connective relations among and between the minoritarian and proletarianized plebe, we must distinguish this political strategy from the traditional form of class struggle posed in terms of ‘exploitation’: “as soon as we struggle against exploitation, the proletariat not only leads the struggle but also defines its targets, its methods, and the places and instruments for confrontation.... This means total identification.”⁴³² The ‘reintegration’ of the marginal plebe ‘into political struggles’ does therefore not mean assimilation to the proletariat. On the contrary, insofar as proletarianization itself effectively consolidates the dominant social order, what is needed is not the becoming-proletariat of the non-proletarianized plebe, but rather the becoming-minor of the proletariat. To create transversal connections

⁴³⁰ Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” 156.

⁴³¹ Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power,” 217.

⁴³² Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” 216.

between the marginalized and proletarianized plebe would thus be to enable the radicalization of the latter, for the “truly revolutionary forces” that “exist in our society today” are “made up of just those strata who are poorly integrated into society, those strata who are perpetually rejected, and who, in turn, reject the bourgeois moral system.”⁴³³

Indeed, as Foucault will later point out, it was the events of May 1968 that had demonstrated the practical and theoretical deficiencies of the assimilative tendency of Marxist thought to re-territorialize the multitude of resistance movements within the province of class conflict. What was singular in these events is that the exercise of power itself was called into question on a host of fronts that fall outside the traditional political domain, thereby problematizing the diffuse and variegated operation of power; Foucault gives as examples “questions about women, about relations between the sexes, about medicine, about mental illness, about the environment, about minorities, about delinquency.”⁴³⁴ In other words, minoritarian struggles generate their political force precisely from the immediacy and specificity of the relations of power they call into question: hence Foucault’s claim that it is by singularizing their proper forms of resistance that the marginalized ‘enter into a revolutionary process.’ The failed attempt to re-inscribe these questions within the vocabulary of class exploitation thus demonstrated the “manifest powerlessness on the part of Marxism to confront these problems.”⁴³⁵

What emerges, then, from this new kind of political problematization are precisely the forms of struggle that Foucault will champion as modes of resistance to the

⁴³³ Foucault, “Michel Foucault on Attica,” 34.

⁴³⁴ Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 115.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. Foucault continues: “So that one found oneself faced with interrogations that were addressed to politics but had not themselves sprung from a political doctrine.”

techniques of subjection by which the exercise of modern power traverses the social field: “opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live.”⁴³⁶ Because the same immanent microphysics of power functions in ‘the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses or institutions’ – or, to speak with Deleuze, because these various concrete assemblages effectuate the same diagram of force relations – the first defining trait of minoritarian forms of oppositional struggle is that they are “‘*transversal*’ struggles, that is, ...they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government”⁴³⁷ but, rather, find common strategic cause more generally as “struggles against the ‘government of individualization.’”⁴³⁸

Since, whatever the singular conditions of its domain of exercise, this ‘government of individualization’ operates by blocking lateral relations, the counter-tactics of political struggle will have a double task: negatively, to “attack everything that separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way”⁴³⁹; and positively, to create non-denumerable multiplicities constituted through the ‘multiplication’ and ‘diverse combinations’ of transversal connections, giving rise to new relational forms and modes of collective subjectivation.

⁴³⁶ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 329.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 329-30, my emphasis. Foucault here initially states that ‘transversal’ refers to not being limited to one country. However, transversality is not merely synonymous with transnationality since the point is that these struggles are not simply opposed to a particular form of government, and thus are not derivable from a given political or economic doctrine, such as traditional Marxism. Moreover, we have already seen Deleuze suggest the distinction between transversality and transnationality when he states in “Intellectuals and Power” that ‘the transversal links between these active and discontinuous points’ form a network ‘from one country to another *or within a single country.*’

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 330.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

Foucault's analytic of power thus provides the critical propaedeutics necessary for developing a transversal politics of connection. In the next chapter, we will develop the positive elaboration of such a politics, which receives perhaps its most systematic theoretical treatment through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minoritarian becoming, and which then becomes singularized in Foucault's ethico-political project of becoming-queer.

CHAPTER 5. *TOWARD A THEORY OF TRANSVERSAL POLITICAL AGENCY:
COLLECTIVE MINORITARIAN BECOMINGS*

5.1 *The Prison Movement and the Problem of Collective Subjectivation: Reconceiving
the 'Plebe'*

We have seen that the aim of Foucault's early transversal politics is the singularization of forms of minoritarian struggle that would contest the exercise of power by undermining the division, maintained through the panoptic courts-police-prison system and integral to capitalism's functioning, between the proletariat and the non-proletarianized plebe. Indeed, it is this division among the plebe, rather than the opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, that orients transversal resistance, for the very class identity of the proletariat is itself the effect of processes of proletarianization that consolidate the social hegemony of the bourgeoisie. The chief objective of transversal politics is to foster connections capable of sparking insurrectionary ferment across the social field, not by integrating the marginal plebe into class struggle as defined by the proletariat, but by providing the former with the resources for articulating and developing its own forms of struggle, and in such a way that the becoming-revolutionary of the latter is made possible.⁴⁴⁰

The strategy, in other words, is to intensify or enrich the relational fabric of the plebeian population so as to multiply and relay the sites of popular contestation to

⁴⁴⁰ For a contemporaneous example of Foucault discussing the singularization and radicalization of the worker's struggle, see "Pour une chronique de la mémoire ouvrière," *Dits et écrits I*, 1267-8.

power's exercise, problematizing the dividing practices that support the economic-political function of power. I will refer to this as the *connective strategy* of transversal resistance, which remains a fundamental feature of both Foucault and Deleuze's politics long after the prison movement.

Before charting the later developments of this strategy, however, it is worth considering the case of the Prison Information Group (GIP) in more detail, both as regards its stated objectives and ultimate limitations. In the last chapter's discussion of the anti-transversal operation of disciplinary power, we saw how a system of lateral invisibility satisfies the first condition for the panoptic organization of a disciplinary space, guaranteeing the productive, controlled ordering of a human multiplicity by isolating its elements and subordinating them to a centralized authority. Such is the cellular technique of partitioning by which a potentially unruly mass is transformed into a denumerable and controllable set of individuals – or, as we have seen Deleuze and Guattari put it, into a 'subjugated group,' a rigidly hierarchized and individualizing form of collectivity. In the case of prisons, where inmates become the objects of a form of knowledge (criminology, sociology, psychiatry, psychology, etc.) of which they are also subjects (to the extent they internalize it), the prisoner "must not speak and be listened to, but rather must reply to questions that he is posed so that his responses can then be examined. The condemned effectively exist in the plural only by virtue of a 'scientific' discourse held by any given official. ... Thus can it be assured that they will form nothing other than a collection, never a collective movement itself bringing to bear its own form

of reflection [*jamais un mouvement collectif porteur lui-même de sa propre réflexion*].”⁴⁴¹

The aim of the GIP is thus to facilitate a counter-network of transversal connections that would cross over and thereby undermine the instituted system of lateral blockage and normalizing individualization, a connective strategy operating on two levels: (1) establishing lines of communication and possible alliance among prisoners themselves, both within and between prisons; and (2) enabling the construction of such lines between prisoners and the greater population. As Foucault puts it:

We want to break up the double isolation in which the inmates find themselves: through our inquiry, we want for them to be able to communicate with each other, to relay to each other what they know, and to speak with each other from prison to prison, cell to cell. We want for them to address themselves to the population and for the population to speak to them. These experiences, these isolated revolts must be transformed into communal knowledge and coordinated practice.⁴⁴²

The means employed by the GIP may seem relatively modest, e.g., distributing questionnaires among, and collecting and publishing the responses of, the inmate population, so that they could have the occasion to both speak out and speak to one another about the conditions of their own confinement. However, the objective of this project was much farther-reaching: namely, to help enable prisoners to constitute themselves as what Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* term a ‘subject-group,’ or what they will later call a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation.’ In other words, the point was to spark a process of collective subjectivation, whereby those who compose a marginalized population would generate a political counter-force by transforming the

⁴⁴¹ Foucault, “Préface, in Livrozet (S.), *De la prison à la révolte*,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1264, my translation.

⁴⁴² Foucault, “(Sur les prisons),” *Dits et écrits I*, 1044, my translation.

conditions of what can be said, and by whom, regarding the intolerable exercise of power over them.

Because inmates had only ever been, as Foucault puts it in *Discipline and Punish*, ‘the object of information, never a subject in communication,’ the attempt to transform the prison population into an assemblage of enunciation should be understood as an effort to realize a new form of collective political agency by intervening in the field of discursive practices.⁴⁴³ By forming a counter-discourse, a set of relays through which ‘isolated revolts’ would be connected to compose ‘communal knowledge and coordinated practice,’ the aim was for prisoners to singularize their own mode of struggle, contesting the mechanisms by which the panoptic structure of ‘double isolation’ had effectively rendered them silent and invisible. In this way, a political group subject could emerge through the construction of a shared form of expression: one bearing witness to a set of otherwise marginalized experiences of ‘the intolerable,’⁴⁴⁴ and articulating a form of otherwise excluded reflection proper to those over whom power is exercised intolerably.

⁴⁴³ As Deleuze puts it: “It’s an oversimplification, but the goal of the GIP was for the inmates themselves and their families to be able to speak, to speak for themselves. That was not the case before. Whenever there was a show on prisons, you had representatives of all those who dealt closely with prisons: judges, lawyers, prison guards, volunteers, philanthropists, anyone except inmates themselves or even former inmates. Like when you do a conference on elementary school and everyone is there except the children, even though they have something to say. The goal of the GIP was less to make them talk than to design a place where people would be forced to listen to them, a place that was not reduced to a riot on the prison roof, but would ensure that what they had to say came through” (Deleuze, “Foucault and Prison,” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 277).

⁴⁴⁴ “*Intolérable*” is the title of the collection of five booklets published by the GIP between February 1971 and January 1973, the opening slogan of which reads: “Courts cops hospitals asylums school military service the press the TV the State and first of all the prisons are *intolérable*” (cited and translated by Alberto Toscano, “The Intolerable-Inquiry: The Documents of the Groupe d’information sur les prisons,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, Issue 3: Workers’ Inquiry, September 25, 2013). Toscano continues: “Refusing the horizon of ‘reformism,’ they [the GIP] declare that allowing prisoners to speak on their own behalf, and using the group to transmit their speech and writing to other prisoners, is ‘the only means to unify in the same struggle the inside and outside of the prison’ (16). It is not a matter of inculcating the ‘consciousness of oppression,’ which could hardly be absent, nor knowledge of who the enemy is, a daily experience; rather, it is a question of countering the manner in which the means of formulating, expressing, and organizing this consciousness are systematically quashed and confiscated” (ibid).

In other words, as it had been in *History of Madness*, the political problem for Foucault is again that of providing the conditions of material expression for an intensive form of excluded experience – that “most intense point of a life, the point where its energy is concentrated, ... where it comes up against power, struggles with it, attempts to use its forces or evade its traps”⁴⁴⁵ –, only now that experience is collective and directly constitutes a kind of limit-relation with power. This is the limit-experience of political uprising, which we will examine in greater detail in Chapter 6; and the form of critical thought that attends it is a kind of subversive minoritarian knowledge, “a *thinking* [pensée] of infraction intrinsic to the infraction itself; a certain reflection on the law tied to the active refusal of the law; a certain analysis of power and law practiced by those who daily struggle against law and power.”⁴⁴⁶ The objective of the GIP is for such thinking, which Foucault calls a “philosophy of the people,” to acquire, “through revolt and struggles, the force to express itself [*la force de s’exprimer*].”⁴⁴⁷ In turn, insofar as this counter-discourse would call into question the divisions sustaining the more general economic-political function of power in capitalist society, the prison movement could be allied to other forms of minoritarian struggle: hence the importance of establishing lines of communication between prisoners and the outside world.

⁴⁴⁵ Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” *Power*, 162.

⁴⁴⁶ Foucault, “Préface,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1266-7, my translation.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 1267, my translation. This last phrase might be translated more naturally as “the strength to express itself.” However, I have opted for the word ‘force’ in order to anticipate Foucault’s parallel analysis of the popular revolts in Iran, where Shiite Islam figures as a “form of expression” that transforms or realizes the affective discontent of the people as “a *force*” (Foucault, “Téhéran: la foi contre le chah,” *Dits et écrits, II*, 688, my translation).

However, Foucault himself was disappointed by what he deemed to be the failure of the GIP,⁴⁴⁸ ultimately concluding that the production and capitalization of a delinquent population – which, as we saw in Chapter 3, was central to the separation instituted between the marginal plebe and the proletariat – had so thoroughly divested criminality of its subversive force that “[d]elinquents serve economic and political society.”⁴⁴⁹ It is almost as though Foucault, having turned from literature to criminality as a more concrete (thus shareable) form of transgression, in turn is compelled to call into question the very “political value of transgression,”⁴⁵⁰ or at least of the structure of exteriority it implies.

In any event, the shortcomings of the prison movement mirror the failings of Foucault’s literary politics to the extent that in both cases, what had previously constituted an exterior form of contestation to society has been interiorized by the capitalist social formation and converted into an instrument of economic or political utility:

Until the late 18th century, it was possible for there to exist an uncertainty, a permanent passage running from crime to political confrontation. Theft, arson, assassination were all ways of attacking the established power. From the 19th century, ... the real aim [of the new penal system] was to create a specific criminalized sphere, a sector that must be isolated from the rest of the population. *Therefore, this sector lost a large part of its critical political function.* And this sector, this *separated minority* was used by power to inspire fear in the rest of the population, so as to control revolutionary movements and sabotage them. For example, labor unions. ... Furthermore, it was lucrative, for instance, with

⁴⁴⁸ See Deleuze, “Foucault and Prison,” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 277. For his part, Deleuze emphasizes the ways in which the GIP had succeeded in transforming the conditions for the production of statements about the prison by prisoners; see *ibid*, 277-280. In Chapter 6, we will have reason to revisit the triple function of the GIP as a mode of political-intellectual activism: (1) a visionary function of seeing the intolerable there where it remains invisible; (2) an enunciative function of transforming the conditions of what can be said, and by whom, regarding the intolerable; and (3) an amplifying function of circulating and relaying the statements of those who suffer the intolerable. This triple function will inform Foucault’s articulation of “philosophical journalism,” the form of intellectual activism that guided his involvement in political resistance struggles from, e.g., the Iranian uprisings to the Polish worker’s movement.

⁴⁴⁹ Foucault, “La torture, c’est le raison,” *Dits et écrits II*, 395, my translation.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 392, my translation.

prostitution, or the trafficking of women and arms, and now with drug trafficking. At present, since the 19th century, *criminals have lost any sort revolutionary dynamism*. I am convinced of it.⁴⁵¹

The criminalized segment of society thus failed to generate the kind of political movement that could enter into transversal alliances with other minoritarian struggles, or with the worker's struggle, and thereby counteract the divisions that neutralize and control the plebeian population.

We may put Foucault's conclusion more generally by saying that the early effort to realize a transversal politics was ultimately inadequate insofar as it did not give rise to a sufficient process of collective subjectivation, whereby a human multiplicity would form itself in such a way as to constitute transformative political agency.⁴⁵² In other words, the Prison Information Group was unable to create the conditions for the emergence of a new assemblage of enunciation, at least one capable of modifying the exercise of power; for the delinquent population largely proved to have already been produced and organized as a subjugated group by capitalist society, and, as Deleuze puts the point on a separate occasion, "[c]ounter-information is only effective when it becomes an act of resistance."⁴⁵³

Further, without diminishing the import of the divisions that rive the social field, and despite his critical displacement of the traditional Marxist binarism, Foucault will also come to implicitly criticize the class-based analysis that had informed his own view

⁴⁵¹ Foucault, "La torture, c'est le raison," 392-3, my translation and emphasis.

⁴⁵² A more developed account of what such agency consists of – including its conditions of possibility, realization, and sustainability – will be the topic of the following chapter.

⁴⁵³ Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?," *Two Regimes of Madness*, 322. Deleuze here is discussing the more general political function of art, which constitutes a form of "counter-information" since it is opposed to "the controlled system of the order-words used in a given society," but is only effective in becoming active resistance (ibid).

of the divided plebe.⁴⁵⁴ In an interview with Jacques Rancière in 1977, he suggests that the plebe itself must be reconceived, no longer as a macro-political statistical aggregate, but as an intensive vector or micro-political movement of revolt:

No doubt the ‘plebe’ should not be conceived as the permanent ground of history, the final goal of all forms of subjection, or the inextinguishable hotbed of all revolts. No doubt there is no sociological reality of the ‘plebe.’ But there is certainly always something, in the social body, in classes, in groups, in individuals themselves that in a way *escapes relations of power*; something that is not a more or less docile or resistant prime matter, but a *centrifugal movement*, inverse energy, or *breakthrough* [*l’échappée*]. ‘The’ plebe no doubt does not exist, but there is something ‘of the’ plebe [*il y a ‘de la’ plèbe*]. There is something of the plebe in bodies and in souls; it is there in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but with irreducibly diverse extension, forms, and energies. This plebeian part [*part de plèbe*] is *less the exterior with regard to power relations than their limit*, their other side, their backlash; it is what responds to every one of power’s advances with a movement to free itself; it is thus what drives every new development of power networks. ... To take the point of view of the plebe, which is that of the other side or limit in relation to power, is thus indispensable for analyzing power’s apparatuses [*dispositifs*]; it is from this perspective that the functioning and developments of power can be grasped.⁴⁵⁵

If the plebe is still to be considered the source of political contestation, this will no longer be as a molar structure or macro-sociological entity – e.g., as the set of radical underclasses in Foucault’s earlier account of the plebe as marginalized population segment; or as the proletarian class in Marxism’s account of the plebe as universal patient of domination and agent of historical revolution –, but instead as a kind of molecular

⁴⁵⁴ We have seen Foucault’s appeal to class, for instance, in his analysis of the social hegemony of the bourgeoisie. For additional examples of Foucault’s invocation of class as the basis for political analysis, see his statement from 1971 that “I am simply trying to make visible, to allow to appear and to be transformed in a discourse readable to all, what is unbearable for the least privileged classes in the current system of justice. ... [I]t is according to the class to which one belongs, according to the possibilities of fortune, according to social positions that one obtains justice” (Foucault, “Un problème m’intéresse depuis longtemps, c’est celui du système pénal,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1074; cited and translated by Toscano, “The Intolerable-Inquiry”). See also “Rituals of Exclusion,” an interview from the same year where Foucault equates “the government” with “the bourgeois class whose interests are represented by the government” (Foucault, “Rituals of Exclusion,” *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, translated by John Johnston, 69).

⁴⁵⁵ Foucault, “Pouvoirs et stratégies,” *Dits et écrits II*, 421-2, my translation and emphasis.

counterforce, the germ of insurrection that traverses the social field. The plebe should not be understood as a substantive group identity, but as a processual quality referring to the ‘breakthrough’ or ‘centrifugal movement’ of that which ‘escapes relations of power,’ which is why Foucault emphasizes the term ‘of the’ plebe rather than ‘the’ plebe. In other words, Foucault reframes the plebe as an intensive, micro-political concept rather than an extensive, macro-political one. Indeed, we could speak here of a *becoming-plebe*, designating what Foucault several years earlier had referred to as “the force of flight,”⁴⁵⁶ or what, as we will examine shortly, Deleuze and Guattari had already named ‘line of flight’ in *Anti-Oedipus*.⁴⁵⁷

Moreover, in the same move, Foucault also recasts the concept of the outside,⁴⁵⁸ which had been privileged in his early vertical politics of transgression; for ‘centrifugal,’

⁴⁵⁶ See Foucault, “The Force of Flight,” *Space, Knowledge, Power: Foucault and Geography*, edited by J. Crampton and S. Elden, translated by Gerald Moore, pp. 169-172. In this article, a review of a series of paintings by Paul Rebeyrolle, Foucault describes the final, climactic painting in the ‘irreversible sequence’ as “the charting [*tableau*] of transversality” (171; cf. “La force de fuir,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1270).

⁴⁵⁷ In *Anti-Oedipus*, the French phrase *ligne de fuite*, which refers to the molecular, schizophrenic breakthrough, is translated as “line of escape”: see, for example, Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 277, 278, 281, 307, 315, 316, 318, and 377. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the same phrase is translated as “line of flight,” which is the more common formulation and the one retained here.

⁴⁵⁸ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, and with reference to Foucault and Blanchot, Deleuze and Guattari will term this subversive activity of thinking “counterthought” or “*outside thought*” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 376). More than ‘thought of the outside,’ the term ‘outside thought’ makes clear that ‘outside’ does not refer to an object of thought, but rather qualifies the activity of thinking, designating the very trajectory or material force of thought itself. Such is the properly ‘nomadic’ mode of thought, which confronts and contests the dominant “images of thought” (ibid) or systems of knowledge that prevail in given historical periods, e.g., Nietzsche in his double critique of God (the form of thought organizing the classical episteme) and man (the form of thought organizing the modern episteme). As we have seen, this is the subversive function unreason was to play for Foucault in *History of Madness*, from Bosch, Goya, and Sade to Nietzsche and Artaud. And in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in addition to Nietzsche, ‘outside thought’ also finds its exemplar in Artaud, who articulates a “thought grappling with exterior forces instead of being gathered up in an interior form, operating by relays instead of forming an image; an event-thought, a haecceity, instead of a subject-thought, a problem-thought instead of an essence-thought or theorem; a thought that *appeals to a people* instead of taking itself for a government ministry” (ibid, 378, my emphasis). Moreover, this reference to Artaud is the very same made by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, where Artaud names a form of ‘genital thought’ (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, 114), a thought without image that destroys the image in favor of pure intensity, “engender[ing] ‘thinking’ in thought” (ibid, 147).

literally ‘center-fleeing,’ refers to a line of force whose movement is directed outward. The thought of the outside is still a thought of resistance, but the outside is no longer a spatial category, instead qualifying a mode of trajectory. Thus, the ‘*part de plèbe*’ is not ‘exterior’ to power or somewhere else beyond it, but rather is a vector of force that breaks from and flees the exercise of power, constituting the latter’s ‘limit.’

In turn, if plebeian breakthroughs form the limit of power, or that which is ultimately irreducible to its exercise, this is because their ‘inverse energy’ is what the ‘functioning and developments of power’ aim to – but can never fully – block, defuse, or capture. As we have already seen in the case of discipline, power functions by organizing, inciting, and controlling the actions and forces of individuals, which Foucault by 1977 had begun formulating generally as ‘governmentalization,’ or the set of techniques for governing the conduct of men.⁴⁵⁹ But since power is thus, as Foucault will later put it, “a set of actions on possible actions,”⁴⁶⁰ the possibility of acting-otherwise must remain relatively open to those upon whom power is exercised.⁴⁶¹ That is, in order for a relation of power to obtain, resistance in the form of human beings composing and conducting

⁴⁵⁹ See, for example, Foucault, “What is Critique?,” 44ff.

⁴⁶⁰ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341.

⁴⁶¹ This is a necessary feature of Foucault’s relational concept of power: by contrast to a state of domination, in which all agency of the patient of domination is destroyed, or a relation of violence, which acts directly upon bodies, a power relation, as an action on other actions, necessarily presupposes the agency of the one whose actions are acted upon. See Foucault, “The Subject and Power”: “In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to break it down. A power relationship, on the other hand, can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up” (ibid, 340). I would suggest that this passage is a clarification of Foucault’s formulation six years earlier in *History of Sexuality* of the “relational character” of power and analytic necessity of resistance: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (*History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 95).

themselves differently must be a permanent possibility, one which explains the status accorded these centrifugal movements as the motive force that ‘drives every new development of power networks.’ These lines or forces of flight therefore acquire a strategic primacy with respect to the operation of power, anticipating Foucault’s better-known assessment five years later in “The Subject and Power” that his analytic approach “consists in taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point...[,] using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used.”⁴⁶²

‘To take the point of view of the plebe’ is thus to adopt the perspective from the limit or degree zero of power’s exercise – from that point which no operation of power can fully capture or control, save by destroying it and thereby ending the relation – so as to better disclose how relations of power have been constituted (their singular historical contingency, rather than universal necessity), how they actually function, and how they might be subverted. Here sounds an echo, to which we will return in Chapter 6, of the earlier perspective of vertical critique (discussed in Chapter 3), which situated itself at the limit or degree zero of history in order to apprehend the reactive or exclusionary founding gesture that reveals a form of positivism as other than what it purports to be.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 329.

⁴⁶³ To take an example from this chapter that could be reread in light of Chapter 3, the vertical mode of critique could be applied to the emergence of the new penal system in the early nineteenth century, showing that while this system announced its objective as the humane reformation of punitive practices and transformation of individuals, buttressed by the epistemic warrant of the human sciences, its real function was to produce a criminalized sector of the population as the economico-political instrument of power. And indeed, such is precisely the perspective of genealogical analysis, which, as we will see in Chapter 6, constitutes Foucault’s re-articulation of vertical critique.

Forces of contestation, then, do not issue from a site that would be radically exterior to the social formation, but rather course immanently throughout the ‘social body’ itself. They cut across the lines of molar segmentarity or division, traversing individuals, groups, and classes; and in each case these forces are singularized and therefore ‘irreducibly diverse’ with respect to their local conditions. The connective strategy continues to animate the project of transversal politics, but in order to more adequately respond to the problem of collective subjectivation, the lateral lines of alliance to be created will have to begin at the micro-political level of intensive becomings or lines of flight, rather than the molar level where these forces have already been integrated into and rigidified as group or class aggregates.⁴⁶⁴ In other words, the movements to be connected will be molecular impulses to revolt that can arise ‘in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie,’ rather than macropolitical campaigns waged on the terrain of group identity, or in the name of a set of class (or underclass) interests.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Later in this chapter, in our discussion of Foucault’s ethico-politics of becoming-queer, we will see an example of the connective strategy applied to the micropolitical domain in this way, namely, through a project of affective intensification as the basis for creating new forms of community, modes of relation, collective practices of subjectivation, etc. In Chapter 6, we will also see the micropolitical or molecular connective strategy operative in Foucault’s analysis of the Iranian uprising, where Shiite Islam, as a singularized form of popular political struggle, serves as the non-hierarchical “form of expression” that realizes as “a *force*” “the thousands of discontentments, hatreds, miseries, and despairs” (Foucault, “Téhéran: la foi contre le chah,” 688, my translation).

⁴⁶⁵ The point is not that macropolitics is dispensable; as Deleuze and Guattari, for example, are at pains to point out, micropolitics would be nothing if it did not act back upon and transform the macro. Rather, the point is that agential force springs from the micropolitical, which, in addition to granting micropolitics a kind of strategic and analytic privilege, also indicates how any macropolitical group should organize itself, i.e., without blocking or capturing its lines of flight. (The latter is the problem of constructing non-hierarchical institutional forms, which was also the original problem in response to which Guattari, in order to build an alternative ‘schizoanalytic’ institution for treating schizophrenics, had proposed the concept of transversality.) See, for example: “It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: ‘we as women...’ makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. ... It is thus necessary to conceive of a molecular women’s politics that slips into molar confrontations, and passes under or through them” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 276).

The plebe, in sum, is reconceived as so many vectors of centrifugal force: a multiplicity of lines of flight, which constitute an immanent limit-relation to power; the perspective of which illuminates the functioning of power; and the transversal connection of which forms the new strategy of resistance to power. To put the point in the language of Deleuze and Guattari from *A Thousand Plateaus*, published three years later in 1980, the plebe is reconceived as a *mass*, rather than a *class*.⁴⁶⁶ And indeed, it is the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, taking up and responding to Foucault's microphysics of force relations, that will provide a more fully developed theoretical treatment of this kind of transformative transverse multiplicity.

5.2 *The Line of Flight and Revolutionary Subject-Groups: The Case of George Jackson*

Deleuze and Guattari's account of transversal politics in *A Thousand Plateaus* can be understood as a development of two related concepts already at work in *Anti-Oedipus*: namely, (1) the line of flight and (2) the subject-group, understood in qualitative contradistinction to the subjugated group. While we have already encountered both concepts, let us return to them in more detail, for they contain the key to understanding how transversality, as the principle of "connection-creation"⁴⁶⁷ by which non-

⁴⁶⁶ See, for example: "If we consider the great binary aggregates, such as the sexes or classes, it is evident that they also cross over into molecular assemblages of a different nature, and that there is a double reciprocal dependency between them. For ... social classes themselves imply 'masses' that do not have the same kind of movement, distribution, or objectives and do not wage the same kind of struggle. Attempts to distinguish mass from class effectively tend toward this limit: *the notion of mass is a molecular notion* operating according to a type of segmentation irreducible to the molar segmentarity of class. Yet classes are indeed fashioned from masses; they crystallize them. And masses are constantly flowing or leaking from classes. Their reciprocal presupposition, however, does not preclude a difference in viewpoint, nature, scale, and function" (ibid, 213-4).

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 223.

denumerable multiplicities are formed, serves as a condition for the realization of transformative political agency.

We initially encountered the phrase *ligne de fuite* in Chapter 3, with Foucault using it somewhat obscurely to indicate the movement by which literature frees language from its representational function.⁴⁶⁸ That is, the ‘line of flight’ first refers to the vertical mode of speech or writing as a decoded flow of language, or as language escaping its social codification, no longer consumable as the horizontal conveyance of meaning. Foucault’s thesis was that this ‘secret verticality’ or ‘structural esotericism’ of literature rendered it intolerable to the culture whose codes it threatened and whose conditions of thought it undermined: “Such speech is transgressive ... in its *play*,” that is, through the “obscure and central liberation of speech at the heart of itself, its *uncontrollable flight* to a region that is always dark, which no culture can accept immediately.”⁴⁶⁹ Thus, already in Foucault’s early work, a line of flight suggests the expressive realization of that which is irreducible to and subversive of the social formation.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari begin to use the concept more systematically. Though the term does not appear as ubiquitously as it will in *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘line of flight’ refers to the radical schizophrenic line, or decoded flows of desire in their pure state, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, are warded off by primitive and imperial societies (through processes of coding and overcoding, respectively) and axiomatized by capitalist societies. In other words, ‘line of flight’ describes the trajectory of the first regime of

⁴⁶⁸ To my knowledge, the term ‘*ligne de fuite*’ is first used in this sense by Foucault in 1963 in “Distance, aspect, origine,” a review of some of the literature of the Tel Quel group.

⁴⁶⁹ Foucault, “Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre,” in *History of Madness*, 545, second italics mine. It may bear repeating that it was Deleuze who encouraged Foucault to publish this short essay, originally written in 1964, as an appendix to the second edition of *History of Madness* in 1972, the same year *Anti-Oedipus* was published; see *Dits et écrits I*, “Chronologie,” Juin 1972.

madness: what had designated an expressive ‘line of force’ in Foucault, a transgressive vertical vector connecting unreason and literature, here becomes “the schizophrenic line of flight or breakthrough,”⁴⁷⁰ or “the pure schizophrenic process of deterritorialization.”⁴⁷¹ If the problem of the two regimes of madness concerns how to prevent the schizoid breakthrough from descending into a catatonic breakdown, then, anticipating *A Thousand Plateaus*, this problem can be reposed as follows: how can the deterritorializing force of a line of flight be sustained, without it either becoming reterritorialized and defused in social institutions (e.g., in the asylum as an ‘apparatus of capture,’ to use Foucault’s term from *Psychiatric Power*), or else collapsing into what Deleuze and Guattari will call a ‘line of abolition’ (e.g., in suicide)?⁴⁷² As we saw in the last chapter, the key to answering this question will lie in the concept of transversal connection.

Now, we have also seen that *Anti-Oedipus* poses the political problem of desire in terms of the direct libidinal investments of the socio-historical field, offering a microphysical analysis of how ‘desiring-production’ is constitutive of social production. On this account, there are two qualitatively different ways in which desire invests the social, that is, two kinds of “unconscious social investment”⁴⁷³: on the one hand, a

⁴⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 316-7, translation slightly modified. Cf.: “*In Search of Lost Time* as a great enterprise of schizoanalysis: all the planes are traversed until their molecular line of flight is reached, their schizophrenic breakthrough” (ibid, 318, translation slightly modified).

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 283.

⁴⁷² As will be discussed below, this problem can be more generally translated into the register of *A Thousand Plateaus* as follows: how can a process of positive absolute deterritorialization (lines of flight freed, connected, composing a transverse or non-denumerable multiplicity) be sustained, without it either becoming a negative relative deterritorialization (lines of flight blocked, reterritorialized through rigid segmentation), or else becoming a negative absolute deterritorialization (lines of flight deprived connection, turning into lines of destruction)?

⁴⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277.

“segregative”⁴⁷⁴ kind, corresponding to the pole of “paranoiac molar investment”⁴⁷⁵; and on the other hand, a “nomadic”⁴⁷⁶ kind, corresponding to the pole of “the molecular schizophrenic line of flight.”⁴⁷⁷ Segregative investments capture desire in centralized molar aggregates, such as the nuclear family and its oedipal triangle, and organize subjugated groups, i.e., human multiplicities that are both hierarchical and individualizing.⁴⁷⁸ By contrast, nomadic investments are of a “schizorevolutionary type” and “follow the *lines of flight* of desire,” assembling “groups-in-fusion ... at the periphery,”⁴⁷⁹ which is to say, composing minoritarian subject-groups by freeing and connecting decoded flows of desire. The project of schizo-politics, intervening at the molecular level of the social field, will be to facilitate nomadic investments of desire and thereby, through the transversal ‘fusion’ of lines of flight, to prepare a multiply-centered revolutionary movement.⁴⁸⁰ Just what such a politics consists in, will be the aim of this chapter to elucidate.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 277.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 315.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 277.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, translation slightly modified.

⁴⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the oedipal function of the family – that is, as the production of a distinctively hierarchical and individualizing form of collective organization – might be fruitfully read alongside Judith Butler’s analysis of the “heterosexual matrix,” the hierarchical and individualizing framework or set of conditions, instituted through the nuclear family, in and through which normalizing (in this case, hetero-normalizing) forms of identity and processes of subjectivation are produced and naturalized. See, for example, Butler, *Gender Trouble*. Butler explains her term ‘heterosexual matrix’ as follows: “I use the term *heterosexual matrix* throughout the text to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. I am drawing from Monique Wittig’s notion of the ‘heterosexual contract’ and, to a lesser extent, on Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 194, n. 6).

⁴⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277, translation slightly modified.

⁴⁸⁰ One name given to such a movement in *A Thousand Plateaus* will be the ‘nomadic’ or ‘revolutionary war machine.’

Generally, then, we may say that the concept of the line of flight provides the evaluative criterion for distinguishing two kinds of human multiplicity. If, as we have seen Foucault put it, there is a qualitative difference between the group as “the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals” and the group as “a constant generator of de-individualization”⁴⁸¹; and if lines of flight constitute so many vectors of deterritorialization, which, as we saw in last chapter’s epigraph and will detail below, impel the co-becoming and de-individualization of the points they pass transversally between and sweep away; then how a group relates to its lines of flight will reflect the kind of group it is.

In short, subjugated groups are organized by blocking, excluding, or capturing lines of flight, whereas subject-groups are composed by ‘following,’ quickening, and connecting them. This is related to why classes, as molar aggregates in which desire is represented as ‘interest,’ cannot provide a suitable basis for revolutionary political movements; for “the revolutionary knows that escape [*la fuite*] is revolutionary,”⁴⁸² a form of active resistance to power’s operations of capture, and such lines of flight are molecular processes. That is, transformative agency is realized at the micropolitical level: “In the subjugated groups, desire is still defined by an order of causes and aims, and itself weaves a whole system of macroscopic relations that determine the large aggregates under a formation of sovereignty. Subject-groups on the other hand have as their sole cause a rupture with causality, a revolutionary line of flight....”⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Foucault, “Preface,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv.

⁴⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 377, translation slightly modified. We will return in detail in Chapter 6 to an analysis of what is meant here by ‘rupture with causality,’ which designates the evental and intensive force of becoming that is irreducible to and disruptive of history.

A particularly salient example of such a ‘revolutionary line of flight’ comes by way of Deleuze’s involvement with the GIP. As Michelle Koerner has argued, Deleuze’s development of the line of flight concept emerges, at least in part, from his ‘encounter’ with George Jackson, a radical black thinker, writer, and militant killed during a San Quentin prison riot on August 21, 1971.⁴⁸⁴ When Deleuze and Guattari first introduce the phrase *lignes de fuite* in *Anti-Oedipus*, speaking of the revolutionary force of ‘the *lines of flight* of desire,’ they refer to Jackson in doing so: “What matters is to break through the wall, even if one has to become black like John Brown. George Jackson. ‘I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon!’”⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ See Koerner, “Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze’s Encounter with George Jackson,” *Genre* 44.2 (2011), 157-80. The ‘assassination’ of Jackson had been the topic of the GIP’s third publication, which, though originally authored anonymously (as all the GIP’s publications were), includes pieces by Foucault and (likely) Deleuze. See Toscano, “The Intolerable-Inquiry”: “*Intolérable 3* internationalizes the scope of the GIP, to present a dossier on the assassination of Black Panther prison militant George Jackson and the conditions of American prisons (this will also be the object of Michel Foucault’s later interview about his visit to Attica). Responding to the far more explicitly political character – the ‘revolutionary function’ (154) – of the US prison movement, the ... booklet begins with a trenchantly lyrical preface by Jean Genet, with ample quotes from Jackson’s *Soledad Brother*, *Blood in my Eye* and other texts. ... This is followed by two 1971 interviews with Jackson, where he stresses the military side of his vision, but also makes allusion to the Maoist need to inquire into order to ‘try to painstakingly determine what each one can do for the construction of the commune’ (170), to ‘reconstruct the world of the people’ (177). The GIP follows this with a text on the ‘war’ in the prisons..., ‘The Masked Assassination,’ which provides a summary of the events leading up to Jackson’s death, and of the campaign of disinformation and counter-offensive. ... A further text analyses the aftermath and underlines (perhaps under Deleuze’s pen) Jackson’s ‘line of flight’ as proof that power is not a seamless moloch, that ‘everything escapes power, beginning with what it does, what it conspires about but does not dominate. The murder of Jackson is one of these things, a line of flight, as Jackson would have said, to which revolutionaries commit themselves’ (209). The final text in *Intolérable 3*, ‘Jackson’s Place in the Prison Movement’, echoing some of Foucault’s own reflections on the marginal plebs (let’s not forget that ‘the Lumpen’ was a key political category for the Black Panther Party), advances Jackson’s idea of prisons as a fulcrum for the creation of revolutionaries as a positive challenge to the incorporation of bourgeois ideologies about crime into the labour movement.”

⁴⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277. They quote this line again eight years later in *A Thousand Plateaus*, still in reference to the revolutionary political force of lines of flight: “It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented to be turned against the heavy arms of the state. ‘I may be running, but I’m looking for a gun as I go’ (George Jackson)” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 204, translation slightly modified). The actual quote from Jackson, which is slightly distorted in its retranslation back to English from the French, reads as follows: “I may run, but all the while that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick” (Cited in Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 160).

The ‘breakthrough,’ still an intensive experience or decoded flow of desire, is also a breakout or uprising, which is to say, direct collective contestation. Indeed, on Koerner’s reading, for Jackson, who depicted his own prison writings as “a message from the hunted running blacks to those people of this society who profess to want to change the conditions that destroy life,”⁴⁸⁶ ‘running’ or taking flight is a life-affirming expression and experience of revolt. Since power in “the contemporary racist, capitalist social order” is “essentially predatory,” operating through techniques of policing and capture to bring about the “disproportionate criminalization of peoples of color, the poor, and working-class populations,”⁴⁸⁷ to free or follow a line of flight is thus to actively resist what Jackson calls “captive society.”⁴⁸⁸ As Deleuze puts it in 1977, again with reference to Jackson, “[n]othing is more active than an escape.”⁴⁸⁹

Moreover, Jackson offers precisely the kind of ‘philosophy of the people’ of which Foucault speaks, i.e., ‘a certain analysis of power and law practiced by those who daily struggle against law and power’; for he “reject[s] moralizing political discourses that separate ‘criminal mentality’ from ‘revolutionary mentality’” and instead “affirms that aspect of criminality that expresses a desire to escape *intolerable* social conditions of captivity.”⁴⁹⁰ In a manner that may well have informed Foucault’s own views on the privileged position of the marginal plebe, “Jackson repeatedly situates the ‘lumpen-proletariat’ — from the kid on the street to the convict doing life in prison — on the front

⁴⁸⁶ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, 328; cited by Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 166.

⁴⁸⁷ Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 167-8.

⁴⁸⁸ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 13; cited by Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 168.

⁴⁸⁹ Deleuze, “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature,” *Dialogues II*, 27.

⁴⁹⁰ Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 168.

line of the class and race war.”⁴⁹¹ The minoritarian political project to singularize a mode of struggle proper to the criminalized plebe would thus aim to transform the ‘criminal mentality’ into a ‘revolutionary’ one, which was precisely a main aspiration of the GIP.⁴⁹²

In turn, one way for such a project to be realized would be the collective becoming-revolutionary of blackness, or what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘becoming-black,’ since, on Jackson’s view, the contemporary social formation “codes blackness as criminality”⁴⁹³ so as to maintain the “existing conditions of capture, enslavement, and incarceration.”⁴⁹⁴ The line of flight as decoded flow of insurrectionist desire – the desire to escape the intolerable – would thus impel a radical process of subjectivation, transvaluing the categories of blackness and criminality alike. To ‘become black like John Brown’ (*Anti-Oedipus*), a militant white anti-racist abolitionist, is to absolutely reject the dominant social order by precipitating what Deleuze and Guattari will call “the becoming-minor of the major”⁴⁹⁵ (in this example, the becoming-black of the white), which is to say, by quickening “an escape from the norms of the ‘majority standard’ and a disinvestment

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. For Foucault’s views on George Jackson’s killing, which he declared a political assassination, and Jackson’s greater place as a revolutionary within the prison movement, see Foucault, Catharine von Bülow, and Daniel Defert, “The Masked Assassination of George Jackson,” in *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and the Prison*, edited by Joy James, 140-158. This article directly quotes Jackson on the political privilege of the ‘lumpen’ or marginal plebe. Moreover, it characterizes the situation of Jackson’s incarceration – “[t]en years in prison for seventy dollars” – as a “political experience” (156), a term which, as we will see in Chapter 5, designates for Foucault precisely the vertical limit-experience of uprising.

⁴⁹² Cf.: “Jackson has already said it: What is happening in the prisons is war, a war having other fronts in the black ghettos, the army, and the courts. . . . Jackson’s death is at the origin of the revolts that exploded in prisons, from Attica to Ashkelon. Prison struggle has now become a new front of the revolution.” (Foucault, von Bülow, and Defert, “The Masked Assassination of George Jackson,” 140, 156-7)

⁴⁹³ Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 168.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, 164.

⁴⁹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 106.

from social arrangements that privilege whiteness: ‘Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black.’⁴⁹⁶

Becoming-black and becoming-nonwhite can therefore be understood as micropolitical processes, what *A Thousand Plateaus* will theorize as ‘minoritarian becomings,’ the basis for which is not inclusion in a substantive group identity by way of ‘organic bond’ (Foucault), but solidarity against the racially coded dividing practices of power in ‘captive society’: “Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. ... Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates ... an active micropolitics. ... As Faulkner said, to avoid ending up a fascist there was no other choice but to become-black.”⁴⁹⁷ Just as with Foucault’s intensive or micropolitical rearticulation of becoming-plebe – where what one becomes (‘of the’ plebe, *de la plebe*) refers to a vector of escape or ‘centrifugal movement’ of revolt, rather than membership in a macrosociological aggregate –, so, too, blackness refers to the processual quality of that which flees or breaks with an oppressive arrangement of power relations.

Minoritarian becoming is always a matter of transforming a segregative schema of social relations through the creation of nomadic counter-practices of collective subjectivation. The fascist mode of group subjection, paranoid about purity, organizes race reactively in terms of exclusion, as in the historical ‘one-drop rule’ for determining whiteness in the United States. By contrast, the processes of becoming-nonwhite or becoming-black would actively resist the hierarchical racial segmentation of society by breaking free from the codes governing the normalized identities of raced subjugated

⁴⁹⁶ Koerner, “Line of Escape,” 177-8; the sentence by Deleuze and Guattari that Koerner quotes is from *A Thousand Plateaus*, 470.

⁴⁹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 292.

groups – e.g., by rejecting the value of purity in favor of the heterogeneity of ‘diverse combinations’ (Foucault) –, creating connections that cross over and undermine the molar lines of division segmenting the social field.

Such is the kind of subject-group formed by the collectivity of San Quentin prisoners who spoke out in the wake of Jackson’s assassination, announcing the compositional principle of their own alliance in terms of the ‘daily struggle’ against intolerably predatory conditions of ‘prison-slavery,’ and seeking to construct a network of popular supports on the outside:

We, the twenty-seven united black, brown, and white prison-slaves of the maximum security cellblock of San Quentin penitentiary, are the victims of an assassination conspiracy, exactly like the one which ended the life of our comrade G.L. Jackson In this prison, there are black, brown, and white comrades who don’t belong to any particular political organization. All that we are asking for is the support of the people in our daily struggle. ... What we are affirming now is this: we need everyone’s help, whether s/he is an outlaw, a pimp, a prostitute, a priest or a doctor of philosophy. ... We are not grieving, we are not crying over the death of our beloved comrade George Jackson. He brought courage to our hearts and spirits, and he taught us how to pursue his ideals. He made the ultimate sacrifice, and his black blood is the nourishment that gives us the resolution to fight against the crushing forces of oppression.⁴⁹⁸

Jackson’s line of becoming-black, i.e., the collective micropolitical process he initiated to revolutionize the criminal mentality, thus helped to singularize a local form of minoritarian struggle (that of the criminalized plebe), giving rise to a racially complex, unified prison movement allied through the shared desire to insurrect against a common regime of power.

Indeed, on Foucault’s view, it is precisely due to Jackson’s efficacy as an agent of political transformation that he was targeted for assassination. Both outside the prison,

⁴⁹⁸ Cited in Foucault, von Bülow, and Defert, “The Masked Assassination of George Jackson,” 151-2. This statement from the prisoners was leaked by their lawyers to the public.

through the expressive force of his writings, which indicted the racial and economic-political injustice of ‘captive’ (or what Foucault would call ‘carceral’) society; and inside the prison, where “he helped to develop” his fellow prisoners’ “political consciousness ... so that they could fight, by all means necessary, fascist methods of repression and dehumanization”⁴⁹⁹; Jackson unleashed a nomadic investment of desire, preparing so many schizorevolutionary lines of flight whose connection would generate subversive political force. “He was killed specifically when the time he had announced and worked for came, when a growing awareness among ‘the blacks, the browns, and the whites’ allowed for the identification of the deceptive traps of organized racism. This process marked the beginning of the formation of a unified resistance front, specifically within the prisons.”⁵⁰⁰

In sum, the case of George Jackson illustrates the concept of the line of flight as an active-affirmative force of revolt, or of insurrectionary desire, taking form through a collective process of minoritarian becoming that would contest the exercise of power proper to the dominant social order (in this case, the racist, capitalist social formation). And even though, as we have seen, the prison movement was unable to realize the political agency to which it aspired, the basic form of transversal politics will remain: that is, the project of constructing revolutionary subject-groups, or quickening processes of becoming-revolutionary, by freeing and connecting lines of flight.

⁴⁹⁹ Foucault, von Bülow, and Defert, “The Masked Assassination of George Jackson,” 156.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 154.

5.3 *The Principle of Transversal Connection: A Double Condition for Transformative Political Agency*

All the analytical pieces should now be in place to present the general project of transversal politics in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The opening distinction is that drawn between the two kinds of human multiplicity, only Deleuze and Guattari will now refer to ‘subjugated groups’ as “arborescent” or “macro-multiplicities,” and to ‘subject-groups’ as “rhizomatic” or “micro-multiplicities.”⁵⁰¹ The basic organizational features of arborescent multiplicities are hierarchical centralization, totalization, and rigid segmentation, whereas rhizomes are centrifugal, open, and mutable. Macro-multiplicities cut off or capture their lines of flight, blocking lateral relations among their constituent elements (everything flowing along hierarchical and centralized lines), whereas the line of flight is the very constitutive force of micro-multiplicities. Indeed, rhizomatic multiplicities are “defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or

⁵⁰¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 33. It should be noted that Deleuze and Guattari do not limit this distinction to human multiplicities, but apply it to the category of multiplicity more generally. The difference in kind between the two multiplicities can be traced back to the distinction Deleuze makes, both in *Bergsonism* and *Difference and Repetition*, between metric (extensive, quantitative, numerical) and non-metric (intensive, qualitative, continuous) multiplicities: see, e.g., *Bergsonism*, 38-43; and *Difference and Repetition*, 238. Deleuze and Guattari make this conceptual connection to Bergson explicit in the passage from *A Thousand Plateaus* just cited: “And in Bergson there is a distinction between numerical and extended multiplicities and qualitative or durational multiplicities. We are doing approximately the same thing when we distinguish between arborescent multiplicities and rhizomatic multiplicities. Between macro- and micromultiplicities. On the one hand, multiplicities that are extensive, divisible, and molar; unifiable, totalizable, organizable; conscious or preconscious – and on the other hand, libidinal, unconscious, molecular, intensive multiplicities composed of particles that do not divide without changing in nature, and distances that do not vary without entering another multiplicity and that constantly construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications, as they cross over into each other at, beyond, or before a certain threshold. The elements of this second kind of multiplicity are particles; their relations are distances; their movements are Brownian; their quantities are intensities, differences in intensity” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 33). Cf. *ibid.*, 483-4. While this distinction in kind between multiplicities takes political form in the schizoanalysis of subjugated groups and subject-groups, I would argue it becomes more fully politically developed through Foucault’s analysis of the denumerating function of disciplinary power.

deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities.”⁵⁰²

The first two principles of rhizomatic composition are therefore “connection” and “heterogeneity,”⁵⁰³ which describe, as it were, both the endogenous and exogenous construction of micro-multiplicities, since a rhizomatic multiplicity itself composed of heterogeneous connections is in turn transformed by entering into new heterogeneous connections with other rhizomes.⁵⁰⁴ This line of ‘connection-creation’ or, to use Guattari’s term, *heterogenesis* – the line of flight or deterritorialization that defines a micro-multiplicity, both its consistency and trajectory – is a line of co-becoming or “transversal communication.”⁵⁰⁵ In short, the transversal line designates the force of flight, or collective process of becoming, constitutive of a rhizomatic multiplicity.

Formally, the difference in kind between the two types of multiplicity can be analyzed in terms of the different modes of relation that obtain in each case between lines and points. “What constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point,” whereas the “line of becoming” proper to a rhizomatic multiplicity “is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localized relation to distant or contiguous points.”⁵⁰⁶ Arborescent

⁵⁰² Ibid, 9.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁰⁴ One of Deleuze and Guattari’s fondest examples of such a heterogeneous connection is the “a-parallel evolution” (ibid, 10) or “block of becoming” (ibid, 238) between the *Drakaea* or ‘Hammer Orchid’ and the Thynnid wasp, “a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp”: “Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further” (ibid, 10).

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 293.

multiplicities thus form ‘punctual’ or ‘unilinear systems,’ while rhizomes form ‘multilinear systems.’

5.3.1 *Arborescence, Striation, Segmentarity*

Deleuze and Guattari summarize the features of a punctual or unilinear system as follows:

(1) Systems of this kind comprise two base lines, horizontal and vertical; they serve as coordinates for assigned points. (2) The horizontal line can be superposed vertically and the vertical line can be moved horizontally, in such a way that new points are produced or reproduced.... (3) From one point to another, a line can (or cannot) be drawn, but if it can it takes the form of a localizable connection; diagonals thus play the role of connectors between points of different levels or moments.... These systems are arborescent, mnemonic, molar, structural; they are systems of territorialization or reterritorialization. The line and the diagonal remain totally subordinated to the point because they serve as coordinates for a point or as localizable connections for two points, running from one point to another.⁵⁰⁷

A unilinear or punctual system forms a coordinate grid, such as the Cartesian coordinates, by which a space becomes measurable, which is to say, homogeneous.⁵⁰⁸ In such a system, diagonal lines are subordinated to the points they conjoin, where one point is located along the horizontal baseline and the other, along the vertical. (It should be noted that the notion of verticality operative here is *not* the special Foucauldian kind

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 295.

⁵⁰⁸ On this point, see, for example, Ed Casey: “Measurability implies the sheer homogeneity of space, its strict regularity as isometric and isotropic (i.e., its homogeneity of measurement and direction, respectively)” (Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 140). Casey’s project is to articulate a philosophical history of the concept of “place,” including its reduction or exclusion at the hands of “space” (due in large part to the advent of Newtonian physics) and its recovery in certain 20th century thinkers, e.g., Deleuze and Guattari. Regarding the modern mathematization of space brought about by Gassendi and Newton, Casey continues: “The leveling-down of space to strict dimensionality and measurability, isotropism and isometrism, and homogeneity and immobility signifies that no vestige of the particularity of place, its peculiar qualities and special tropisms, remains within the monolithic space with which it is now increasingly identified. ... *In other words, the inherent dynamism of place, its power to act or simply to resist, has given way to the supineness of space regarded as an indefinitely passable, indeed a passive, medium*” (ibid, 140-1). For Deleuze and Guattari, homogeneity will be one of the signature features of what they call “striated space.”

treated in Chapter 2 above and again in Chapter 5 below, but rather designates a hierarchical axis of power.) The form of relation proper to this conjoining, which Deleuze and Guattari here term a ‘localizable connection,’ is precisely what, as we saw in Chapter 3, they elsewhere specify as *conjugation* in contradistinction to *connection*: that is, a form of relation between “decoded and deterritorialized flows” that, rather than enabling them to “boost one another [and] accelerate their shared escape,” instead institutes “their relative stoppage, like a point of accumulation that plugs or seals the lines of flight, performs a general reterritorialization, and brings their flows under the dominance of a single flow capable of overcoding them.”⁵⁰⁹

We have already encountered such a system in Foucault’s analysis of the ‘anti-nomadic’ (*Discipline and Punish*) denumerating function of disciplinary multiplicities, realized through the cellular partitioning of space that individualizes elements by blocking their lateral connections. Take the Panoptic arrangement: on any given row (horizontal circular ring), any single cell is isolated from every other cell along that horizontal line, cut off through the system of lateral invisibility; but every point along the horizontal line is also subject to a permanent axial visibility, the axis of which is defined by the diagonal line that establishes a ‘localizable connection’ or ‘conjugation’ between the cell and the central watchtower; and the watchtower, in turn, constitutes a point along

⁵⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 220. Since Deleuze and Guattari initially use the terms ‘connection’ and ‘conjugation’ interchangeably in *A Thousand Plateaus*, only to later introduce this technical – and, indeed, essential – distinction between the two, it can sometimes pose an exegetical challenge to keep the terminology consistent. In the passage cited above on punctual systems, the operative distinction is between ‘localizable connection’ and ‘non-localizable connection,’ where the latter refers to a ‘line-block of becoming’ that sweeps away the points it connects, i.e., a line of flight in processual movement or ‘continuous variation’ and therefore non-localizable. This distinction between ‘localizable connection’ and ‘non-localizable connection’ is analogous to the technical distinction drawn between ‘conjugation’ and ‘connection.’

the vertical baseline, the apex of the “verticon.”⁵¹⁰ This system institutes a unidirectional hierarchical flow running from a centralized authority to the individuals subjected to it; and the ‘line and the diagonal remain totally subordinated to the point’ because the diagonal line’s function is to set into fixed relation a horizontal point with a vertical one.⁵¹¹

The subordination of the diagonal, which is also the stoppage of the transversal, thus designates the subjugation of the group.⁵¹² Deleuze and Guattari refer to this organizational principle of punctual or unilinear systems as the ‘striation’ of space: “a system in which transversals are subordinated to diagonals, diagonals to horizontals and verticals, and horizontals and verticals to points..., expresses the formal conditions under which a space is striated.”⁵¹³ The construction of striated space, in turn, is the technique the State employs for its basic stratifying operation – that is, for the production of what

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 295.

⁵¹¹ The prison example of a punctual or unilinear system is quite simple; more complex is the disciplinary grid of ‘individualizing partitioning’ that developed in the factory. What is at issue is still the construction of a ‘denumerable and controllable multiplicity,’ that is, still “a question of distributing individuals in a space in which one might isolate them and map them; but also of articulating this distribution on a production machinery that had its own requirements. The distribution of bodies, the spatial arrangement of production machinery and the difference forms of activity in the distribution of ‘posts’ had to be linked together. ... At the emergence of large-scale industry, one finds, beneath the division of the production process, the individualizing fragmentation of labour power; the distributions of the disciplinary space often assured both” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 144-5). In turn, and in a way made possible by Foucault’s analysis, Deleuze and Guattari posit the disciplinary ‘Work model’ (“discipline free action”) as the means by which the State appropriated or captured the war machine, by which they mean “not only the disciplining of men” through the modern military, “but also the industrial production of weapons”: “But the State apparatus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, found a new way of appropriating the war machine: by subjugating it before all else to the Work-model of the construction site and factory, which were in the process of developing elsewhere, but more slowly. The war machine was perhaps the first thing to be striated, to produce an abstract labor-time whose results could be multiplied and operations divided” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 490). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of striated space would thus seem to come by way of Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary partitioning.

⁵¹² To put the point differently, there are two opposing modes of the diagonal: (1) the subordinated diagonal, corresponding to arborescent or denumerable multiplicities, and (2) the freed diagonal or transversal, corresponding to rhizomatic or non-denumerable multiplicities. Thus, the subordinated diagonal just is the stoppage of the transversal, and the freed diagonal, in turn, just is the line’s escape from subordination.

⁵¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 497.

we have seen Foucault, in a passage also cited by Deleuze and Guattari in their

“Apparatus of Capture” chapter, term ‘denumerable and controllable multiplicities’⁵¹⁴:

The State ... operates by stratification; in other words, it forms a vertical, hierarchized aggregate that spans the horizontal lines in a dimension of depth. In retaining given elements, it necessarily *cuts off their relations* with other elements, which become exterior, it inhibits, slows down, or *controls those relations*.... Thus the central power of the State is hierarchical...; the center is not in the middle (*au milieu*), but on top, because the only way it can recombine what it isolates is through subordination.⁵¹⁵

Formally speaking, to stratify is to organize a hierarchically centralized multiplicity, a pyramidal unilinear system of reterritorialization in which the vertical axis ‘spans’ or extends over ‘the horizontal lines in a dimension of depth,’ that is, along the diagonal. The diagonal is subordinated to the horizontal and vertical it conjugates; and each ‘localizable connection’ between a vertical point of authority and an isolated horizontal point constitutes an individualizing relation of subjection. A punctual or unilinear system is therefore a denumerable multiplicity – totalizing and individualizing, ‘recombining what it isolates through subordination’ –, the order or governability of which is guaranteed by striating space, ‘cutting off’ or ‘controlling’ the relations among its constituent elements and preventing ‘any relation that is not supervised by authority’ (Foucault). In other words, the subordinated diagonal designates the exclusive relational

⁵¹⁴ We discussed this passage from *Discipline and Punish* – on how ‘the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities...’, replaced by a denumerable and controllable multiplicity’ – in Chapter 4. Deleuze and Guattari make this reference in their chapter “Micropolitics and Segmentarity” when discussing the distinction between a ‘quantum flow’ and a ‘molar segmented line.’ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 536-7, n. 16.

⁵¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 433, my emphasis.

modality of an arborescent multiplicity (conjugation), the defining formal feature of what Foucault, regarding the asylum, first termed an “apparatus of capture.”⁵¹⁶

In short, the subordination of the diagonal expresses the operation of capture, whether the ‘apparatus of capture’ in question refers to a specific disciplinary institution or, as for Deleuze and Guattari six years later, to the State more generally.⁵¹⁷ Proper to both cases is the striation of space as a technique for governing human multiplicities, that is, for controlling the conduct of human beings as part of the economico-political operation of power, maximizing individuals’ productive utility and political docility – which is also to say, *maximizing their force as agents of social production while minimizing their force as agents of political transformation.*

In perfect agreement with Foucault, then, and following his ‘microphysics of power,’ Deleuze and Guattari depict this specifically modern form of power, which emerges in close historical connection with the developments of capitalism, as one that is “immanent and melds with the ‘real,’ operating through normalization” to organize the

⁵¹⁶ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 302, 307.

⁵¹⁷ On the striating operation of the State, see Deleuze and Guattari: “One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire ‘exterior,’ over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc. There is still a need for fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subjects and objects. That is why Paul Virilio’s thesis is important, when he shows that ‘the political power of the State is polis, police, that is, management of the public ways,’ and that ‘the gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs,’ people, animals, and goods” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 385) .

social formation according to a system of division or “rigid segmentarity.”⁵¹⁸ There are, in turn, three modes of rigid segmentarity, which structure the relational fabric of the social field, including its forms of individual and collective subjection: (1) a binary mode, corresponding to “the great major dualist oppositions” between molar aggregates, e.g., “social classes, but also men-women, adults-children,” whites-nonwhites, heterosexuals-homosexuals, etc.; (2) a circular mode, corresponding to a kind of centralized geopolitical segmentarity, a series of centers proceeding from the most immediate locality (“my affairs, my neighborhood’s affairs”) to the most global (“my city’s, my country’s, the world’s...”); and (3) a linear mode, corresponding to the imbricated series of disciplinary institutions through which individuals pass, “in the family, in school, in the army, on the job. School tells us, ‘You’re not at home anymore’; the army tells us, ‘You’re not in school anymore’ ...”⁵¹⁹

5.3.2 *Multiplicities of Becoming: Collective Lines of Flight and the Danger of Abolition*

By contrast, then, to the punctual or unilinear systems of arborescent subordination, the project of transversal politics will concern the construction of ‘multilinear’ systems,

⁵¹⁸Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 130. Deleuze and Guattari later cite Foucault’s ‘microphysics of power’ in their “Micropolitics and Segmentarity” chapter (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 537, n. 16.). Cf. “Attention has recently been focused on the fact that modern power is not at all reducible to the classical alternative ‘repression or ideology’ but implies processes of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc., and which proceed by way of microassemblages.” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 458). For confirmation that they are indeed referring to Foucault here, see “Desire and Pleasure,” where Deleuze presents as “[o]ne of the major theses of *Discipline and Punish*” that “power arrangements rely neither on repression nor on ideology. Breaking away from these kinds of alternatives, more or less accepted by everyone, *D and P* formed a concept of normalization, and of disciplines” (Deleuze, “Desire and Pleasure,” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 122). Elsewhere in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a work abundant in references to Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly situate Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary power at the molecular level: “It requires a whole organization articulating formations of power and regimes of signs, and operating on the molecular level (societies characterized by what Foucault calls disciplinary power)” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 67; cf. *ibid.*, 224, on “Foucault’s analysis of ‘disciplines’ or micropowers”).

⁵¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 209.

beginning with the imperative to “[f]ree the line, free the diagonal”⁵²⁰. “In a multilinear system, ...the line breaks free of the point as origin; the diagonal breaks free of the vertical and the horizontal as coordinates; and the transversal breaks free of the diagonal as a localizable connection between two points.”⁵²¹ The transversal thus performs a destratifying function⁵²² that runs precisely counter to the denumerative function of modern power (by which potentially unruly collectivities are transformed into controllable collections of hierarchically ordered individuals). Take, for example, the case of George Jackson: the transversal, the line of flight as active-affirmative force of revolt, ‘breaks free of’ its subjection as subordinated diagonal, initiating a collective process of minoritarian becoming that contests the relational modality of the prison, i.e., the unilinear system of power’s exercise.

Indeed, if the category of *becoming* is so important for transversal politics, this is because “[b]ecoming is the movement by which the line frees itself from the point and renders points indiscernable,” constituting “a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points.”⁵²³ Becoming, as what Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘line-block’ of connection, is non-localizable precisely because it ‘sweeps’ away the points it passes between, impelling a joint process of transformative subjectivation: “*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away....”⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 295.

⁵²¹ Ibid, 297.

⁵²² On “destratifying transversality” and “transversals of destratification,” see *ibid*, 335-6.

⁵²³ Ibid, 293-4.

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 25.

This ‘transversal movement,’ as the principle of non-localizable connection, thus designates the destratifying trajectory of the line of flight as block of becoming, deterritorializing and transporting the points it sets into relation by passing between. Such is the compositional principle for rhizomatic or non-denumerable multiplicities, which is to say, for the group as ‘a constant generator of de-individualization’ (Foucault): “The diagonal frees itself, breaks or twists. The line ... passes *between* things, *between* points. It belongs to a smooth space. ... [I]t constitutes ... multiplicities of masses or packs, not of classes; anomalous and nomadic multiplicities, not normal or legal ones; multiplicities of becoming, or transformational multiplicities, not countable [*dénombrable*] elements and ordered relations...”⁵²⁵

Indeed, the case of George Jackson may echo again here, for the subject-group of prisoners of which Jackson was a co-founder was named ‘Wolf Pack,’⁵²⁶ and “the pack or wolf-multiplicity” (with its attendant processes of “becoming-wolf”⁵²⁷) serves as Deleuze and Guattari’s first example in *A Thousand Plateaus* of a rhizomatic multiplicity: “The pack, even on its own turf, is constituted by a line of flight or of deterritorialization that is a component part of it, and to which it accredits a high positive value,” by contrast to an arborescent multiplicity that “integrates these lines in order to segment them, obstruct them, ascribe them a negative sign.”⁵²⁸ The difference in kind between a micro-multiplicity and a macro-multiplicity, like the contradistinction of connection and

⁵²⁵ Ibid, 505.

⁵²⁶ See, for example, Joy James, *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America’s Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion*, 84.

⁵²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 29.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 33.

conjugation, can thus be understood as the difference, respectively, between ‘positive deterritorialization’ and ‘negative deterritorialization.’

Let us take the traits of the rhizomatic multiplicity each at a time. Like the peripheral ‘groups-in-fusion’ of the ‘schizorevolutionary type’ in *Anti-Oedipus*, which assemble by ‘following the lines of flight of desire,’ such a multiplicity is ‘nomadic,’ composing itself along a freed diagonal or transversal line. This is the line of connection-creation, by which a micro-multiplicity connects with other micro-multiplicities and thereby changes in nature, creating something new. In this way, the rhizome is a ‘transformational’ multiplicity, a ‘multiplicity in becoming.’ For the same reason, it is also an ‘anomalous’ multiplicity, which is to say, it is defined by its relation to the outside, its centrifugal vector, rather than by a normalizing, hierarchical center.⁵²⁹ And it is thus a pack- or mass-multiplicity, constituted by its component line of deterritorialization, by contrast to the arborescent group structure of classes; for if a pack has a ‘leader,’ it occupies not the center but the outermost limit, where the function of a limit is not to divide but to connect to the outside (the George Jackson function).

However, the concept of a micro-multiplicity must be complicated further, for if the principle of transversal connection provides the evaluative criterion for distinguishing

⁵²⁹ On the anomalous as “Outsider” and “phenomenon of bordering,” by contrast to the normal, see *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. ... Lovecraft applies the term ‘Outsider’ to this thing or entity, the Thing, which arrives and passes at the edge, which is linear yet multiple If the anomalous is neither an individual nor a species, then what is it? It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering. ... Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is in no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension, as a function of which it is possible to count the others, all those lines or dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment (beyond the borderline, the multiplicity changes nature)” (ibid, 244-5). As Deleuze and Guattari note, the initial distinction between *anomal* (‘anomalous’) and *abnormal* (‘abnormal’) was made by Foucault’s teacher, Georges Canguilhem, whose work *The Normal and the Pathological* greatly impacted Foucault’s own analysis of normalization, e.g., in Foucault’s Collège de France lecture course entitled *Abnormal*.

macro- and micro-multiplicities, it also performs a second selective function by distinguishing two kinds of micro-multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari stress that it would be an error to assume there is anything intrinsically ‘better’ about the molecular than the molar, in the sense of a moral good. The privilege micropolitics enjoys over macropolitics is strategic, since the former is the potential site of transformative political agency;⁵³⁰ but this is not an inherent normative privilege, as is exemplified by what Deleuze and Guattari call “microfascism,” a properly molecular form of subjection by which “desire desire[s] its own repression.”⁵³¹ Indeed, mass-multiplicities can even be said to pose the greatest peril. “What makes fascism so dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism.”⁵³²

In other words, the danger of being reterritorialized and appropriated by an apparatus of capture is not the only one facing the line of flight; there is another “moment that must be confronted, the moment the transversal turns into a line of abolition.”⁵³³ This is the moment of breakdown, the destructive force which, for example, we have seen to be characteristic of the second regime of madness: “the line of flight crossing the wall, ...but instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence, *turning to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion of abolition.*”⁵³⁴ In the case of the two regimes of madness problem, the line of abolition marks the collapse into

⁵³⁰ This claim, again, follows from the primacy that both Foucault and Deleuze accord resistance with respect to the constitution of the social field and the ‘development of power networks’ (Foucault); for “[f]rom the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216).

⁵³¹ Ibid, 215.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid, 299.

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 229.

suicide or catatonia, precisely because the schizophrenic flow of madness is unable to bear the charge of being the sole expression of an absolute deterritorialization; that is, the schizoid line of flight is deprived possible connections with other lines of flight, with the deterritorializing tendencies of other social flows, and thus falls unsupported. (As we discussed last chapter, this is the schizopolitical formulation of the problem of material expression.) In the case of fascism, the line of abolition becomes collective, traversing the social field and constituting a mass-multiplicity whose libidinal forces (what *Anti-Oedipus* calls ‘desiring-production’) are invested in a pure process of destruction. In general, the line of abolition is what the line of flight becomes when, by failing to make connections with other lines of flight, it cannot satisfy the conditions of its own sustainability. What was a line of connection-creation then turns instead to annihilation.⁵³⁵

The line of flight thus faces a double danger: (1) from the molar domain, the threat of capture, which, figured by the subordinated diagonal, would undermine the line of flight’s *conditions of realization* by blocking the transversal, preventing the construction of lateral alliances; and (2) from within the molecular domain, the threat of abolition, which would undermine the line of flight’s *conditions of sustainability* by setting it on a course of destruction. At issue in both cases is a threat to the connective force of the line of flight. Conversely, generating such force forms the strategic objective of transversal politics.

⁵³⁵ In other words, what was an absolute positive deterritorialization becomes an absolute negative deterritorialization: “For the stakes here are indeed the negative and the positive in the absolute” (ibid, 510), where ‘absolute’ refers to the molecular vector of flight.

The principle of connection – “the way in which decoded and deterritorialized flows boost one another, accelerate their shared escape”⁵³⁶ – can therefore be understood as the transversal solution to the political problem of material expression, now articulated as the problem of maintaining and quickening the creative-affirmative force of the line of flight, ‘augmenting its valence’. That is, transversality, as the relational mode of connection-creation, constitutes both a condition of realization and of sustainability for the line of flight (as well as for the micro-multiplicity the destratifying trajectory of which that line defines).

The transversal condition of realization goes unmet when the diagonal is subordinated, the line of flight neutralized by striated space or rigidly segmented in binary, circular, or linear modes. In other words, in the absence of transversal connection, the centrifugal vector of escape is not realized as *force*, i.e., as transformative agency capable of acting back upon the macropolitical conditions of social production; for “molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties.”⁵³⁷ In turn, even when the conditions of realization have been met, in the absence of creating other transversal connections, the force of flight cannot be sustained, descending into a line of abolition. That is, the transversal condition of sustainability goes unsatisfied when the line of flight cannot connect to other lines, instead turning cancerous, an auto-destructive force of mutation.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, 220.

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 216.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to the project of meeting this double condition of realization and sustainability as one of constructing a ‘plane of consistency’:

It is the plane, in other words, the mode of connection, that provides the means of eliminating the empty and cancerous bodies..., of rejecting the homogeneous surfaces that overlay smooth space, and neutralizing the lines of death and destruction that divert the line of flight. What is retained and preserved, therefore created, what consists, is only *that which increases the number of connections...*⁵³⁸

The transversal principle of connection thus yields the practical imperative to augment the positive valence of lines of flight by multiplying their connective force, and it provides the selective criterion⁵³⁹ for evaluating between the “fascisizing” and revolutionizing tendencies of mass-multiplicities. A nomadic, anomalous, transformational multiplicity “becomes revolutionary” when, “by connecting” “a number of minority elements,” it “invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming.”⁵⁴⁰ To use Deleuze and Guattari’s example, such was the case with the events of May 1968 in France, through which a molecular phenomenon of transformative political agency was realized ‘by connecting a number of minority elements’ – indeed, by connecting the very minoritarian singularities that we have seen championed by Foucault as transversal struggles against individualizing subjection, e.g., “the youth, women, the mad, etc.”⁵⁴¹

The connective strategy of transversal politics can thus be understood as the project to realize and sustain transformative political force by ‘inventing’ collective processes of

⁵³⁸ Ibid, 508.

⁵³⁹ This is the second moment of selection, distinguishing between two forms of micro-multiplicity; the first moment of selection is the difference in kind between micro- and macro-multiplicities.

⁵⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 106. Such, for example, is the project of a revolutionary or nomadic war machine: to construct a smooth space, to occupy that space, and to thereby distribute and compose oneself as a people in that space. See Deleuze and Guattari’s chapter, “Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine”: “But more generally, we have seen that the war machine was the invention of the nomad, because it is in essence the constitutive element of smooth space, the occupation of this space, displacement within this space, and the corresponding composition of a people” (ibid, 417).

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 216.

minoritarian becoming. As we have seen in our previous discussions of becoming-plebe and becoming-black, and as is suggested by the anti-essentialist language of ‘invention,’⁵⁴² ‘minoritarian’ refers not to a substantive identity – one grounded in a macrosociological entity (race, sex/gender, class, sexuality, age generation), the organization of which would result from rigid binary segmentation –, but rather to a processual quality of becoming, that is, a connective mode of relation. And it is the transversal logic of this mode of relation, finally, that provides the fundamental criterion for distinguishing a *non-denumerable* or minoritarian multiplicity from a *denumerable* or majoritarian one: whereas a majority always constitutes a denumerable set,

...the minority is defined as a nondenumerable set, however many elements it may have. What characterizes the nondenumerable is neither the set nor its elements; rather, it is the *connection*, the “and” produced between elements, between sets, and which belongs to neither, which eludes them and constitutes a line of flight. The axiomatic manipulates only denumerable sets, even infinite ones, whereas the minorities constitute “fuzzy,” nondenumerable, nonaxiomizable sets, in short, “masses,” multiplicities of escape and flux. ... What is proper to the minority is to assert a power of the nondenumerable....⁵⁴³

If, as we saw in Chapter 4, the initial formulation of schizo-politics sets into opposition the transversal connection and axiomatic conjugation of decoded flows, the later formulation of transversal resistance will articulate this connective project in terms of harnessing the minoritarian ‘power of the nondenumerable’ to contest the axiomatic manipulation of ‘denumerable and controllable’ (Foucault) human multiplicities. The non-denumerability proper to the minority – the group as ‘multiplicity of escape and flux,’ a ‘constant generator of de-individualization’ (Foucault) – constitutes a counter-force to the dominant social order by transforming the schema of possible social relations.

⁵⁴² As we will see in the following section, Foucault also stresses the verb ‘invent,’ by contrast to ‘discover,’ in his elaboration of creating a collective practice of becoming-queer.

⁵⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 470.

In other words, minoritarian becoming, as a collective process of subjectivation, gives rise to something like ‘a people,’ that is, to new forms of community whose very mode of composition would challenge the rigid segmentation of the social formation.⁵⁴⁴ And just as the strategy proposed in “Intellectuals and Power” was for minorities (‘women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals’) to ‘enter into a revolutionary process’ by singularizing their own forms of struggle, which could then become laterally allied against a common regime of power to form a multiply-centered resistance movement; so, now, the aim advanced in *A Thousand Plateaus* is to realize and sustain precisely those moments “the axiomatic cannot tolerate: when people demand to formulate their problems themselves, and to determine at least the particular conditions under which they can receive a more general solution.”⁵⁴⁵

5.4 Foucault’s Transversal Ethico-Politics: The Case of Becoming-Queer

“For example, no ‘gay liberation movement’ is possible as long as homosexuality is caught up in a relation of exclusive disjunction with heterosexuality ... instead of bringing to light their reciprocal inclusion and their transverse communication in the decoded flows of desire....”

— Deleuze and Guattari⁵⁴⁶

“Here again, a line of subjectivation is a process.... It is a line of flight. It escapes the previous lines; it escapes from them. ... Foucault’s research was going to show that processes of subjectivation eventually took on other modes than the Greek mode, for example in Christian apparatuses, modern societies, etc. Couldn’t we cite apparatuses

⁵⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari give the example here of minoritarian nationalization: “Whether it be the infinite set of the nonwhites of the periphery, or the restricted set of the Basques, Corsicans, etc., everywhere we look we see the conditions for a worldwide movement: the minorities recreate ‘nationalitarian’ phenomena that the nation-states had been charged with controlling and quashing” (ibid, 470). In Chapter 6, we will consider Foucault’s own analysis of a ‘nationalitarian’ popular movement, namely, the Iranian revolution.

⁵⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 471.

⁵⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 350-1.

where subjectivation no longer goes through aristocratic life or the aestheticized experience of free men but through the marginalized existence of the ‘excluded’?” bringing to light their reciprocal inclusion and their transverse communication in the decoded flows of desire....”

— Deleuze⁵⁴⁷

5.4.1 *Sexuality, Biopower, and the Politics of Friendship*

It remains, finally, for us to detail a positive example of what a politics that harnesses the ‘power of the nondenumerable’ might look like, and how it would contest the exercise of power in capitalist society. I will thus conclude this chapter by providing an account of Foucault’s late ethico-politics, which articulates precisely such a transversal project of minoritarian becoming: namely, what may be termed *becoming-queer*. As the concrete development of what was presented formally in *A Thousand Plateaus*, this project suggests another line in the Foucault-Deleuze block of becoming; and as Foucault’s effort to singularize a form of minoritarian struggle, it serves as a further response to the question of transversal resistance posed to him by Deleuze a decade prior.

To understand how an ethical practice of queer subjectivation constitutes a mode of resistance, and hence a politics, it must first be situated in relation to Foucault’s analysis of biopower in the introductory volume of *History of Sexuality* (1976), completed the year after *Discipline and Punish*. The concept of biopower refers to the mode of power which takes life, whether that of the individual or the population, as its object of production and control. Drawing again from the distinction first made in *Anti-Oedipus* between micro- and macrophysics, Foucault characterizes modern biopower as a “bi-

⁵⁴⁷ Deleuze, “What is a *Dispositif*?”, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 340-1.

polar technology” that develops historically along two axes: (1) the micropolitical axis of discipline, which he now refers to as “an *anatomo-politics of the human body*,” by which the “body as a machine” is rendered docile and useful; and (2) the macropolitical axis of administrative regulation, of “a *bio-politics of the population*,” by which the “species body” as a statistical aggregate is managed and governed with respect to the conditions of its basic biological processes.⁵⁴⁸

Like disciplinary power, which in fact constitutes one of its two poles, biopower serves historically as a necessary condition for capitalism insofar as it makes possible the “adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the differential allocation of profit....”⁵⁴⁹ In other words, as with discipline, the basic operation of biopower is economico-political. This is why Foucault’s economico-political thesis holds for modern power generally, whether the disciplining of individuals in panoptic assemblages, or the bio-political regulation of the population. As Deleuze will later point out, at issue in both

⁵⁴⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 139; Foucault lists as examples of these biological processes “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity.” Following Foucault’s terminology here, strictly speaking, we must distinguish between “biopower” and ‘bio-politics,’ the latter being subordinate to the former as one of its axes, which is to say, as one set of techniques and corresponding domain of application through which the general political technology of biopower is exercised. Moreover, it should be emphasized that to characterize anatomo-politics and bio-politics, respectively, as the micro- and macro-political poles of biopower is not simply to reduce the difference between them to a quantitative matter of size. Rather, the qualitative difference between discipline and what Foucault will later call ‘security power’ (notably, in *Security, Territory, Population*) is maintained to the extent that each domain has its proper set of laws by which phenomena are governed: the macro-physical with its statistical aggregates governed according to the regulation of probabilistic tendencies, and the microphysical with its “somatic singularities” (Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 44) governed according to individualizing techniques of control. It is also worth noting that Foucault retains this ‘bi-polar’ schema of the macro- and micro-political six years later in “The Subject and Power,” when he writes of pastoral power that “the multiplication of the aims and agents of pastoral power focused the development of knowledge of man around two poles: one, globalizing and quantitative, concerning the population; the other, analytical, concerning the individual” (Foucault, “Subject and Power,” 335, translation modified). The English translation has “roles” rather than “poles,” but this is an error, as is both clear from the context and confirmed by the French text, “*pôles*”; cf. *Dits et écrits II*, 1050).

⁵⁴⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 141.

cases is a form of power exercised upon human multiplicities: on the one hand, an anatomic-politics that functions to impose a certain conduct on a particular multiplicity of individuals, where that multiplicity is limited in number and space;⁵⁵⁰ and on the other, a bio-politics that functions to administer the conditions of life processes in a particular multiplicity, where that multiplicity is a more expansive and open population.⁵⁵¹

Accordingly, rather than being opposed to one another, discipline and bio-politics are distinct but complementary strategies through which power operates in capitalist society.⁵⁵² Their convergent points of reciprocal support or mutual articulation form crucial nodes in the modern diagram of force relations.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ I would point out that although discipline as a cellular form of power is developed and exercised in enclosed spaces (factories, schools, prisons, hospitals, asylums, barracks, etc.), panopticism – as an abstract function and disciplinary technique for controlling the conduct of individuals through a system of hierarchical division and surveillance – ultimately becomes dispersed throughout the socius: “The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 207). For more on the generalized diffusion of panoptic techniques and ‘swarming of disciplinary mechanisms’ throughout the social field, see *ibid.*, 205-9, 211-2, and 215-6. For Foucault’s discussion of how the police were a central means for relaying this disciplinary or panoptic mode of power to a more open form of human multiplicity or population, see *ibid.*, 213-4.

⁵⁵¹ See Deleuze, *Foucault*, 72. Cf. Deleuze: “In brief, the two pure functions in modern societies will be ‘anatomic-politics’ and ‘bio-politics,’ and the two bare matters those of a particular body and a particular population” (*ibid.*).

⁵⁵² Foucault expounds on this point: “This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. If the development of the great instruments of the state, as institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomic- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony” (*ibid.*, 140-1).

⁵⁵³ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of “power centers,” the function of which is to conjugate micropolitical and macropolitical axes, i.e., to serve as sites of conversion or adjustment between molecular flows and molar lines, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, e.g., pp. 224-7.

Now, if the apparatus of sexuality is of especial importance to Foucault's analytic of biopower, it is because the category of sex/sexuality serves as just such a site of convergence between anatomic- and bio-politics, located "at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand it was tied to the disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity."⁵⁵⁴ Insofar as it thus constitutes a vital tactical conjuncture through which biopower controls and governs the conduct of individuals and groups, sexuality also becomes privileged strategic terrain for forms of counter-conduct that would contest this exercise of power.

Foucault's transversal ethico-politics therefore intervenes at precisely this pivot point of biopower. As resistance to the 'government of individualization,' such a politics challenges the techniques of subjection by which the apparatus of sexuality binds the individual to herself and divides her from others through a normalizing form of identity. Since, as we have seen Foucault suggest in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, such a process of de-individualization takes shape through a mode of collective subjectivation that is itself made possible by the construction of non-hierarchical group formations, it follows that any politics of de-subjection will require the production of new relational forms – an open network of "polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships."⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 145. Foucault continues: "It fitted in both categories at once, giving rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body. But it gave rise as well to comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions aimed at the entire social body or at groups taken as a whole" (ibid, 145-6).

⁵⁵⁵ Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 139.

Accordingly, when Foucault champions something like a queer cultural movement as a shared form of ethico-political practice, he emphasizes precisely this task of creating new modes of social relation:

Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the secret of my desire?’ Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, ‘What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?’ The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth *to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships*. ... Therefore, we have to work at *becoming homosexuals* and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.⁵⁵⁶

The ‘question of homosexuality,’ then, does not refer to an inherent property, much less a substantive nature, of being homosexual. The problem posed by homosexuality, which Foucault names ‘friendship,’ is not to discover an essential self-relation but, rather, to facilitate the production, transformation, and proliferation of a ‘multiplicity of relationships,’ the schema for which cannot be given in advance.

Indeed, far from constituting the kind of identity politics for which it is sometimes mistaken, which would be centered in molar forms of social identification and their corresponding, rigidly segmented group interests, the Foucauldian question of homosexuality and its philial project concern an active task of becoming, a collective process of subjectivation that I am calling ‘becoming-queer.’⁵⁵⁷ This practice of becoming takes shape through the construction of friendship, understood as a mode of relation with two fundamental features: (1) as a “relationship that is still formless,” friendship must be “invent[ed] from A to Z,” for its structure is unmoored from

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, 135-6, my emphasis.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf.: “We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. ... We don’t have to discover that we are homosexuals. ... Rather, we have to create a gay life. To *become*” (Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 163).

institutional supports and its meaning, ungoverned by dominant social codes; and (2) with regard to its positive content, this relation between friends encompasses “the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure,”⁵⁵⁸ which is to say, the shared creation of a reciprocal circuit of care.⁵⁵⁹

Foucault gives as an example of the formlessness of friendship the relation between two men of “noticeably different ages” who, without a “code [that] would allow them to communicate... [and] with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other,”⁵⁶⁰ must together invent the very terms of that relation – which is to say, must invent themselves as friends who are constituted through the movement arising between them. Indeed, the space of this in-between is precisely that of a non-localizable connection in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where ‘*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation, but a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away.’ Friendship should not be conceived as a line running back and forth from one fixed point to another but, rather, as a perpendicular vector passing between the friends and impelling their co-becoming. By contrast to a relation that would obtain between pre-existing terms, such as a contractual relation independent parties enter into, the friendship

⁵⁵⁸ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136. The last phrase reads in the original French: “*la somme de toutes les chose à travers lesquelles, l’un à l’autre, on peut se faire plaisir.*” What the English translation cannot quite preserve is the reflexive sense in which both participants in the relation experience pleasure in and through the other, but in such a way that the distinction between self and other becomes blurred. It is not so much that *I* experience pleasure that *you* give to *me*, and vice versa – as though friendship were an exchange relation – but that *there is* the experience of a shared pleasure in the conduit that courses between us. (Note that the impersonal *on* in ‘*on peut se faire plaisir*’ is the same grammatical subject that Foucault, following Blanchot, uses with reference to the thought of the outside.) The inventive formation of the relation transforms both terms of the relation.

⁵⁵⁹ With respect to a collective ethos of co-constitutive care and pleasure, cf. “On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress”: “What I want to ask is: Are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other? Is the pleasure of the other something that can be integrated in our pleasure, without reference either to law, to marriage, to I don’t know what?” (Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 258).

⁵⁶⁰ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 136.

relation is itself dynamically constitutive of its proper terms. That is, friendship is an auto-poetic relation, which is de-individualizing, insofar as the subject-position of an original self in relation to the other is displaced in favor of a constituent movement of joint becoming.

Of course, just as with the marginal and proletarianized plebe, this movement does not mean ‘total identification,’ which would collapse the betweenness of the friends’ transversal trajectory.⁵⁶¹ Rather, their co-becoming defines the coordinates of a shared mode of life for which differentiation serves as a genetic principle. In contradistinction to institutional or oppositional forms of social difference (rigid binary segmentarity), philial differentiation affirms difference in its positivity as transversal connection. Thus, to return to Foucault’s example, the age differential between friends, precisely because it deprives them of a socially coded way of relating, makes the invention of a new relational form possible, which propels both friends outside their age-based subject-positions. In this way, the mode of life proper to collective processes of becoming-queer constitutes a decoded flow of desire, a deterritorializing line of creative mutation that cuts across the striated space of the social field:

Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, *a diversification that would also be a form of relationship and would be a ‘way of life’?* A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield *intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized*. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶¹ Indeed, Foucault is specifically critical of the erotic model of the “lovers’ fusion of identities” (Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 137).

⁵⁶² Ibid, 137-8, my emphasis.

If the project of becoming-queer generates an ethics, it will be the very kind that Foucault attributes to *Anti-Oedipus*: namely, an ethics of immanence, which realizes the affective intensification of relationships ‘by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations.’ If this project generates a culture, it will be in the expansive sense of “a culture that invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms.”⁵⁶³ To displace prevailing cultural forms through a radical production of the new entails a creative collective practice that crosses over the historical lines of division between segmented group identities and interests. Thus, echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s claim in the epigraph above regarding the inclusive disjunction and ‘transverse communication’ between homo- and heterosexuality, Foucault argues that if such a movement of cultural invention is to fundamentally transform collective modes of life throughout the social formation, “then gay culture will not only be a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals – it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferable to heterosexuals. ...[N]onhomosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations.”⁵⁶⁴

Indeed, independently of any molar structure of identification, it is the transversal form of the friendship relation, its perpendicular movement as a line of deterritorialization, that enables the process of becoming-queer to enrich the relational fabric or, in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, to effect a collective becoming-intensive of the social formation. As Foucault puts it, “Homosexuality is a historic

⁵⁶³ Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 159-60.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 160. In this way, becoming-queer exemplifies a ‘becoming-minor of the major’ in the sense that characterizes minoritarian becoming for Deleuze and Guattari. See, e.g., *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291-298.

occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the ‘slantwise’ [*en biais*] position of the latter, as it were, *the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric* allow these virtualities to come to light.”⁵⁶⁵ The agential force of this queer mode of collective subjectivation stems from its slanting trajectory, its position ‘*en biais*’ – a term which, following the meaning of *biais* in sewing, suggests the threading of a diagonal direction across the gridded texture of a fabric.

For Foucault, then, the problem of friendship – articulated through the question of homosexuality – can be put as follows: how, by virtue of the transversal movement of becoming-queer, can ‘diagonal lines’ be woven into the ‘social fabric,’ such that they create the conditions of material expression for a multiplicity of ‘affective and relational virtualities’ to be realized? This indeed echoes the two Foucauldian problems previously posed in the 1960s and 1970s. We have seen how, in *History of Madness*, the central issue at the heart of the modern world concerned the insupportability and constitutive division of the intensive experience of unreason, the expression of which becomes the charge of modern literature. We have also seen how, in the analytic of power, the critical question regarded how to construct lateral lines of alliance as a counter-network of resistance to the relations of power exercised in capitalist society. Now, connecting and extending aspects of both projects, the problem of Foucault’s immanent ethico-politics becomes that of creating transversal lines of alliance that would contest the functioning of power by providing a system of supports for the production of previously excluded modes of relation and intensive experience.

⁵⁶⁵ Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” 138, my emphasis.

5.4.2 *The Connective Strategy of Becoming-Queer: Minoritarian Resistance to Neoliberal Governmentality*

The problem of friendship and the project of becoming-queer to which it gives rise, thus provide a Foucauldian response to the question of how to construct a non-denumerable multiplicity constituted through the transversal connection of decoded flows or lines of flight of desire: in other words, a micropolitical connective strategy that would both disrupt the operation of power and make possible radically new forms of existence. For indeed, “what makes homosexuality ‘disturbing’” is precisely what makes Foucault’s ethics of immanence a politics of resistance: namely, the decoded form and deterritorializing force of “the homosexual mode of life,” including

...everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can’t allow a place for without fearing *the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force*. ... Institutional codes can’t validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms.⁵⁶⁶

Just as the extra-institutional formlessness of friendship and its genetic principle of affirmative differentiation make possible the creative movement of co-becoming between friends; so too the transformative political force of becoming-queer derives from its destratifying trajectory with respect to the institutionalized set of relations that segment the social formation. In this regard, Foucault’s philial project specifically contests the operation of biopower. As we have seen, biopower’s function is to govern the population by normalizing and controlling the conduct of individuals and groups, and it does so through the denumeration and regulation of human multiplicities and the dispersion of

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 136-7, my emphasis.

techniques of subjection. On both fronts – that is, the macro-level of social institutions and the micro-level of subjection – the project of becoming-queer functions as a form of resistance. At the micro-level, this is because the invention of minoritarian modes of co-becoming constitutes a de-individualizing process of collective subjectivation, while at the macro-level, this is because the creation of these new forms of relation challenges the institutional relational framework through which the conditions of a population are administered.

This latter point, moreover, must be emphasized, for modern power’s techniques of administration over the population operate by limiting and simplifying the field of possible social relations:

In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor. There is, of course, the relation of marriage, and the relation of family, but how many other relations should exist, should be able *to find their codes not in institutions but in possible supports*, which is not at all the case! ... We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. *Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage [gérer].* We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric.⁵⁶⁷

It is no coincidence that the verb Foucault uses in reference to this governmental function of power, ‘gérer’ (to manage or administer), is the same he reserves to depict biopower’s “function of administering life,”⁵⁶⁸ since the ‘impoverishment of the relational fabric’ is a bio-political strategy for rendering the population a governmentalizable object of regulation and control.

⁵⁶⁷ Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” 158, my emphasis.

⁵⁶⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 138; see also, *ibid.*, 139. In both cases, the French phrase “gérer la vie” is translated as “administering life.” Cf. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir*, 181, 182.

Indeed, as Foucault had pointed out two years earlier (1979), the very institutionalization of the social domain, the historical formation of “civil society,” is “absolutely correlative” to “the technology of liberal governmentality,”⁵⁶⁹ which is itself the “framework of political rationality”⁵⁷⁰ for the exercise of biopower. The constitution of ‘civil society’ in the second half of the 18th century responds to a central political problem for the liberal art of governing: given that economic subjects of interest are irreducible to juridical subjects of right, how can the governability of “these individuals, who inhabit the space of sovereignty as subjects of right and, at the same time, as economic men, ...be assured” in order for “governmentality to preserve its global character over the whole space of sovereignty”⁵⁷¹? The answer, Foucault argues, is that civil society – as “the emergence of a new object, a new domain,” which will also be called “society” and “the nation”⁵⁷² – functions as a field of political unity that integrates the economic and juridical aspects of the subject, making possible the governmentalization of *homo economicus* and the intensification of power’s exercise by way of its extension through social institutions: “An omnipresent government, a government which nothing escapes, a government which conforms to the rules of right, and a government which nevertheless respects the specificity of the economy, will be a government that manages civil society, the nation, society, the social.”⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 296-7.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, 317.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, 294-5.

⁵⁷² Ibid, 295-6.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, 296. Foucault continues: “*Homo economicus* and civil society are therefore two inseparable elements. *Homo economicus* is, if you like, the abstract, ideal, purely economic point that inhabits the dense, full, and complex reality of civil society. Or alternatively, civil society is the concrete ensemble within which these ideal points, economic men, must be placed so that they can be appropriately managed. So, *homo economicus* and civil society belong to the same ensemble of the technology of liberal governmentality.”

It is therefore this mode of liberal governmentality that impoverishes the relational fabric so as to render the population and the individuals composing it governable, operating at both the micro- and macro-political levels: that is, (1) by means of individualizing techniques of subjection, producing *homo economicus* as the form of a self-corporatizing individual whose “life itself . . . must make him into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise”⁵⁷⁴; and (2) through the institutionalization of a set of social relations that can be administered and controlled, i.e., the production of civil society, which “generaliz[es] the ‘enterprise’ form within the social body or social fabric,” “extending the economic model of supply and demand and of investment-costs-profit so as to make it a model of social relations and of existence itself, a form of relationship of the individual to himself, time, those around him, the group, and the family.”⁵⁷⁵ In this way, moreover, biopower performs its economico-political function, integrating the

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid, 241. For more on *homo economicus* as the liberal mode of subjection that produces the form of the modern individual as “someone who is eminently governable,” see *ibid.*, 270-1. Foucault does suggest that there is a certain strain of American neoliberalism, exemplified by Gary Becker’s analysis of drug policy, that gives rise to “the image, idea, or theme-program of a society . . . in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals” (*ibid.*, 259-60). In this case, *homo economicus* is still the form of individual subject who is governmentalizable, in the sense that “power gets a hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent, that he is a *homo economicus*” (*ibid.*, 252), but the point of power’s exercise is at the environmental level of the conditions of action, rather than at a microphysical level of the disciplined body (as in the case of classical liberal governmentality). Though the argument cannot be developed here, I would suggest that Foucault reads Becker as a critical virtuality of neoliberal thought, rather than endorsing neoliberalism in general, especially its actual economico-political forms.

⁵⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 241-2. For Foucault’s discussion of the bio-political exercise by means of which liberal governmentality “takes on the task of continuously and effectively taking charge of individuals and their well-being, health, and work, their way of being, behaving, and even dying, etc.,” see *ibid.*, 62. See also Foucault’s discussion of noso-politics, which operates through the “*medicalization of the family*” to adjust the subjection of individuals to the apparatus of social and economic production: “The biological traits of a population become relevant factors for economic management, and it becomes necessary to organize around them an apparatus that will ensure not only their subjection but the constant increase of their utility” (Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Power*, 96). Cf. “The Birth of Social Medicine,” especially on modern medicine as a “biopolitical strategy” which accomplishes “[s]ociety’s control over individuals” (Foucault, “The Birth of Social Medicine,” in *Power*, 137).

double accumulation of human populations and capital, while consolidating relations of social hegemony and stratification.

The tendency of this liberal logic of socio-relational vitiation, which leaves the institution of the restrictive nuclear family with a totalizing hold on the field of social relations, receives perhaps its starkest articulation in Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that "there is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are families."⁵⁷⁶ But of course, what appears here as a claim about social ontology, in fact describes the contingent effect of a political operation proper to liberal governmentality – one which has only been accelerated by neoliberalism's 'ethos of privatization,'⁵⁷⁷ and which constitutes exactly the kind of government of individualization ('separating the individual, breaking his links with others, splitting up community life') that transversal struggles are allied against.

Indeed, just as we saw with disciplinary power (e.g., the lateral invisibility foundational to panoptic arrangements, or the prevention by the courts-police-prison system of points of contact between the proletarianized and non-proletarianized plebe), so too with biopower, it is by means of blocking transversal connections that the relational arrangements of the social field are rigidly segmented and controlled. Accordingly, the call for a collective, transversal project of queer subjectivation – for the creation of 'a culture and an ethics' that would multiply lateral, extra-institutional connections, as so

⁵⁷⁶ Margaret Thatcher, "Interview for *Woman's Own*," Sept. 23, 1987.

⁵⁷⁷ I borrow this term from Jason Read: "Privatization is not just neoliberalism's strategy for dealing with the public sector, what David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession, but a consistent element of its particular form of governmentality, its ethos, everything becomes privatized, institutions, structures, issues, and problems that used to constitute the public. It is privatization all the way down" (Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus," 35).

many freed ‘diagonal lines’ of minoritarian becoming traversing and intensifying the ‘social fabric’ – is a call to resist the bio-political exercise of neoliberal governmentality.

In sum: if power operates through the impoverishment of the social fabric so as to more effectively manage a population, then contestation will take the form of enriching the relational fabric of society, creating ‘new alliances and tying together unforeseen lines of force.’ The Foucauldian project of becoming-queer can thus be understood as a transversal ethico-politics aiming to establish, through the creation of a non-institutionalized network of supports, the conditions of material expression for new modes of existence and culture, “new forms of community”⁵⁷⁸ that challenge the neoliberal techniques of control (individualizing subjection, relational vitiation), through which biopower manages the conduct and conditions of the population.

⁵⁷⁸ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 151, n. 45, translation modified. Deleuze’s phrase, *nouvelles formes de communauté*, is rendered by its English translator as “new forms of subjectivity.”

CHAPTER 6. INTENSITY, UPRISING, CRITIQUE: FOUCAULT'S POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY OF AGENCY

“For me, politics was the chance to have an experience in the manner of Nietzsche or Bataille.”

— Foucault⁵⁷⁹

6.1 *Return to Verticality: In Defense of the Limit-Experience*

Over the course of the last three chapters, we have seen how Foucault's political thought develops in response to the problem of material expression: first indexed on the concept of verticality, which issued into the abandoned literary politics of transgression, this problem, set within the specific context of the capitalist social formation, finds a more adequate solution through the articulation of transversal politics, an articulation itself made possible by Foucault's philosophical friendship with Deleuze.

It might seem to be implied by this chronological presentation that verticality is surpassed by transversality as the conceptual basis for Foucault's theory of political agency or transformation. Such a conclusion would indeed cohere with the generally accepted view that Foucault's early fascination with the notion of transgression, and with the category of the 'limit-experience' more generally, can be reduced to something like an aspect of intellectual adolescence he later outgrew; for example, this view is expressed clearly in Ian Hacking's assertion that the tragic experience of unreason from *History of*

⁵⁷⁹ Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," *Power*, 247.

Madness attests to a “romantic illusion” that Foucault will correct and “strip” from his subsequent, more “mature” works.⁵⁸⁰

Without denying the auto-critical transformations of Foucault’s thought, I will, in effect, argue against the general view that minimizes the abiding philosophical significance, for his work, of the limit-experience. One of the chief objectives of the present chapter will be to show how, rather than rejecting the concept of verticality along with his literary politics, Foucault in fact modifies and redeploys it: the vertical form of limit-experience is recast intensively through an analysis of revolt as the degree zero of power’s exercise, which makes political agency possible (and serves as the ultimate anchor for concretely realized human freedom); and the vertical form of critique is elaborated as necessary for both the sustainability of collective uprising (or the revolutionary process of collective subjectivation) and the ethico-political agency of thought. In other words, rather than being eclipsed by transversality, the concept of the vertical becomes its integral complement, allowing a more complete analysis of the set of

⁵⁸⁰ Ian Hacking, “Preface,” *History of Madness*, xii. Hacking elaborates: “A romantic fantasy lurks here, the purity of the possessed, those who not only speak the truth in paradox, like the fools in Shakespeare, but who are also themselves the truth. The fantasy leaps out at you from the 1961 preface, in words suppressed in 1964: ‘a madness whose wild state can never be reconstituted; but in the absence of that inaccessible primitive purity ...’ (p. xxxiii). There it is: the inaccessible primitive purity. ... One of these books is governed by an idea of *dérason*, in which there lurks a dream of madness in the wild, as something prediscursive, inaccessible, pure. ... Once Foucault’s idea of archaeology had matured, it appears that an archaeology can only be of what is said. If so, the second book (of the two identical texts) is no longer an archaeology of silence. It is the work of an author who is no longer obsessed by the fear of madness and dread of unreason. He has made peace with both, and has moved on to the greatest of his archaeologies, *The Order of Things* (1966)” (ibid, xi-xii). It is worth noting in passing the irony that Hacking refers to *The Order of Things* as exemplary of a Foucauldian archaeology that would be ‘stripped’ of all reference to a limit-experience in its ‘primitive purity’; for in the preface of that work, Foucault characterizes his undertaking as “an attempt to analyse” “the pure experience of order and its modes of being,” “this experience of order in its pure primary state,” where one encounters ‘the *il y a* of order’ as that which is “most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures” (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx). The point of noting this, of course, is not to detract from *The Order of Things*, but to suggest the persistent philosophical value, for Foucault, of the general notion of the limit-experience.

necessary conditions for political agency, which is to say, of the solution to the political problem of material expression.

Still, before pursuing this line of approach, it is worth considering at some length a possible objection to it. As we saw in Chapter 3, whether in its experiential or critical mode, verticality implies a kind of limit-relation to history: e.g., the work of the dreaming imagination as ‘that which in existence is most irreducible to history’; the limit-experience of unreason at the degree zero of history, i.e., that the exclusion of which enables the horizontal unfolding of reason or western culture; and the vertical critique of this horizontal history, which uncovers arbitrary division and contingency at the ‘origin’ of what takes itself to be grounded in universal necessity. Generally speaking, the vertical formulation of the problem of material expression may be put as follows: how can that which is irreducible to history nevertheless act upon and transform the conditions of history, that is, the historical conditions of social production? Now, in the case of literature, we have already seen Foucault come to reject one way of conceiving this vertical irreducibility, namely, as exteriority to the social formation. Why should we not also think that this criticism would apply to the other instances of experiential verticality, such as dreams and unreason, which are explicitly ‘transcendent’ forms of limit-experience?

In other words, why should we not accept the widely held view that Foucault’s youthful interest in limit-experiences was merely a naïve romanticism, a vestige of transcendent thought that will be shed through his subsequent analyses of discourse and power? After all, doesn’t Foucault himself implicitly confirm this view when he later (1)

offers a self-criticism of his notion of experience in *History of Madness*⁵⁸¹ and (2) suppresses the original preface of that work (which contained the crucial reference to the ‘constant verticality’ that ‘confronts Western culture with what it is not,’ disrupting ‘reason in its horizontal becoming’), ostensibly in response (and concession) to Derrida’s famous critique?⁵⁸² In short, if, from the beginning, the conceptual basis of verticality is given by a form of experience that becomes philosophically suspect or expendable, why return to verticality at all?

6.1.1 *The Sublime Function of the Limit-Experience: The Project of Desubjectivation*

In order to address this possible set of objections, let us begin by responding to point (1) above. When Foucault retrospectively criticizes his “very floating”⁵⁸³ use of the term “experience” in *History of Madness*, it is not the limit-experience of unreason that he specifically distances himself from, so much as his recurrent appeals to a kind of collective cultural perception or consciousness of madness, e.g., the ‘Great Fear’ said to have gripped the classical period.⁵⁸⁴ In the editor’s introduction to *History of Madness*, Jean Khalifa is thus correct to point out that such an invocation of “experience” borrows

⁵⁸¹ See, for example, Paolo Savoia, “Madness,” *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 277-278.

⁵⁸² See, for example, Jean Khalifa, “Introduction,” *History of Madness*, xxiii.

⁵⁸³ Foucault, “Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 202.

⁵⁸⁴ See, for example, *Psychiatric Power*: “It seems to me that, above all, I was trying to study the image of madness produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the fear it aroused, and the knowledge formed with reference to it, either traditionally, or according to botanical, naturalistic, and medical models, etcetera. It was this core of representations, of both traditional and non-traditional images, fantasies, and knowledge, this kind of core of representations that I situated as the point of departure, as the site of origin of the practices concerning madness that managed to establish themselves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In short, I accorded a privileged role to what could be called the perception of madness” (Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 12-13). Notice that this self-criticism does not apply to the modern works of unreason in the 19th and 20th centuries, that is, the tragic lineage running from Sade through Hölderlin and Nietzsche to Artaud.

from the “vocabulary of the phenomenological approach,”⁵⁸⁵ which explains why Foucault will later reproach himself for having offered what was “still an analysis of representations”⁵⁸⁶ and therefore “still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history.”⁵⁸⁷ However, where Khalfa errs is in identifying this phenomenological notion of experience with the tragic or transgressive concept of the limit-experience in the original preface.

Indeed, in an important interview with Duccio Trombadori from 1978, in which Foucault emphasizes the essential and persistent impact of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot on his thought, he explicitly distinguishes phenomenological experience from limit-experiences:

The phenomenologist’s experience is basically a certain way of bringing a reflective gaze to bear on some object of ‘lived experience,’ on the everyday in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meanings. For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, on the other hand, experience is trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the ‘unlivable,’ to that which can’t be lived through. *What is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time. ...* Moreover, phenomenology attempts to recapture the meaning of everyday experience in order to rediscover the sense in which the subject that I am is indeed responsible, in its transcendental functions, for founding that experience together with its meanings. On the other hand, in Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a *project of desubjectivation*. The idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself is what was important to me in my reading of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot....⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁵ Khalfa, “Introduction,” *History of Madness*, xx.

⁵⁸⁶ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 12.

⁵⁸⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by Sheridan Smith, 16.

⁵⁸⁸ Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 241, my emphasis. In another interview given in the same year, Foucault again clarifies the seminal importance, for his thought, of the project of desubjectivation as elaborated by Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski, whom he credits with being “the first to emphasize the problem of the subject as a basic problem of philosophy and of modern thought” (Foucault, “The Stage of Philosophy,” *New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory*, Issue 1.5 – Scenes of Knowledge, my emphasis).

Foucault thus opposes the limit-experience to phenomenological experience in much the same way that, as we saw in Chapter 2, the experience of the sublime in Kant can be opposed to ordinary empirical experience: that is, as a maximally intensive experience of the impossible that ruptures both the unity of the subject – taken in its transcendental function as the founding act of meaning, or, in Kantian terms, as the ‘formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations’ – and the unity of the object, taken as the world of ‘everyday experience.’ This is also akin to the opposition we encountered in Chapter 3, where Foucault contrasts the anthropological analytic of finitude, made possible by Kant’s Copernican turn, to the radicalization of this finitude through the limit-experience of transgression, in that instance exemplified in the being of literary language (and the thought of the outside that modern literature opens onto).⁵⁸⁹

In all of these cases, what is essential is the dissolution of the subject position as original or constitutive ground. Indeed, the ‘project of desubjectivation,’ first articulated by Foucault in terms of the tragic limit-experience of unreason, continues to animate his thought, up to and including his late account of transversal political struggle “against the

⁵⁸⁹ See, for example, Foucault’s homage to Bataille, “Preface to Transgression,” where, with regard to the thought of transgression, he writes: “Undoubtedly, it can be said that it comes to us through that opening made by Kant in Western philosophy when he articulated, in a manner that is still enigmatic, metaphysical discourse and reflection on the limits of our reason. However, Kant ended by closing this opening when he ultimately relegated all critical investigations to an anthropological question; and undoubtedly, we have subsequently interpreted Kant’s actions as the granting of an indefinite respite to metaphysics, because dialectics substituted for the questioning of being and limits the play of contradiction and totality. To awaken us from the confused sleep of dialectics and of anthropology, we required the Nietzschean figures of tragedy, of Dionysus, of the death of God, of the philosopher’s hammer, of the Superman approaching with the steps of a dove, of the Return. But why, in our day, is discursive language so ineffectual when asked to maintain the presence of these figures and to maintain itself through them? Why is it so nearly silent before them, as if it were forced to yield its voice so that they may continue to find their words, to yield to these extreme forms of language in which Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Pierre Klossowski have made their home, which they have made the summits of thought?” (Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” 76).

government of individualization,”⁵⁹⁰ that is, against “the type of individualization linked to the state”⁵⁹¹ (e.g., in the minoritarian project of becoming-queer).

Considering the consistently maintained conceptual distinction between the notion of experience that Foucault will criticize himself for having employed, and the category of the limit-experience; and considering that the philosophical upshot of the limit-experience, the ‘project of desubjectivation,’ continues to sound in Foucault’s articulation of political struggle over two decades later; we can thus conclude that Foucault’s retrospective objections to *History of Madness* do not provide grounds for dismissing the vertical limit-experience as a viable political concept. Moreover, lest the particular examples of the limit-experience in Foucault’s work appear to be limited to the 1960s (in which case it might be argued that the thought remained merely an early influence), in the same interview with Trombadori, Foucault explicitly indicates how the major line of his archaeological and genealogical project consists in an effort to develop the concept of the limit-experience, and specifically the Bataillean experience of transgression, from the perspective of a critical history of thought:

Everything I’ve been concerned with up to now has to do basically with the way men in Western societies have produced these experiences – fundamental ones, no doubt – which consist in engagement in a process of acquiring knowledge of a domain of objects, while at the same time they are constituting themselves as subjects with a fixed and determinate status. . . . I made an effort, in particular, to understand how man had transformed certain of these limit-experiences into objects of knowledge – madness, death, crime. That is where one reencounters some of Georges Bataille’s themes, but applied to a collective history which is that of the West and its knowledge. It’s always a question of limit-experiences and the history of truth.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 330.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, 336. This is, of course, the negative formulation of the positive project of transversal politics, namely, the composition of non-denumerable human multiplicities that would be “constant generator[s] of de-individualization” (Foucault, “Preface,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv).

⁵⁹² Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 257.

It is thus no exaggeration to say that, far from the fleeting vestige of an immature romanticism, the category of the limit-experience centrally informs the trajectory of Foucault's work, including *History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic* (which analyzes the appropriation of death as an object of positivist medicine), *Discipline and Punish*, and, no doubt also, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.⁵⁹³ These books should be understood in the strict sense as historical critiques, that is, as analyses of the historical conditions of possibility for the formation of fields of experience, including the constitutive processes of what Foucault calls "objectivation" ("determining under what conditions something can become an object for a possible knowledge, how it may have been problematized as an object to be known, to what selective procedure it may have been subjected, the part of it that is regarded as pertinent") and "subjectivation" ("determin[ing] what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge").⁵⁹⁴

In other words, Foucault's critical histories can be read as so many 'vertical reinterpretations' of how different limit-experiences have been excluded, defused, or appropriated as the basis for the formation of dominant regimes of power-knowledge, including the production of normalizing and individualizing forms of subjectivity, or what we have seen Deleuze and Guattari call the 'binary segmentation' of major and

⁵⁹³ In the same interview some 10 pages later, Foucault will include sexuality among the list of limit-experiences: "I've already spoken about limit-experiences, and that's the theme that really fascinated me – for me, madness, death, sexuality, and crime are more intense subjects." (Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," *Power*, 266, translation modified; the English translation fails to include the word "death," *mort*, which appears in the French)

⁵⁹⁴ Foucault, "Foucault," *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 459-460.

minor identities (the sane and the insane, the healthy and the sick, the law-abiding and the criminal, the straight and the queer).

6.1.2 *Foucault's 'Reply to Derrida': Toward a Politics of the Limit-Event*

Nevertheless, it remains the case that Foucault did, in fact, remove his original preface from the second edition of *History of Madness*, a gesture which is often depicted as a response to Derrida's forceful critique. Further, in the 1972 edition, Foucault replaced what had initially been the lead title, *Folie et Déraison* ('Madness and Unreason': a rare example, for the title of a French book, of a second term being capitalized), with what had been at first just the subtitle, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* ('History of Madness in the Classical Age'). Thus, one might continue to press the objection as follows: even if Foucault's retrospective self-criticism refers to his overly phenomenological account of the collective perception of madness, rather than to the tragic limit-experience of unreason; and even if the general category of the limit-experience persists in informing his critical project; his editorial decisions still suggest a critical distance taken from his early notion of experiential verticality, and thus cast doubt on the viability of reconstructing a vertical politics. In order to answer this more difficult objection, we must take a closer look at Derrida's "Cogito and the History of Madness" (presented in 1963, two years after the publication of *History of Madness*) and the question of Foucault's putative tacit concession nine years later.

Derrida's essay challenges Foucault's history of madness on two levels. The first, taking aim at the original preface, claims to lay bare the fundamental "infeasibility" of

Foucault's project: namely, its attempt "to write a history of madness *itself*,"⁵⁹⁵ whether as an 'archeology of silence' or in terms of a constitutive division between reason and madness that would be the birth of western culture. For Derrida, this attempt, insofar as Foucault's history is itself necessarily a work of reason, is consigned to failure in advance: *either* madness would have to be the subject of the work, which is impossible, since to speak the language of madness would require that one actually be mad, and, following Foucault's own formula, where there is madness there is no work; *or* madness would have to be the object of the work, in which case it would already have been ineluctably appropriated by reason, and Foucault would thus be recommitting the very gesture of violence that he condemns. Madness, then, as disqualified subject or already-captured object: either way, it is impossible to render a history of madness in which the truth of madness itself would speak.⁵⁹⁶

In turn, the second level of Derrida's critique takes aim at a three page passage on Descartes's First Meditation, which appears at the beginning of Foucault's second

⁵⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 39. Derrida elaborates: "In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted—and this is the greatest merit, but also the very infeasibility of his book—to write a history of madness *itself*. *Itself*. Of madness itself. That is, by letting madness speak for itself. Foucault wanted madness to be the *subject* of his book in every sense of the word: its theme and its first-person narrator, its author, madness speaking about itself. Foucault wanted to write a history of madness *itself*, that is madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry *on* madness – the agonistic and rhetorical dimensions of the preposition *on* overlapping here – on madness already crushed beneath psychiatry, dominated, beaten to the ground, interned, that is to say, madness made into an object and exiled as the other of a language and a historical meaning which have been confused with logos itself" (ibid).

⁵⁹⁶ It is worth noting that this line of criticism fails to mark the distinction Foucault makes between unreason – which, precisely, is given or rather seizes the power of expression, by contrast to the madness that the poets of unreason end up succumbing to – and madness qua mental illness: to speak in the tragic language of unreason, to compose and structure one's work and thought so as to express the tragic insight of that broken lineage, is a far cry from appropriating madness through a form of reason that would 'confine it in mental illness'. Indeed, to fail to distinguish between unreason and mental illness in this way, as Derrida and those who follow him do, is exactly to re-enact the forgetting, to unwittingly restage the oblivion of the limit-experience of the tragic; and it is also to miss the central problem (of material expression) and project (to articulate the conditions for realizing and sustaining this expression) at the heart of Foucault's work.

chapter, “The Great Confinement.” Here, Foucault suggests that the exclusion of madness proper to the classical period, realized at a socio-institutional level through widespread practices of internment, becomes realized at the epistemico-discursive level through the surreptitiously grounding decision taken by the meditating subject to dogmatically refuse the possibility of being mad as a skeptical reason for doubt. Derrida argues that Foucault’s reading is both unfaithful to Descartes and symptomatic of the founding impossibility of *History of Madness: unfaithful*, because Foucault does not sufficiently attend to the Cartesian ‘order of reasons,’ according to which the madness hypothesis is first surpassed by an equivalent but more universally accessible reason for doubt (the dreaming hypothesis) and then covered by the evil genius hypothesis (which is the madness hypothesis hyperbolized); and *symptomatic*, because whereas Foucault suggests that the Meditations enact an exteriorization of madness (the madness to which he would give voice, or at least whose silencing he would uncover), in fact, they open onto the “mad audacity” proper to philosophy itself, namely, the ability of the basic metaphysical truth of the Cogito to withstand the test of madness, to be “valid *even if I am mad*.”⁵⁹⁷

In other words, for Derrida, what Foucault in his preface calls “the obscure common root”⁵⁹⁸ of reason and madness – the “degree zero of the history of madness, when it was undifferentiated experience, the still undivided experience of the division itself”⁵⁹⁹ – is not a tragic limit-experience expelled by philosophy as the latter’s first condition. Rather, before any historical act of founding division would have been instituted, this common root is embedded in the very ground of philosophy, in the “supreme self-confidence” and

⁵⁹⁷ Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 67.

⁵⁹⁸ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxxiii.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid*, xxvii.

“hyperbolic audacity of the Cartesian Cogito,” “this zero point” or “impenetrable point of certainty” that makes possible any “project of thinking.”⁶⁰⁰

It would thus seem that much of the force of Derrida’s critique is directed against Foucault’s original preface. Nevertheless, most of the attention in the Foucault-Derrida debate has centered around their competing interpretations of Descartes, and this, for the apparently straightforward reason that Foucault – by removing his original preface from the second edition of *History of Madness*; and by focusing his well-known rejoinder, an essay entitled “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” and appended to that second edition, on the disputed passage from the First Meditation – seems to have largely conceded Derrida’s first line of criticism. In point of fact, however, Foucault penned two responses to Derrida in 1972: the aforementioned appendix is a revision of an earlier essay, which first appeared in the Japanese journal *Paideia* under the simple title “Reply to Derrida.”⁶⁰¹ This initial response is shorter than the more famous second version, and its exegetical engagement with Descartes’s text, less developed; but what it shows, which tends to drop out of the later text, is not only that Foucault does marshal an answer to Derrida’s first set of charges, but that he does so in the strongest of terms, clarifying the philosophical and political significance of the debate.

Two considerable issues are at stake here: (1) whether or not reason has its ground in a constitutive exclusion, which would leave the rational project itself unjustified, with

⁶⁰⁰ Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 67-8.

⁶⁰¹ “Reply to Derrida” was first translated into English in 2006 as an appendix to *History of Madness*, which may account in part for why, at least in the Anglophonic world, this essay has remained so uncommented upon. Still, it is perhaps indicative of a more general attitude – to wit, that the first essay is merely a rough draft of the second – that in his introduction, Jean Khalifa, the editor and co-translator of *History of Madness*, says nothing about the content of “Reply to Derrida” other than describing it as “an earlier and different version of Foucault’s answer to Derrida” (Khalifa, “Introduction,” xxiii).

no foundation other than one of arbitrary violence; and (2) whether philosophical discourse can enter into relation with what is radically outside it, or whether, with Derrida, “the exterior (is) the interior,”⁶⁰² “there is nothing outside the text,”⁶⁰³ and the supposed radicality of exteriority is always already contained within, made possible by, and reiterated through philosophy itself. In the first case, Derrida challenges the core of Foucault’s project as a counter-history (and, specifically for our purposes, as vertical critique), while in the second, he rejects the very concept of the ‘thought of the outside’ that was so integral to Foucault’s work throughout the 1960s (and to the vertical form of the limit-experience).

Foucault’s answer in “Reply to Derrida,” unique to this essay, is to argue that if Derrida cannot conceive of a form of thought that would open onto the outside – if he is “so preoccupied with remaining in the interiority of philosophy” that he cannot “recognize this external event, this *limit event*, this primary division”⁶⁰⁴ by which the positivity of reason is predicated on the exclusion of madness –, then this is because Derrida’s own thought is determined by three “postulates” that serve as the traditional armature for the institution of philosophy in France.⁶⁰⁵ First, every form of knowledge or rational discourse “entertains a fundamental relation with philosophy,”⁶⁰⁶ which confers on the former its epistemic justification as rational or as knowledge (*philosophy as law of discourse*). Second, any mistake made in regard to philosophy is not an error in argument

⁶⁰² Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 46.

⁶⁰³ Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 416. Cf.: “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Spivak, 158).

⁶⁰⁴ Foucault, “Reply to Derrida,” in *History of Madness*, 589, my emphasis.

⁶⁰⁵ It is worth keeping in mind that in between Derrida’s critique and Foucault’s replies, the revolts of 1968 had taken place, in which the university as a functionary of power had become the object of political struggle.

⁶⁰⁶ Foucault, “Reply to Derrida,” 575-6.

so much as “a blend of Christian sin and Freudian slip,”⁶⁰⁷ a moral fault inadvertently revealing a wayward inner logic that only philosophy can disclose and correct (*philosophy as totalization of meaning and moralization of truth*). Third, philosophy, as “the repetition of an origin that is more than originary, and which infinitely exceeds, in its retreat, anything that it could say in any of its historical discourses,”⁶⁰⁸ is sealed off from any event, any encounter with singular forces outside it that it would not have been able to master in advance (*philosophy as impermeable to the event*).

In other words, Foucault’s reply to the first part of Derrida’s critique is to disclose the dominant conditions of discourse that make his charge possible – and then to call these conditions themselves into question. Indeed, for Foucault, the three postulates summarize everything in the intellectual domain from which he had tried “for so long”⁶⁰⁹ to free himself.

In opposition to them, he advances three counter-theses, following from the method of ‘archaeology’ that he had developed in the intervening years since Derrida’s essay. First, philosophy is not foundational for knowledge; on the contrary, the formation of philosophy as a kind of knowledge is itself subject to historico-epistemic conditions that are exterior to it. Second, “the systematicity which links together forms of discourse, concepts, institutions, and practices is not of the order of a forgotten radical thought that has been covered over and hidden from itself, nor is it a Freudian unconscious,”⁶¹⁰ but rather, the unconscious of knowledge is constituted by a specific set of rules governing the emergence of statements and discursive practices. Third, far from being impermeable

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 576.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 577.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, 578.

to events, thought itself can be understood *as* an event (e.g., a singular, transformative epistemic event, such as the Copernican turn), and the history of thought can be analyzed in terms of “the ‘events’ that can come about in the order of knowledge, and which cannot be reduced either to the general law of some kind of ‘progress’, or the repetition of an origin”⁶¹¹; it is in this sense that Foucault refers to *History of Madness* as “the analysis of an event.”⁶¹² He then applies this archaeological method to the exegetical dispute over the First Meditation, arguing that the foundational exclusion of madness by the meditating subject can only be apprehended when the text is read as a meditative technique, that is, as a series of discursive events modifying the subject, rather than through the traditional lens of the ‘order of reason’ imported by Derrida.

If, for Foucault, what is at stake philosophically in this debate with Derrida is the evental status of thought, then conversely, the political stakes concern the thought of the event. In an interview given just three months prior to the publication of “Reply to Derrida,” Foucault identifies the categories of *power* and *the event* as central to the kind of counter-knowledge that, as we saw in Chapter 4, he will later call a ‘philosophy of the people’:

Under the categories of what has alternately been called ‘truth,’ ‘man,’ ‘culture,’ ‘writing,’ etc., it is always a matter of warding off the shock of that which happens [*ce qui se produit*]: the event. . . . In the broadest sense, *the event and power are what are excluded from knowledge*, such as it is organized in our society. This is to be expected, since class power (which determines this knowledge) must appear inaccessible to the event; and the event, in its dangerous aspect, must be dominated and dissolved in the continuity of a class power that remains unnamed. On the other hand, the proletariat develops a form of knowledge where it is a question of the struggle for power, of what must be done to give rise to the event, respond to its

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid, 577.

urgency, or avoid it, etc.; this is a knowledge that is absolutely inassimilable to the first kind, since it is *centered around power and the event*.⁶¹³

The appearance of impermeability to the event is required for the organization of a dominant form of power-knowledge that must present itself as natural, necessary, or universal so as to cover over its own contingency (hence mutability, fragility); in turn, this concealment functions to safeguard the invisibility of power, to mask its exercise and its effects on the conditions of the possible. Seen in this light, when Foucault opposes his own mode of analysis to Derridean deconstruction by asserting that Derrida “does not know the category of the singular event,”⁶¹⁴ at issue is less a methodological question⁶¹⁵ than the implied political charge that Derrida’s thought is determined by, and unwittingly reinforces, ‘class power.’

Thus, far from tacitly conceding Derrida’s essential claim that ‘the exterior (is) the interior,’ and thereby abandoning the thesis of constitutive exclusion along with his original preface, Foucault instead situates Derrida’s critique itself, and his philosophical project more generally, within the regime of power-knowledge that functions by excluding the double thought of the singular event – ‘this external event, this limit event, this primary division’ – and power. By positioning Derrida as “the most profound and the most radical”⁶¹⁶ contemporary example of philosophy qua dominant discourse, Foucault thus seeks to flip deconstruction on its head, effectively charging it with being a monolithic, logocentric, totalizing form of discourse that forecloses any relation to an

⁶¹³ Foucault, “Revolutionary Action: ‘Until Now’”, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 220-1, translation modified, my emphasis; cf. “Par-delà le bien et le mal,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1094.

⁶¹⁴ Foucault, “Reply to Derrida,” 577.

⁶¹⁵ Such may be suggested by Foucault’s better known polemical statement in his second response to Derrida that deconstruction is “a historically well determined little pedagogy” (Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 416).

⁶¹⁶ Foucault, “Reply to Derrida,” 577.

outside and thus to difference as such, which is to say, to the singular event as production of the new and force of transformation.

By contrast, what is needed, and what Foucault will seek to elaborate, is a form of counter-knowledge ‘centered around power and the event’: a kind of minoritarian philosophy (‘of the people’), which Deleuze and Guattari, referring to Foucault, call “outside thought” or “counterthought,”⁶¹⁷ and which Foucault, referring to Deleuze, calls “thought of the multiple – of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity.”⁶¹⁸ Indeed, it is precisely the “intensive thought” of Deleuze – about which Foucault writes: “new thought is possible; thought is again possible”⁶¹⁹ – that enables Foucault to recast the concept of verticality, to which our next section will turn.

However, before concluding our consideration of the possible set of objections to verticality’s return, the fact must still be addressed: in 1972, Foucault suppressed the original preface of *History of Madness*, containing the key reference (in that work) to experiential verticality, as well as the original title, containing the capitalized word “Unreason.” What, then, did he reject exactly? I would suggest there are at least three reasons for this self-distancing, all of which are addressed by (and help explain) the subsequent conceptual developments of verticality.

First, the form of expression proper to the limit-experience of unreason – that through which experiential verticality is realized – is the work of art, especially the work of literature. Accordingly, Foucault effectively abandons this aspect of his earlier project when he abjures his literary politics (by the end of 1970); it then becomes a matter of

⁶¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 376-7.

⁶¹⁸ Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 358.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 367.

relocating the vertical form of limit-experience, from intellectual works to the collective experience of political uprising.

Second, Foucault rejects the element of transcendence and its residual appeal to a kind of existential authenticity that had characterized his early notion of the vertical limit-experience (e.g., the tragic axis of the death dream, or the invocation of Artaud and his notion of the ‘authentically insane’). He then reformulates the irreducibility of experiential verticality in terms of intensity (what Deleuze calls the ‘intensive,’ as opposed to the ‘extensive,’ or ‘becoming,’ as opposed to ‘history’): in the will to revolt, the vertical limit-experience becomes immanent, collectively realized and “transformed into a *force*,”⁶²⁰ and the degree zero refers to the absolute limit of power’s exercise.

Third, with respect to critical verticality, while Foucault does not reject the general notion of constitutive division, he does distance himself from what in the original preface had suggested a certain primordially of the limit-experience, which, preceding the chronological order of history, would be realized in history as something like the return of the repressed.⁶²¹ Foucault maintains the critical concept of the degree zero as vertical limit,⁶²² but he does so from the genealogical perspective that takes ‘origin’ to refer to a site of *emergence* in the immanent plane of force relations, which is to say, as a singular,

⁶²⁰ Foucault, “Tehran: Faith against the Shah,” in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, 202.

⁶²¹ It is this aspect of early Foucauldian verticality that, as we saw in Chapter 3, Althusser identified with Foucault’s ‘transcendentalist tendency.’

⁶²² To the double nature of the concept of verticality, with its two aspects, experiential and critical, there correspond two notions of the degree zero as vertical limit: (1) the experience *of* the limit, which refers to the experiential degree zero, whether the vertical experience of originary exclusion (as in *History of Madness*’s original preface) or of the absolute limit of power’s exercise (as in the will to revolt, the experience of the *intolerable*); and (2) the experience *at* the limit, which refers to the critical degree zero, the vertical perspective on the emergence of singular events as sites of transformative force (as in the visionary function of intellectual activism, the ability to see the intolerable, which we will discuss in sbelow).

transformative event whose upsurge constitutes the entrance of force into history; such is the production of the new, which is also a rupture in the historical conditions of social production that constitutes the very possibility of political agency.

In sum, Foucault removed his original preface from *History of Madness* in response to two problems. The first is the problem of *transcendence*, which prompts the vertical limit-experience to be reconceived intensively, both with respect to the limit itself, i.e., the degree zero (of history, of power's exercise), and with respect to the relation to that limit (whether the genealogical perspective on history, or the collective experience of political uprising). The second is the problem of *material expression*, since a new "form of expression"⁶²³ other than literature must be conceived that would satisfy the conditions of realization for this intensive experiential verticality to be 'transformed into a *force*,' prompting the conceptual convergence of vertical and transversal politics in Foucault's theory of revolt. Detailing Foucault's response to these problems will ultimately provide us the resources for constructing an account of the necessary conditions for political agency.

6.2 *Middle Experience: The 'Vertical Dimension of Intensities'*

6.2.1 *The Verticality of Deleuzian Repetition: Evental Thought and Eternal Return*

In Chapter 3, we saw how Deleuze offered Foucault a way out of the impasse resulting from the collapse of literary politics in the face of the problem of capitalism. What must now be shown is how this 'way out' is twofold, corresponding to the double thought of power and the event that is excluded from the dominant organization of

⁶²³ Foucault, "Tehran: Faith against the Shah," 202.

knowledge in society and affirmed by minoritarian counter-thought. On the one hand, as we have seen, the thought of power, which Foucault credits Deleuze with having explored,⁶²⁴ initiates the line of transversal politics. On the other hand, for Foucault, Deleuze also opens the thought of the event, preparing a renewal of vertical politics by allowing the irreducibility proper to verticality to be conceived *immanently*, as the irreducibility of the intensive to the extensive.

Now, although not named as such, we have already encountered one formulation of the Deleuzian concept of the event: namely, the *breakthrough*, the “revolutionary line of flight,” “the revolutionary break” that “cannot be achieved except at the cost of, and by means of a rupture with, causality.”⁶²⁵ Similarly, with respect to Deleuze’s earlier event philosophy, discussed by Foucault in his review of *Logic of Sense and Difference and Repetition* (“Theatrum Philosophicum,” published in November 1970), events are in some sense irreducible to the macrophysical causal order in which they are realized: “Physics concerns causes, but events, which arise as its effects, no longer belong to it.”⁶²⁶ Perhaps we can already begin to sense how verticality, which from the first had concerned a basic irreducibility to history and the “rational concatenation of causes,”⁶²⁷ would align with the thought of the event. It is as though Foucault, just as he is rejecting

⁶²⁴ See “Intellectuals and Power,” cited in Chapter 4: “If the reading of your books (from *Nietzsche* to what I anticipate in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) has been essential for me, it is because they seem to go very far in exploring this problem: under the ancient theme of meaning, of the signifier and the signified, etc., you have developed the question of power, of the inequality of powers and their struggles” (Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 213-4).

⁶²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 377. In our next section’s discussion of the vertical limit-experience of revolt, we will return to this conception of the event as ‘revolutionary line of flight’ in order to better understand the sense in which causality is ruptured.

⁶²⁶ Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 349.

⁶²⁷ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxix.

the vertical exteriority of literature⁶²⁸, finds in Deleuze's 'intensive thought' of "incorporeal materiality"⁶²⁹ a new way to conceive verticality, indexed no longer on an ontology of literary language but an evental metaphysics of force, or what Foucault calls "a metaphysics of the incorporeal event"⁶³⁰: "a metaphysics freed from its original profundity as well as from a supreme being"; "a metaphysics where it is no longer a question of the One Good but of the absence of God"; a metaphysics, in short, that "revolves around atheism and transgression" and recalls "Sade and Bataille"⁶³¹.

Indeed, it is precisely in terms of the transgressive *sublime function* – that is, the dissolution of the subject achieved through an intensive limit-experience of thought – that Deleuze can be situated in relation to Sade and Bataille, as well as other vertical thinkers in between, such as Nietzsche and Artaud. While there is a longer story to tell than is presently possible concerning Deleuze's metaphysics of intensive difference in *Difference and Repetition*, the specifically vertical nature of what he calls 'repetition for itself' indicates how Deleuze's thought – which Foucault describes as "genital thought, intensive thought, affirmative thought, acategorical thought"⁶³² – enables Foucault to recast the concept of verticality.

For Deleuze, there are two basic "forms of repetition": the first, a "repetition of the Same, explained by the identity of the concept or representation," is a "horizontal,"

⁶²⁸ The interview in which Foucault calls into question his own literary politics, "Folie, littérature, société," was published in December 1970, based on an interview given during Foucault's trip to Japan from September to October of that year. As cited in Chapter 3, in the same interview, Foucault discusses his interest in the shared, specifically vertical structure of literature and madness. See Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 981ff.

⁶²⁹ Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," 346.

⁶³⁰ Ibid, 352.

⁶³¹ Ibid, 347-8.

⁶³² Ibid, 367.

“extensive,” “ordinary” repetition; the second is a “vertical,” “intensive,” “singular”⁶³³ repetition in which difference itself is what repeats. Now, in general, repetition consists in “elements that are absolutely identical (if they are not identical, then there is no repetition), but yet must also be different (if they are not distinguishable, then we once again have no repetition, as we only have one event).”⁶³⁴ In the first, horizontal form of repetition, “when we find ourselves confronted by identical elements with exactly the same concept,”⁶³⁵ repetition is representational: the common concept is what accounts for the identity of the elements (the sense in which they are the same), while their difference must be referred to the subject of representation, to “a change ... produced in the mind which contemplates...”⁶³⁶

In other words, as was the case with phenomenological experience, horizontal repetition is grounded in the synthetic activity of a constitutive subject; and as was the case in our discussion of vertical and horizontal language in early Foucault, horizontality

⁶³³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 24. Deleuze first uses the term *vertical* to qualify the second form of repetition in reference to Binswanger and schizophrenia: “Take an uncovered or bare repetition (repetition of the Same) such as an obsessional ceremony or a schizophrenic stereotype: the mechanical element in the repetition, the element of action apparently repeated, serves as a cover for a more profound repetition, which is played in another dimension, *a secret verticality* in which the roles and masks are furnished by the death instinct. Theatre of terror, Binswanger said of schizophrenia” (ibid, 17-8, my emphasis). Deleuze then refers to the work of Raymond Roussel (who also appears as a tragic poet of unreason in *History of Madness*, and to whom Foucault dedicated a book-length study, *Death and the Labyrinth*, in 1963) and Charles Péguy as exemplary of the vertical form of repetition: “Both Péguy and Roussel take language to one of its limits: in the case of Roussel, that of similarity and selection, the ‘distinctive feature’ between *billard* and *pillard*; in the case of Péguy, that of contiguity or combination, the famous *tapestry points*. Both substitute a vertical repetition of distinctive points, which takes us inside the words, for the horizontal repetition of ordinary words repeated” (ibid, 22). For additional instances of this distinction between horizontal and vertical repetition, see ibid, 84 (“one is actual, the other virtual; one is horizontal, the other vertical”) and 287 (“One is static; the other dynamic. One is extensive, the other intensive. One is ordinary; the other distinctive and involving singularities. One is horizontal; the other vertical”). See also: “Every origin is a singularity and every singularity a commencement on the horizontal line, the line of ordinary points on which it is prolonged like so many reproductions or copies which form the moments of a bare repetition. It is also, however, a recommencement on the vertical line which condenses singularities and on which is woven the other repetition, the line of the affirmation of chance” (ibid, 202).

⁶³⁴ Henry Somers-Hall, *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition*, 56.

⁶³⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 23.

⁶³⁶ Ibid, 70.

indicates the representational function of thought, in this instance, discursive cognition. By contrast, in the second, vertical form of repetition, the identical element that is repeated is not some one *thing*, cognizable under a concept with extension in the ordinary world of objects. Rather, the identical element repeated is repetition itself, repetition eternally repeating – and thus performing precisely the kind of infinitely recursive, auto-doubling function that, as we saw in Chapter 2, is distinctive of verticality. Further, and for the same reason, the difference ‘between’ elements is understood not by reference to the subject of representation, but to an auto-differing of the element of repetition with itself: that is, what is repeated, what recurs in ‘repetition for itself,’ is ‘difference in itself,’ a pure process of becoming that disperses the fixed identity of the subject. To better understand this latter point, let us consider the limit-case, privileged by Deleuze, of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence.

The thought of the eternal return, first introduced in the penultimate paragraph of Book Four of *The Gay Science*, begins as a meditation on becoming.⁶³⁷ Arising in the hour of one’s ‘loneliest loneliness,’ the thought is posed by one’s ‘demon’ as a hypothetical test: how would you be affected if you heard that the absolute entirety of past and present existence, including your own in its irreversible necessity and singularity, were to be eternally repeated and endlessly re-lived? Would you be crushed by the weight of resentment, sorrow, and spite, or would you rejoice and declare the good news and its daimonic bearer divine? Most simply, then, the thought of the eternal return opens as an ethical test of self-affirmation – all things are so tightly entwined that to affirm yourself,

⁶³⁷ See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341: “The greatest weight.” This paragraph immediately precedes Nietzsche’s introduction of Zarathustra in “*Incipit tragoedia*” (ibid, §342), a passage we encountered in our discussion of vertical interpretation in Chapter 3.

you must affirm the absolute infinity of past and present time – and yields the practical maxim: act in such a way that you can will or desire your action to be repeated an infinite number of times.

One who is able to pass this test is thus able to ‘will the past,’ which for Nietzsche is the ultimate criterion of becoming-active, the distinguishing mark of the transmutation of reactive force by which *ressentiment* is overcome.⁶³⁸ But since the past invariably issues into the present, one can only will the past absolutely if one can affirm the very passage and transience of time itself: the infinite movement of destruction and creation, the eternal rhythm of passing away and returning, the pure process of becoming. This speculative affirmation of what Deleuze calls ‘the being of becoming’ doubles as a practical ethical affirmation: one can only will the past by affirming the necessity of its role in effectuating the present; by affirming this present moment itself in both its singular necessity (this instant could not be any different than it is without altering the entirety of the infinite past) and necessary passage; and by thus incorporating the past into the futural movement of one’s own active self-becoming.

To say Yes to the eternal return, then, is to will or desire the repetition of the past as an affirmation of the future – which is to say, precisely Deleuze’s concept of ‘repetition for itself,’ or vertical repetition, in *Difference and Repetition*, “making repetition the category of the future.”⁶³⁹ In other words, the infinite past is affirmed in the very activity of becoming by which the future, too, is affirmed: the affirmation of the open Moment

⁶³⁸ This transmutation of reactive force into active-affirmative force will play a key role in the collective process of becoming-revolutionary that animates popular revolt. For our previous discussion of “*ressentiment*” and reactive force in Nietzsche, see Chapter 3.

⁶³⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 94.

and the eternity it expresses⁶⁴⁰ achieves the synthesis of time as the double affirmation of past and future.⁶⁴¹ By affirming oneself in one's movement of radical self-becoming, one affirms one's very being *as* becoming, as a singular expression of the being *of* becoming by which existence itself is affirmed and affirms itself. And it is this thought of radical or pure becoming, the ontological primacy of the being of becoming, that explains Foucault's claim that Deleuze's metaphysics 'revolves around atheism and transgression,' i.e., around a fundamental groundlessness conceived through an intensive movement of thought by which the representational or phenomenological subject position is undone: "Repetition in the eternal return never means continuation, perpetuation or prolongation, nor even the discontinuous return of something which would at least be able to be prolonged in a partial cycle (an identity, an I, a Self) but, on the contrary, ... presupposes the dissolution of all prior identities."⁶⁴²

We can thus see how Deleuze, for Foucault, opens anew the possibility for vertical thought – 'genital thought, intensive thought, affirmative thought, acategorical thought' –, breaking with the representational operation of discursive cognition through the idea of eternal recurrence. As Foucault writes, "We must avoid thinking that the return is the form of a content that is difference," which would be to conceive the eternal return on the

⁶⁴⁰ See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Third Part, "On the Vision and the Riddle," §2.

⁶⁴¹ "The synthetic relation of the moment to itself as present, past and future grounds its relation to other moments. The eternal return is thus an answer to the problem of *passage*. And in this sense it must not be interpreted as the return of something that is, that is 'one' or the 'same'. We misinterpret the expression 'eternal return' if we understand it as 'return of the same'. It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other words, identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs. This is why the eternal return must be thought of as a synthesis; a synthesis of time and its dimensions, a synthesis of diversity and its reproduction, a synthesis of becoming and the being which is affirmed in becoming, a synthesis of double affirmation" (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Janis Tomlinson, 48).

⁶⁴² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 201-202.

horizontal model of repetition; “rather, from an always-nomadic and anarchic difference,” or difference in itself, “to the unavoidably excessive and displaced sign of recurrence,” or repetition for itself, “a lightning storm was produced which will bear the name of Deleuze: new thought is possible; thought is again possible.”⁶⁴³

Such thought is *genital*, a reference to Artaud,⁶⁴⁴ insofar as it is “an event-thought ... instead of a subject-thought,” “grappling with exterior forces instead of being gathered up in an interior form”⁶⁴⁵; *intensive*, insofar as what occurs in the idea of vertical repetition is the auto-intensification of thought itself, thought increasing its proper power of activity by passing through the test of the eternal return; *affirmative*, insofar as it is by affirming eternal recurrence, as the being of becoming, that thought effects its own becoming-active; and *a-categorical*, insofar as such thought functions as an ‘a-presentational’⁶⁴⁶ singularity or degree of power, a “thought-event”⁶⁴⁷ generating force, by contrast to representational or discursive thought, e.g., the Kantian understanding, which operates through apprehensive and recognitive syntheses to subsume objects of intuition under concepts. Indeed, the example of Kant is doubly relevant, for the thought of vertical repetition is precisely akin to the experience of the sublime, which, all while undoing the foundational structure of the transcendental subject, elevates thought to its

⁶⁴³ Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 367.

⁶⁴⁴ On Artaud as the thinker of genital thought, i.e., an imageless thought that both destroys the dominant image of thought and creates thought anew, see Deleuze: “Artaud pursues in all this the terrible revelation of a thought without image, and the conquest of a new principle which does not allow itself to be represented. ... He knows that thinking is not innate, but must be engendered in thought. He knows that the problem is not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist (there is no other work, all the rest is arbitrary, mere decoration). To think is to create – there is no other creation – but to create is first of all to engender ‘thinking’ in thought. For this reason Artaud opposes *genitality* to innateness in thought” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 147). Cf. *ibid*, 114.

⁶⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 378.

⁶⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 24.

⁶⁴⁷ Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 354.

greatest intensity, to thought's own absolute, which is for it a 'soul-stirring delight' (Kant).

In short, like the vertical line of flight in early Foucault that frees language from its horizontal function as communication, Deleuze opens a form of outside thought through the idea of vertical repetition that frees thought itself from its representational function.

6.2.2 *Vertical Intensity and the 'Liberation of Difference'*

In this light, let us turn, finally, to the passage in "Theatrum Philosophicum" where Foucault, referring to *Difference and Repetition*, first casts "the vertical dimension" in terms of intensities. Foucault begins by depicting "the functioning of the concept," the hallmark of discursive cognition, as that which allows the multiplicity of the manifold to be ordered according to a table of representations: "For the concept to master difference, perception must apprehend global resemblances (which will then be decomposed into differences and partial identities) at the root of what we call 'diversity' [*le divers*]." ⁶⁴⁸

The concept allows any singularity encountered to be recognized, represented as an intelligible objet of intuition on the basis of its resemblance to other representations (falling under the same concept), from which it can then, in turn, be comparatively differentiated. In other words, once the extensity of a singularity is established (that is, identified as an object of intuition subsumed under a concept), its intensity can be captured or represented as a relative quantity (greater or less): "Each new representation must be accompanied [*s'accompagne*] by those representations which display the full

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, 357. Foucault's term "*le divers*," translated as 'diversity,' is the term used in French to translate the Kantian 'manifold.'

range of resemblances; and in this space of representation (sensation - image - memory), likenesses are put to the test of quantitative equalization and graduated quantities, and in this way the immense table of measurable differences is constructed.”⁶⁴⁹ This ‘immense table’ is, indeed, how representational thought organizes the manifold as a denumerable and orderable multiplicity, ‘mastering difference’ by reducing it to a hierarchical metric of comparison. And as with horizontal repetition, where the necessary difference between identical elements is ultimately located in a modification of the mind who contemplates them, so too, discursive cognition refers back to a subject – in this case, the subject of “good sense” – that serves as “the world’s most effective agent of division in its recognitions, its establishment of equivalences, its sensitivity to gaps, its gauging of distances, as it assimilates and separates.”⁶⁵⁰

It will thus come as no surprise that when Foucault articulates verticality in terms of intensity, he does so in calling for the overcoming of “the philosophy of representation”: “Let us pervert good sense and allow thought to play outside the ordered table of resemblances; then it will appear as the vertical dimension [*une verticalité*] of intensities, because intensity, well before its gradation by representation, is in itself pure difference.... One must give rise to thought [*Il faut penser la pensée*] as intensive irregularity. Dissolution of the Me.”⁶⁵¹ As in Foucault’s earlier formulation, ‘verticality’ refers to that which is ‘outside’ the ‘space of representation’ and ‘before’ the procedures ordering the latter (in this case, by capturing pure difference and reducing it to a measure of comparative ‘gradation’); in some sense, then, vertical irreducibility is still understood

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, translation modified.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, translation modified.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

in terms of exteriority and anteriority. Further, verticality retains its transgressive sublime function, dissolving the identity of the subject, or undoing what Bataille called *le moi-sujet*. However, rather than to a quasi-primordial experience of transcendence, ‘the vertical dimension’ refers now to an intensive vector of thought⁶⁵²: both the thought *of* intensity (intensity as *le pensé*, or that which is thought) and thought *as* intensity (intensity as *la pensée*, or thought itself), befitting the auto-implicative structure of verticality.⁶⁵³

Moreover, as intensity, this vertical vector of thought ‘is in itself pure difference,’ a singular event or ‘intensive irregularity’ productive of the new. We have seen how this holds in the eternal return, where what recurs in vertical repetition is difference in itself as the being of becoming; it also holds for intensity generally, insofar as “intensity *affirms* difference”⁶⁵⁴ in its positivity as intensive singularity. This characteristic of intensity distinguishes it from essential properties, which presuppose difference as negation, as in the proposition, “if x differs from y, x is not y.”⁶⁵⁵ Henry Somers-Hall explains this point through the example of “the Aristotelian notion of definition”: “when we want... to talk about the essence of man, we d[o] so by attributing a property to him called a difference. This difference allow[s] us to divide the genus into two opposed

⁶⁵² In this regard, the intensive reformulation of verticality (1970) anticipates an analogous reformulation of transversality (1977), which we discussed last chapter in the context of Foucault’s reconceptualization of ‘the plebe’ (and the outside) as a centrifugal vector of force.

⁶⁵³ This point can also be put in terms of “the event of thought [*la pensée*] and the incorporeality of what is thought [*le pensé*]” (Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 354).

⁶⁵⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 234.

⁶⁵⁵ Somers-Hall, *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition*, 177.

classes: the rational and the non-rational. Negation [i]s thus fundamental to the process of definition, and to the specification of properties.”⁶⁵⁶

Such is the operation of constitutive division at the level of thought, akin to the dividing practices of ‘binary segmentarity’ (Deleuze and Guattari) at the level of the social formation: that is, a procedure for the “subjection of difference”⁶⁵⁷ by which essential identities are formed through exclusive disjunction between binary opposites. Indeed, this is a general feature of categorical thinking, or what Foucault calls “the philosophy of representation,” in which “the relationship of two predicates, like red and green, is merely the highest level of a complex structure: the *contradiction* between red and not-red (based on the model of *being* and *non-being*) is active on the lowest level; the nonidentity of red and green (on the basis of a *negative* test of *recognition*) is situated above this; and this ultimately leads to the *exclusive* position of red and green (in the table where the *genus* color is *specified*).”⁶⁵⁸

Thus, when Foucault, concluding that “[d]ifference can only be liberated through the invention of an acategorical thought,”⁶⁵⁹ characterizes Deleuze’s atheistic-transgressive metaphysics as ‘a-categorical’ and ‘affirmative,’ he describes in effect a form of ‘counterthought’ (Deleuze and Guattari), one taking as its domain of analysis the

⁶⁵⁶ Somers-Hall, *Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition*, 177.

⁶⁵⁷ Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 359, translation modified. It is worth quoting the fuller passage: “The most tenacious subjection [*assujettissement*] of difference is undoubtedly that maintained by categories. By showing the number of different ways in which being can express itself, by specifying its forms of attribution, by imposing in a certain way the distribution of existing things, categories create a condition where being maintains its undifferentiated repose at the highest level. Categories dictate the play of affirmations and negations, establish the legitimacy of resemblances within representation, and guarantee the objectivity and operation of concepts. They suppress anarchic difference, divide differences into zones, delimit their rights, and prescribe their task of specification with respect to individual beings. On one side, they can be understood as the a priori forms of knowledge, but, on the other, they appear as an archaic morality, the ancient decalogue that the identical imposed upon difference” (ibid).

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, 357.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, 359.

‘vertical dimension of intensities,’ which is to say, the eventual field of productive difference. In such a way does Deleuze, in addition to having explored the thought of power, advance the thought of the singular event – which advance thereby enables verticality itself to be rethought intensively. As we will see, it is this intensive-vertical dimension, precisely, that will be the locus of agential force, designating a condition for the possibility of political agency, and, as Foucault will say of revolt, “a last anchor point” for “[a]ll the forms of established or demanded freedom....”⁶⁶⁰

We can also begin to see how verticality and transversality conceptually interrelate, for vertical counter-thought is perfectly consistent with the later, transversal formulation of subversive minoritarian counter-discourse. Take, for example, a principle aim of transversal politics discussed last chapter, namely, to provide the conditions for a “philosophy of the people” to achieve for itself, “through revolt and struggles, the force to express itself”⁶⁶¹: this kind of project can now be characterized in terms of constructing a collective form of expression that would realize, as *force*, what is experienced by ‘the people’ at the vertical level of intensity. That is, if transversal connection satisfies a condition for the realization of political agency, it will do so by providing a form of expression adequate to solving the vertical problem of material expression (i.e., how that which is irreducible to history can nevertheless transform the conditions of history), conceived now in intensive terms through the ‘incorporeal materiality’ of the event. This, as we will see, is precisely what is at issue in Foucault’s account of political uprising.

⁶⁶⁰ Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 449.

⁶⁶¹ Foucault, “Préface,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1267, my translation.

Finally, before taking leave of “Theatrum Philosophicum,” it is worth briefly remarking on Foucault’s first sentence introducing *Difference and Repetition*: “Instead of denouncing the fundamental omission that is presumed to have inaugurated Western culture, Deleuze, with the patience of a Nietzschean genealogist, points to the variety of small impurities and paltry compromises.”⁶⁶² In effect, Foucault here sets Deleuze apart from, if not in opposition to, the lineage of thought running from Heidegger to Derrida, that is, the critique of metaphysics as the forgetting of Being (that ‘fundamental omission that is presumed to have inaugurated Western culture’). Instead, Foucault aligns Deleuze with the Nietzschean tradition of genealogy, anticipating his own seminal essay several months later, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”⁶⁶³

However, it is difficult to not also hear in Foucault’s phrasing an implicit self-distancing from his original preface to *History of Madness*, where, again with reference to Nietzsche, Foucault writes: “At the centre of these limit-experiences of the Western world is the explosion, of course, of the tragic itself – Nietzsche having shown that the tragic structure from which the history of the Western world is made is nothing other than the refusal, the forgetting and the silent collapse of tragedy.”⁶⁶⁴ In both Foucault’s preface from 1961 and his allusion to Heidegger in 1970, what is in question is a fundamental forgetting taken to be constitutive of the history of Western culture: in the first case, however, it is a thesis advanced by Foucault, whereas in the second, it is one against which he favorably contrasts Deleuze.

⁶⁶² Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 355.

⁶⁶³ Foucault’s remarks implicitly contrasting Deleuze from Derrida might also be read as anticipating his own responses to Derrida, published just over a year later.

⁶⁶⁴ Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxx.

I would thus suggest that there is a conceptual displacement from the early period of Foucault to the middle period, which is made possible, at least in part, by the impact of Deleuze on Foucault, and which can be marked, with respect to Foucault's intellectual ancestry, by his shift in emphasis from the Nietzsche of *Birth of Tragedy* to that of the *Genealogy*. At issue in this displacement – which is something like the becoming-immanent of Foucault's thought – will be a rethinking, in intensive terms, of the relation between vertical critique and history: which is also to say, a rethinking of the 'limit event' ('external event, primary division') that would no longer appeal to a quasi-primordial origins story, nor to an attendant experience of transcendence, but to the emergence of singular events within an immanent field of force relations.

6.3 *Middle Critique: The 'Vertical' Relation of Genealogy to History*

6.3.1 *The Contingency and Singularity of Evental Emergence*

In important respects, there is a clear continuity between Foucault's earlier analysis of Nietzschean interpretation (in "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," the essay Foucault presented at the 1964 Nietzsche conference organized by Deleuze) and his turn to genealogy.⁶⁶⁵ In both cases, Foucault locates in Nietzsche a form of vertical critique that would disclose the singular and contingent conditions for what is taken to be grounded in universal necessity: e.g., revealing the 'ideal depth' of conscience or consciousness, taken as the essence of human being, to be in fact the historical effect of force relations, and

⁶⁶⁵ It is interesting to compare the series of terms composing the titles of the two essays, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." If it is true that the second essay is in some sense a development of the first, then one might read "Genealogy" as replacing "Freud," and "History" as replacing "Marx." In other words, Freud would be replaced by Nietzsche's genealogical account of drives and instincts; and Marx – or more accurately, traditional Marxist historians – would be replaced by Nietzsche's non-teleological, non-progressivist account of historical force relations.

specifically, of the reactive forces of *ressentiment*, which, blocked from discharging themselves in herd society, are re-directed inward, bringing about “the *internalizing* of man” from which there “first grows in man that which he later calls his ‘soul.’”⁶⁶⁶

Indeed, this example, which we discussed in Chapter 2, illustrates a basic principle of genealogical critique, already active in Foucault’s earlier formulation of vertical interpretation: namely, what we might call the *contingency thesis*. Articulated as an anti-essentialist critique of original identity, this thesis holds that “behind things,” there is “not a timeless and essential secret but the secret that they have no essence.... What is found at the historical beginnings of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.”⁶⁶⁷ Thus, for instance, genealogy situates the ‘soul’ as a chance effect of history, and specifically, of a *relation* between forces (thus indicating a constitutive ‘disparity’ or difference).

The same can be said for the modern moral values installed through the singular event that Nietzsche calls the ‘slave revolt in morality’: to discover the ‘historical beginnings’ of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is to show how they are founded not in universal moral truth, but in the ‘dissension’ from or rejection of an older system of values; indeed, it is to show how the modern ‘good’ is but the derivative, reactively-formed contrast concept of ‘evil,’ which is itself the negative transvaluation of what had previously constituted the ‘good’ (the overflowing strength, etc., of noble morality). As for the purported freedom

⁶⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Second Treatise: §16, 57. It is worth noting here that in his earlier essay on Nietzsche, Foucault refers to “the whole play of reactive forces that Deleuze has analyzed so well in his book on Nietzsche” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” 277).

⁶⁶⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 371. In a manner consistent with the vertical reinterpretation of history in *History of Madness*, Foucault applies the contingency thesis to reason itself: “Examining the history of reason, [the genealogist] learns that it was born in an altogether ‘reasonable’ fashion – from chance” (ibid).

of the ‘soul,’ “genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an ‘invention of the ruling classes’ and not fundamental to man’s nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth.”⁶⁶⁸ That is, rather than pertaining to the essence of the soul or the original truth of man’s identity, the ‘concept of liberty’ is itself the effect of a power-knowledge regime, which is to say, a strategic instrument deployed in a struggle between disparate forces.

In turn, from the application of the contingency thesis to the case of the ‘soul’, there follows another basic feature of genealogy, which was already active in Foucault’s formulations of experiential verticality: namely, the dissolution of the subject: “Where the soul pretends unification or the Me [*le Moi*] fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning – numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye. The *analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the Me*, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events.”⁶⁶⁹ Just as the vertical limit-experience ruptures the unity of the ego-subject (*moi-sujet*), so, too, genealogy performs the transgressive sublime function, “shattering the unity of man’s being....”⁶⁷⁰ However, it does so through its movement as vertical critique, “follow[ing] the complex course of descent,” which is to say, “maintain[ing] passing events in their proper dispersion” so as to reveal “that truth or being lies not at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents.”⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 374, my emphasis.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, 379.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid, 374.

In other words, recalling Foucault's depiction seven years prior of the interpretive excavator who, by "descend[ing] along the vertical line and show[ing] that this depth of interiority is in reality something other than what it says," "restore[s] the glittering exteriority that was covered up and buried"⁶⁷²; and anticipating Foucault's proposal 13 years later for "a historical ontology of ourselves" as the "historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, [and] saying"⁶⁷³; genealogy dispels the self's pretense to an inner essence or original identity by disclosing the contingent external events that have determined our forms of knowledge and modes of being, "reintroduc[ing] into the realm of becoming everything considered immortal in man."⁶⁷⁴ Indeed, this includes locating the intensive dimension of our affective experience within the evental field of becoming, for genealogy "must seek [events] ... in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts.... We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history."⁶⁷⁵

The 'analysis of descent' thus reveals the historical contingency of the events that have constituted our field of possibility, or the set of conditions for what we can say, think, feel, do, and become.⁶⁷⁶ This descending 'vertical line' of critique (tracking with Nietzsche's term *Herkunft*, "descent") is, in turn, complemented by an ascending vertical line of analysis, which isolates what Foucault, following Nietzsche's term *Entstehung*,

⁶⁷² Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," 273.

⁶⁷³ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 315.

⁶⁷⁴ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 379.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 369, 379.

⁶⁷⁶ It is in this context that both Foucault and Deleuze locate the transformative project of Nietzsche's overman: "We would need another sensibility, another way of feeling. ... Another becoming, another sensibility: the Overman" (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 64-5).

calls “*emergence*, the moment of arising. It stands as the principle and the singular law of an apparition.”⁶⁷⁷ In other words, genealogical critique follows a double vertical movement of (1) descent and (2) emergence; and while the work of the former is ‘to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion’ so as to demonstrate the *contingency* of what has constituted contemporary reality, the task of the latter is to grasp these events in the *singularity* of their ‘arising.’⁶⁷⁸

By locating the event in its singular ‘apparition’ or “eruption,”⁶⁷⁹ crossing over the “threshold of emergence”⁶⁸⁰ and entering into history, genealogy thus allows Foucault to re-articulate what, in *History of Madness*, he had termed the ‘degree zero’ of history. At issue in both cases is an event – what Foucault, in his first reply to Derrida a year later, will call a ‘limit event’ – that is constitutive or transformative of history, yet in some sense irreducible to it. This irreducibility designates a kind of limit-relation to history; and the form of analysis its perspective makes possible, whether ‘vertical reinterpretation’ or what Foucault will now call ‘effective’ history (following Nietzsche’s *wirkliche Historie*, another term for genealogy), contests the traditional conception of history:

The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. ... An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at

⁶⁷⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 376. Note that Foucault’s term *apparition*, which connotes the phantasmatic, suggests a connection here with Deleuze’s concept of the phantasm, discussed by Foucault in “Theatrum Philosophicum.” The notion of phantasm also appears in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* (e.g., II, §12), as cited by Foucault: “If [the world] appears as a ‘marvelous motley, profound and totally meaningful,’ this is because it began and continues its secret existence through a ‘host of errors and phantasms’” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 381).

⁶⁷⁸ This double movement of descent and arising would seem to be pre-figured in “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” by the counter-intuitive imagery, discussed in Chapter 3, of the descending interpreter whose interpretation is itself an ascending projection: “For if the interpreter must go to the bottom himself, like an excavator, the movement of interpretation is, on the contrary, that of a projection [*surplomb*], of a more and more elevated projection...” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” 273)

⁶⁷⁹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 380.

⁶⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, II, §6; cited by Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 378.

dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a theological movement or a natural process. ‘Effective’ history, however, deals with [*fait resurgir*] events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations.⁶⁸¹

Like the notion of horizontal history in Foucault’s work on madness, which refers to a teleological and progressivist understanding of historical time, traditional history assumes the “suprahistorical perspective” of “a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself....”⁶⁸² Foucault also refers to this as “de-eventalized history,” which explains its objects of analysis by ascribing them “the most unitary, necessary, inevitable, and (ultimately) extrahistorical mechanism or structure available,” e.g., “[a]n economic mechanism, an anthropological structure, or a demographic process....”⁶⁸³ By contrast, the function of genealogy is to “record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality,”⁶⁸⁴ throwing into relief the disruptive and anarchic difference that they introduce into the field of history.

⁶⁸¹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 380.

⁶⁸² Ibid, 379. Foucault, who would appear to have a certain view of Hegel in mind (as he also did in his formulation of horizontal history in *History of Madness*), continues: “...a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development” (ibid).

⁶⁸³ Foucault, “Questions of Method,” *Power*, 228. For Foucault, de-eventalized history is epitomized by structuralism, which he characterizes as “the most systematic effort to evacuate the concept of the event, not only from ethnology but from a whole series of other sciences and in the extreme case from history. In that sense, I don’t see who could be more of an antistructuralist than myself” (Foucault, “Truth and Power,” *Power*, 115).

⁶⁸⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 369. Foucault will later refer to this method as “eventalization,” composed of two functions that echo the analyses of descent and emergence: “First of all, a breach of self-evidence. It means making visible [*faire surgir*] a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all. ... A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences, and practices rest: this is the first theoretico-political function of ‘eventalization.’ Second, eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on, that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary” (Foucault, “Questions of Method,” 227).

6.3.2 *Limit-Event: The Becoming-Force of Vertical Intensity in and against History*

Indeed, it is here in particular that we can discern the impact of Deleuze on Foucault's turn to genealogy, for the analysis of emergence is conducted in terms of a differential multiplicity of force relations. Anticipating Foucault's comment the following year to Deleuze that reading his works, from *Nietzsche and Philosophy* to *Anti-Oedipus*, had been "essential" because, "under the ancient theme of meaning... you have developed the question of power, of the inequality of powers and their struggles,"⁶⁸⁵

Foucault writes:

Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous [*hasardeux*] play of dominations. Emergence is always produced in a particular state of forces. The analysis of the *Entstehung* must delineate this interaction, the manner of the struggle that these forces wage against each other or against adverse circumstances.... *Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage....*⁶⁸⁶

If the affirmative-intensive thought of vertical repetition in Deleuze's metaphysics is a matter of freeing difference from subjection to categorical thinking, the genealogical project of vertical critique is a matter of meticulously analyzing 'various systems of subjection.' However, this analysis, undertaken with "the acuity of a glance ... that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements,"⁶⁸⁷ is specifically attentive to the inversions of force relations, which constitute systematic transformations by which something new is produced (e.g., the slave revolt in morality). And this emergence of the new, this 'entry of forces' is not to be explained teleologically by reference to final causes ('the anticipatory power of meaning'), but strategically and contingently in terms

⁶⁸⁵ Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power, 213-4.

⁶⁸⁶ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 376-7, my emphasis.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid, 379.

of aleatory struggles; for an event just is “the reversal of a relationship of forces.... The forces operating in history do not obey destiny or regulative mechanisms, but the luck of the battle. They do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attention is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events.”⁶⁸⁸

Forces, then, ‘operate in history’; yet their singular, evental ‘eruption’ into history can neither be predicted nor ultimately explained by means of the laws of historical causation, whether the latter be conceived ‘theologically’ as ‘destiny’ or ‘rationalistically’ as ‘mechanism.’⁶⁸⁹ It is therefore the element of force itself that is irreducible to history, for the event is precisely that which is constitutive of history without being derivable from it. That is, the event functions as a kind of immanent degree zero of history; and rather than owing to a form of quasi-primordial transcendence, the anteriority of this degree zero refers to the ontological primacy of intensive difference; for the event, as a reversal of forces itself productive of force, is nothing other than a singular expression of what Deleuze calls ‘the being of becoming,’ and what, with reference to Foucault fifteen years later, he will term the “perpetual becoming” of forces: “*there is a becoming of forces which doubles history.*”⁶⁹⁰ As Foucault puts it, “The world such as we are acquainted with it is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, 381.

⁶⁸⁹ The side of theological destiny would include the philosophy of history, which Foucault characterizes in “Theatrum Philosophicum” as making a theological error regarding historical causation and therefore “fail[ing] to grasp the event” (Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” 351-2); the side of rationalistic mechanism would include structuralism, as noted above.

⁶⁹⁰ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 85, emphasis original, translation modified.

contrary, it is a profusion [*myriade*] of entangled events,”⁶⁹¹ which is to say, a differential, non-denumerable multiplicity of force relations.

In such a way, the irreducibility distinctive of verticality is recast intensively in terms of evental becoming, a thought expressed by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* when they write: “becoming ... is born in History, and falls back into it, but is not of it. ... What History grasps of the event is its effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming ... escapes History.”⁶⁹² And indeed, we can begin to see here how the transversal analysis of lines of flight, as centrifugal vectors of force, will connect to the vertical analysis of intensity: namely, as the intensive vector of becoming which ‘escapes History.’

Further, in addition to helping Foucault address the problem of transcendence by providing an immanent conception of degree zero, this reformulation of irreducibility, as the limit-relation between the event and history, suggests a possible solution to the vertical problem of material expression. We have seen that Foucault, with Deleuze, conceives the ‘vertical dimension of intensities’ through the ‘incorporeal materiality’ of the event; and since events now appear as becomings of force, or as singular expressions of the ‘perpetual becoming’ of forces, we can characterize the event as *the incorporeal materiality of becoming*. On the other hand, “History is the concrete body [*le corps même*] of becoming,”⁶⁹³ which is to say, the very *corporeal materiality of becoming*. Now, if the problem of material expression concerns how that which is irreducible to history can

⁶⁹¹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 381.

⁶⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson, 110. It should be noted that Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term ‘lived experience,’ or *le vécu*, refers to the phenomenological conception of experience, and thus does not pertain to the political limit-experience of revolt in Foucault’s sense.

⁶⁹³ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 373.

nevertheless act upon and transform history, then we have provisionally discovered the general outline of a solution: the difference between the incorporeality of the event and the corporeality of history accounts for how the former is irreducible to the latter, while their common materiality accounts for how one could act upon the other.⁶⁹⁴

6.3.3 *The Transformative Force of Vertical Thought as Genealogical Critique*

Genealogy would thus be that form of critique which apprehends, as so many singular events, what we might call the ‘becoming-force’ of the intensive-vertical dimension in history.⁶⁹⁵ This is one sense in which effective history can be understood as a form of vertical critique. More specifically: just as with intensive thought, in which ‘intensity’ refers to both what is thought (*le pensé*) and thought itself (*la pensée*), the ‘verticality’ in vertical thought also refers to both what is thought (the thought of verticality) and thought itself (thought as verticality)⁶⁹⁶; and when genealogy apprehends the ‘becoming of forces’ that ‘doubles history,’ it functions in the first sense, as the thought *of* verticality. However, as is suggested by its double vertical movement of descent and emergence, genealogy also functions as vertical thought in the second sense, which Foucault makes explicit in writing that effective history

⁶⁹⁴ The relation between the event and history, or the incorporeal materiality of becoming and the corporeal materiality of becoming, is akin to the respective relation in *Anti-Oedipus* between desiring-production and social production: an irreducible priority is accorded the former term, and a dependency accorded the latter term, even though in fact neither term is separable from the other, nor can access be gained to the former absent the latter.

⁶⁹⁵ In the next section, we will develop a detailed example of Foucault’s analysis of this becoming-force of vertical intensity, namely, the case of the Iranian uprising.

⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, the cases of intensive thought and vertical thought are really one and the same, insofar as we are dealing specifically here with the intensive formulation of verticality. Thus, the thought of verticality will be the thought of the evental becoming-force of intensity; and as we will see, thought as verticality, i.e., in the vertical relation of genealogy to history, imbues thought itself with transformative or productive agency, thus constituting an intensive force.

...has no fear of looking down, but it looks from above and descends to seize the various perspectives, to disclose dispersions and differences, to leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity. ... Effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of a perspectival knowledge. ... Nietzsche's version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. Its perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation Through this historical sense, knowledge is allowed to create its own genealogy in the act of cognition; and *wirkliche Historie* composes a genealogy of history as the vertical projection of its position [*La wirkliche Historie effectue, à la verticale du lieu où elle se tient, la généalogie de l'histoire*].⁶⁹⁷

There are two ways in which genealogical critique itself, taken as a form of thought, performs a vertical function. The first is related to the contingency thesis and the hermeneutical vector of descent: by contrast to traditional historians' "pretension to examine things farthest from themselves,"⁶⁹⁸ the genealogist examines 'what is closest,' what is constitutive of her actuality, and thereby conducts what Foucault calls a 'history of the present'; in doing so, however, the genealogist de-familiarizes this present, dispossessing it of what was taken to be natural, normal, or necessary. As Foucault will put the point thirteen years later in his essay "What is Enlightenment?," the genealogist problematizes the present by asking: "In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?"⁶⁹⁹

In this manner, genealogical critique calls into question the self-evidence of contemporary reality's horizon of intelligibility. Foucault will characterize as *vertical* the

⁶⁹⁷ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 381-382.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, 381.

⁶⁹⁹ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 315. Thus, for example, a genealogical analysis of the prisons will begin by dispossessing us of the assumption, widely held and taken as self-evident, that confinement would be a universal punitive form, that the severity of a crime would be calculated quantitatively in terms of duration of confinement, etc.

point of view that carries out this function of de-familiarization – as, for example, in his review essay eight years later on a book by the journalist Jean Daniel, who poses the question of “what is concealed under that precise, floating, mysterious, utterly simply word ‘today’”. Jean Daniel wrote *L’Ere des ruptures* [*The Age of Ruptures*] from a vertical viewpoint on his journalist’s trade,⁷⁰⁰ as “a quest for those subtler, more secret, and more decisive moments when things begin to lose their self-evidence,”⁷⁰¹ moments which disclose “that everything one perceives is evident only against a familiar and little-known horizon, that every certainty is sure only through the support of a ground that is always unexplored.”⁷⁰²

The second vertical function performed by genealogy, related to its role as an ungrounding critique of the conditions of the present,⁷⁰³ is the auto-doubling relation it establishes with respect to history. In Chapter 3, we saw how Foucault defined the being of literary language in terms of the auto-superposition of a language ‘erected vertically above itself,’ by contrast to the ordinary form of language as communication or horizontal conveyance of meaning. The same kind of distinction can be drawn here regarding history.⁷⁰⁴ By contrast to the horizontal (progressivist, teleological) form of history, which presupposes a totalizing perspective beyond history (from which vantage

⁷⁰⁰ Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” *Power*, 443.

⁷⁰¹ The comparison here is to “those moments, which happen in life, when what one was most sure of is suddenly revealed to be a mistake.” (Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” 447)

⁷⁰² Foucault, “For an Ethic of Discomfort,” 448.

⁷⁰³ Cf.: “But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference.” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 381) Cf. also Nietzsche’s proclamation, in the voice of “the madman,” of man’s act of deicide: “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125)

⁷⁰⁴ This relation can be expressed as the analogy, ‘literary language : language :: effective history : history’.

point the contingent singularity of events could be reduced either to the meaning of a final cause or original intention, or to the generality of a mechanism), effective history, as the ‘genealogy of history,’ is defined in terms of the auto-superposition of a history erected vertically above itself: *à la verticale du lieu où elle se tient*, ‘in a vertical relation to where it takes up position,’ to where it takes up itself taking up position, etc. We see here the recursive, auto-doubling function proper to verticality, only now this function is performed by virtue of Nietzschean perspectivism. Genealogy affirms itself as a ‘perspectival knowledge,’ that is, as a form of knowledge immanently emplaced within its own domain of inquiry, actively intervening within this domain with an evaluative eye toward transforming it; and indeed, as a critical history of the present, the genealogist is implicated in her own genealogy, situated within that present and equally the object of evaluation and transformation.

In turn, from this twofold vertical function of genealogical critique as de-familiarizing and auto-doubling, two implications follow that are fundamental for Foucault’s thought. First, critical thought is work that one conducts upon oneself as a practice of self-transformation. In this way, and in a manner that obliquely recalls Foucault’s existential poetics sketched at the end of “Dream and Existence,”⁷⁰⁵ vertical critique is akin to vertical experience, for the “transformation of one’s self by one’s own knowledge is ... something rather close to the aesthetic experience.”⁷⁰⁶ Indeed, genealogy is in essence a kind of auto-critique, later formulated as “a historical ontology of

⁷⁰⁵ See the first section of Chapter 3. It is fitting that Foucault’s turn to Nietzschean genealogy would be consistent with his earliest formulation of (what he later calls) ‘an aesthetics of existence’ – which is also his very first response to the problem of material expression –, since it is in Nietzsche that Foucault will locate the guiding ethical principle that “we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 262).

⁷⁰⁶ Foucault, “An Interview by Stephen Riggins,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 131.

ourselves,”⁷⁰⁷ through which the self becomes de-familiarized and ungrounded, encountering itself as a stranger or double: “History becomes ‘effective’ to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being ‘Effective’ history leaves nothing around the self It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.”⁷⁰⁸

In such a way does vertical critique perform the transgressive sublime function, unmooring and undoing the form of the subject (what Deleuze calls the ‘man-form’), and thereby opening up new possible modes of becoming or processes of subjectivation. In other words, as Foucault will later put it, vertical critique constitutes a kind of “philosophical ethos,” “a *limit-attitude*” that “takes the form of a possible crossing-over [*franchissement*],” “separat[ing] out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think,” and thereby “seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.”⁷⁰⁹

Relatedly, the second implication, following from genealogy’s immanent vertical perspectivism, is that critical thought, as an instrument ‘made for cutting,’ is itself generative of force, constituting an event. That is, ‘effective’ history should be understood literally, as an activity of thought that is itself productive of the new, effectuating or realizing the actual: “In reality, knowledge is an event that falls under the

⁷⁰⁷ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 315.

⁷⁰⁸ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 379-380. Cf.: “The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. It ... seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.” (Ibid, 386-7)

⁷⁰⁹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 315-6.

category of activity....When Nietzsche speaks of the perspectival character of knowledge, he is pointing to the fact that ... knowledge is always a certain strategic relation in which man is placed. ... One can speak of the perspectival character of knowledge because there is a battle, and knowledge is the result of this battle.”⁷¹⁰ If perspectivism thus refers to knowledge as a ‘strategic relation’ transforming the field of forces in which it intervenes, then the verticality of genealogy’s perspective on history will refer specifically to the transformative strategy of auto-critique as itself a form of struggle, mapping “the lines of fragility” of the present, in which one is embedded, in order “to make a topographical and geological survey of battle”⁷¹¹ that gives rise to ‘a possible crossing-over.’ And insofar as the auto-transformative force of this critical undertaking, “as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings,” constitutes what Foucault calls ‘the practice of freedom,’⁷¹² vertical critique will satisfy a condition of possibility for *ethico-political* agency.

Foucault’s turn to genealogy therefore directs the trajectory of his own intellectual activism, composing what we might call a ‘strategies of truth’: “I would like to produce effects of truth which might be used for a possible battle, to be waged by those who wish to wage it, in forms yet to be found and in organizations yet to be defined. ... Telling the truth so that it might be attackable. Deciphering a layer of reality in such a way that the lines of force and the lines of fragility come forth, the possible points of resistance and attack....”⁷¹³ It is precisely in this sense that Deleuze will characterize Foucault as a

⁷¹⁰ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” 14.

⁷¹¹ Foucault, “Pouvoir et corps,” *Dits et écrits I*, 1627, my translation.

⁷¹² See, e.g., Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 281ff.

⁷¹³ Foucault, “Clarifications on the Question of Power,” *Foucault Live*, 191, 189, translation modified.

cartographer, mapping the ‘lines of force’ constitutive of the social field (which Deleuze, following Foucault’s analysis of Bentham’s Panopticon, calls the ‘diagram’) so as to make possible the connection and quickening of a multiplicity of counter-currents of resistance.⁷¹⁴ Indeed, this strategies of truth constitutes, at the level of critical thought, the very connective strategy that orients transversal resistance, working to prepare the conditions for so many emergent lateral lines of alliance to be forged between minoritarian struggles.

We can thus begin to elaborate how vertical critique supports and sustains transversal politics, enumerating the set of functions defining the intellectual’s role in facilitating political agency. Like a political analogue to Artaud’s notion of the ‘superior lucidity’ of the ‘authentically insane,’⁷¹⁵ the first function of Foucault’s intellectual activism, proper to vertical critique, can be called the *visionary function*: that is, to see the intolerable there where it remains unseen, and to make it visible. It is in this regard that Deleuze will later refer to Foucault as “a kind of *seer*. And what he saw was actually intolerable. ... For Foucault, to think was to react to the intolerable, the intolerable things one experienced.”⁷¹⁶ Further, since the intolerable itself marks a limit, that threshold where actuality cannot but be transformed, the function of “thinking as vision, as capturing the intolerable” is also one of “thinking at something’s limit. It was two things: seeing something unseen and thinking something that was almost at a limit.”⁷¹⁷ Indeed, as in the case of the GIP, the ability to see an unseen limit is to possess a kind of eventual vision, what Deleuze calls Foucault’s “keen political intuition”: “Political intuition, for

⁷¹⁴ Deleuze, *Foucault*, especially the second chapter, “A New Cartographer.”

⁷¹⁵ See the second section of Chapter 3.

⁷¹⁶ Deleuze, “Foucault and Prison,” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 274-5.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*

me, is the feeling that something is going to happen and happen *here*, not somewhere else. A political intuition is a very rare occurrence. Foucault sensed that there were little movements, small disturbances in the prisons. He was not trying to take advantage of them or cause them. He *saw* something.”⁷¹⁸

To perform the visionary function is thus to intuit and make visible the experience of the intolerable, thereby disclosing a limit that is also the site of an emergent singular event; as we will detail in the next section, this is the absolute limit of power’s exercise, the degree zero of the political that is both the source of revolt and ‘last anchor point’ for ‘all the forms of established or demanded freedom.’ Further, to reveal the intolerable *as* intolerable is thus also, through the vertical operation of de-familiarization, to compel us to no longer tolerate what passes as normal, “to sharpen intolerance to the facts of power” to which we are inured; it is “an art of bringing out the exorbitant in the ordinary, and the revolting brutality in what we tolerate out of habit. . . . It is a matter of multiplying ‘points of repulsion’ in the political fabric and extending the surface of possible dissidences.”⁷¹⁹ In this way, the visionary dimension of intellectual activism indicates how vertical critique can act as a catalyst for the connective strategy of transversal politics.

Second, the intellectual performs an *enunciative function*, helping to establish or secure the conditions for the emergence of a form of expression, or what we have seen Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation,’ through which a minoritarian population would compose a subversive form of counter-discourse. As we discussed in Chapter 4, this function is exemplified in the GIP’s aim to “produce new

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Foucault, “Préface” to Debarid (M.) et Hennig (J.-L.), *Les Juges kakis, Dits et écrits II*, 138-9, my translation.

conditions for statements”⁷²⁰ – in that instance, for statements made by inmates and their families about the exercise of power in prison. The enunciative function, in turn, is complemented by a third, to which it is closely linked: namely, an *amplifying function* by which counter-discursive statements would be amplified, relayed, and circulated, set into connection with other minoritarian collectivities subjected to a common regime of power. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s language, the amplifying function enables a multiplicity of lines of flight to connect to one another, augmenting their valence and magnifying their efficacy as transformative force. Or, as Foucault puts it: “The voices of an incalculable number of speaking subjects must resonate and give voice to an innumerable experience. . . . All sorts of experience must be given voice; we must lend an ear to aphasiacs, to the excluded, to the moribund,” to all those “who effectively confront the dark and solitary face of struggle. I believe the task of a practitioner of philosophy living in the West is to lend an ear to all these voices.”⁷²¹

In sum: by re-articulating vertical critique genealogically as a historico-critical analysis of the immanent field of force relations, Foucault develops the double thought of power and the event – the very thought that, as we have seen, is central to subversive counter-knowledge as ‘a philosophy of the people’ –, since both power and the event are conceived as functions of interactions between forces (the former as their dominant codification, the latter as their transformative reversal). And this thought, which consummates the ‘intensive turn’ characteristic of the middle period of verticality, forms the basis for Foucault’s subsequent elaboration of both a transversal politics of

⁷²⁰ Deleuze, “Foucault and Prison,” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 279.

⁷²¹ Foucault, “Méthodologie pour la connaissance du monde: comment se débarrasser du marxisme,” *Dits et écrits II*, 615-6, my translation.

connection (beginning with the problem of power in capitalist society) and, as we will see next, a vertical politics of revolt.

6.4 *Late Experience: The ‘Vertical Relation’ of Political Uprising to History*

“There are more ideas on the earth than intellectuals often imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, and more impassioned than politics is capable of conceiving. One must attend to the birth of ideas and to the exhibition of their force: not in books that would pronounce them, but in the events in which they manifest their force, in the struggles that one conducts for ideas, against them or for them. It is not ideas that motor the world. But it is precisely because the world contains ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not without resistance conducted by those who rule it....”

— Foucault⁷²²

6.4.1 *The Vertical Experience of the Intolerable: The Fact of Revolt as the Ratio*

Cognoscendi of Freedom

As indicated in the initial epigraph to this chapter, Foucault directly situates his account of “political experience” within the tradition of the limit-experience descended from Nietzsche and Bataille. The name he will give to this specific kind of experience is *soulèvement* – a term often translated as ‘revolt,’ but the vertical imagery of which, as a movement of elevation coming from below, is better conveyed by the word ‘uprising.’ In addition to serving as the exemplar of eventual emergence, political uprising, as an individual or collective response to the intolerable, is the form that vertical experience will take after Foucault has recast the concept of verticality itself immanently in terms of ‘the dimension of intensities.’

In Chapter 4, the prison movement provided an example of political uprising, analyzed as the breakout or breakthrough of what Deleuze and Guattari call “a

⁷²² Foucault, “Les «reportages» d’idées,” *Dits et écrits II*, 707, my translation.

revolutionary line of flight” (e.g., the case of George Jackson). Such a centrifugal vector of revolt, as a “revolutionary break” or “rupture with causality,”⁷²³ can now be understood as a limit-event, or a singular event that transforms the conditions of the possible. Indeed, what Deleuze and Guattari characterize in *Anti-Oedipus* in terms of desiring-production – that is, “the order of desire and its irruption,” which alone “accounts for the reality this rupture [with causality] assumes at a given moment, at a given place”⁷²⁴ –, they articulate 12 years later, on the topic of May 1968, in terms of that dimension of revolt which is irreducible to historical causation:

In historical phenomena such as the revolution of 1789, the Commune, the revolution of 1917, there is always one part of the *event* that is irreducible to any social determinism, or to causal chains. Historians are not very fond of this aspect: they restore causality after the fact. Yet the event is itself a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality; it is a bifurcation, a deviation with respect to laws, an unstable condition which opens up a new field of the possible.⁷²⁵

We see here the irreducibility to history that is the hallmark of the vertical dimension, framed as that aspect of the insurrectionary event which exceeds ‘any social determinism’ or ‘causal chains,’ i.e., which can be neither explained nor predicted by the existing set of social, economic, and political conditions and processes. Like the entry of force into history through the singular emergence of the event, political uprising is a production of the new, and specifically, of ‘a new field of the possible’: the event “is an opening onto the possible,” but “the possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event.”⁷²⁶ That is, rather than actualizing a latent but extant possibility, the event of revolt transforms the very conditions of the possible, doing so creatively by realizing something

⁷²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 377.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place”, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 233.

⁷²⁶ Ibid, 234.

new. “The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity”; and because it thus “passes as much into the interior of individuals as into the depths of a society,”⁷²⁷ the event must be grasped from the perspective of an *experience* that opens onto new modes of life.

In effect, then, political uprising performs the de-familiarizing function proper to the contingency thesis of vertical critique, disclosing the contemporary horizon of possibility (what we can say, think, do, feel, become), in its mutability and fragility, as the historical product of struggles between forces. And if historical ontology opens ‘the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think’ (Foucault), thereby satisfying a condition of possibility for ethico-political agency; the ‘possible’ that the event of popular revolt creates – ‘a new existence, a new subjectivity’ – is what Deleuze and Guattari call “the composition of a people,”⁷²⁸ a process of collective becoming-revolutionary. Further, just as the visionary function of intellectual activism is to perceive and make visible the intolerable where it has remained unseen, “what counts” in the event of political uprising – that which is singular and transformative, however surrounded it may be by “slogans, idiocies, illusions” – is “a visionary phenomenon, as if a society suddenly saw what was intolerable in it and also saw the possibility for something else. It is a collective phenomenon in the form of: ‘Give me the possible, or else I’ll suffocate...’”⁷²⁹ Thus, what is visionary in revolt is exactly what is also irreducible: the experience, both individual and collective, of the intolerable and its possible overcoming, that is, of the limit and the practice of freedom.

⁷²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place”, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 233-4.

⁷²⁸ On the “composition of a people” that corresponds to the “essence” of the nomadic or revolutionary war machine as the smoothing and occupation of space, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 417.

⁷²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place”, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 234.

As we have discussed in the previous two chapters, it is just this sort of ‘collective phenomenon,’ distinctive of non-denumerable multiplicities, that the anti-transversal operation of power aims to prevent, defuse, or control.⁷³⁰ Indeed, we can begin to see how the transversal and vertical threads our analysis converge: if the principle of transversal connection designates the conditions for the realization and sustainability of the line of flight; the ‘visionary phenomenon’ of revolt indicates how the irreducible verticality of political experience is a necessary *condition of possibility* for the line of flight, or for political agency, understood as the transformation of the conditions of social production.

However, before we are positioned to provide a fuller account of political agency, we must first develop Foucault’s conceptual treatment of revolt, analyzing more precisely how uprising constitutes a vertical limit-experience. It is straightforward enough to establish *that* revolt takes a vertical form: Foucault makes this explicit in a brief homage to the philosopher and journalist Maurice Clavel, written in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, when he describes uprising generally as “that which, in history, escapes from history.... What escapes from history is the instant, the fracture, the tearing, the interruption. ... Uprising ... lifts human beings into a vertical relation to their land and their humanity [*Le soulèvement ... dresse les hommes à la verticale de leur terre et de leur humanité*].”⁷³¹ The collective experience of revolt is thus structurally akin to the

⁷³⁰ See, for example, our discussion in Chapter 4 of the panoptic techniques of disciplinary power, especially the denumerative function by means of which “[t]he crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a *collective effect*, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201, my emphasis).

⁷³¹ Foucault, “Vivre autrement le temps,” *Dits et écrits, II*, 790, my translation. In this same essay, Foucault situates Clavel and Blanchot together as thinkers of what “breaks the thread of time” (ibid, 789).

Kantian sublime, opening a rupture or “fracture of the present”⁷³² through the auto-elevating movement by which a person or a people confronts their proper humanity. And indeed, just as, for Kant, the sublime functions as the *ratio cognoscendi* of human freedom, calling us to a duty that “elevates a human being above himself (as part of the sensible world)”⁷³³; so, too, political uprising is an experience of the irreducibility of human agency that makes possible the practical realization of freedom.

In an important essay on the uprising in Iran, published the week following his piece on Clavel, Foucault articulates this irreducibility in terms of a limit-relation that obtains between revolt and both history and politics:

Revolts belong to history. But, in a certain way, they escape from it. The impulse [*mouvement*] by which a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people says, ‘I will no longer obey,’ and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority they consider unjust seems to me to be something *irreducible*. Because no authority is capable of making it utterly impossible ... [a]nd because the man who rebels is finally inexplicable; it takes a wrenching-away that *interrupts the flow of history, and its long chains of reasons*, for a man to be able, ‘really,’ to prefer the risk of death to the certainty of having to obey.⁷³⁴

Recalling the ‘centrifugal movement’ of becoming-plebe as an intensive vector of insurrectionary force, as well as the ‘constant verticality’ of unreason that disrupts the horizontal flow of history and its ‘rational concatenation of causes,’ political uprising is ‘something irreducible,’ emerging at the degree zero of both (1) power and (2) history.

In the first case, revolt is the political experience of the exercise of power as being both intolerable and, in the end, mutable. One stakes one’s life on the refusal to continue with what had been tolerated until now, on the demand for transformation, the possibility

⁷³² Ibid, 790, my translation.

⁷³³ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:86.

⁷³⁴ Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 449, my emphasis. “Vivre autrement le temps” appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* the week of April 30-May 6, 1979; “Inutile de se soulever?” (“Useless to Revolt?”) appeared in *Le Monde* the next week on May 11-12.

of which is concretely created in the very demand for it. This insurrectionary ‘impulse,’ this movement of restiveness capable of traversing the social fabric (‘a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people’), is something that no exercise of power is ‘capable of making utterly impossible’: for, as we saw in Chapter 4, unlike a relation of violence (acting directly on bodies) or a state of domination (in which those subjected have no field of possible action available to them), power is defined as ‘a set of actions on possible actions’; and it therefore requires the relative agency of those whose actions are acted upon.⁷³⁵ Thus, to render impossible the will to revolt, which would necessitate taking the lives of all those who stake theirs insurrecting, would be tantamount to destroying the power relation itself.

That is, the very will to revolt – ‘to prefer the risk of death to the certainty of having to obey’ – constitutes the absolute limit of power’s exercise; and it is for this reason that “[a]ll the forms of established or demanded freedom, all the rights that one asserts, even in regard to the seemingly least important things, no doubt have a last anchor point there, one more solid and closer to experience than ‘natural rights.’”⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ See “The Subject and Power” (1982): “When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, ...one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free.’ By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available. ... At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341-2). Several pages later, Foucault, in what may well be a response to Deleuze’s “Desire and Pleasure” (a collection of notes, originally written as a private letter to Foucault in 1977, posing to him a series of critical questions) – and which, in any case, underscores their shared view on the primacy of resistance or lines of flight in relation to power – continues: “if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. ... It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape. Accordingly, every intensification or extension of power relations intended to wholly suppress these points of insubordination can only bring the exercise of power up against its outer limits” (ibid, 346-7).

⁷³⁶ Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 449.

In the second case, like the emergence of a singular event as the becoming-force of vertical intensity, uprising is both “‘outside’ history and in history,”⁷³⁷ ‘belonging’ to it but also ‘escaping’ from it. The will to revolt of the one who insurrects is ultimately ‘inexplicable’ according to the laws of historical causation: her experience, desire, and action can neither be explained according to a rational predictive calculus, nor derived from a set of historical (read: pre-existing social, economic, political, cultural) conditions and their ‘long chains of reasons.’ Borrowing from the historian François Furet’s work on the French Revolution, Foucault articulates this irreducibility in terms of the “distinction between the totality of the processes of economic and social transformation,” i.e., the long historical duration of material conditions, flows, structures, and practices in which all events are situated, “and the specificity of the revolutionary event,” i.e., “the specificity of what people experienced deep inside, but also of what they experienced [vivent] in that sort of theater that they put together from day to day and which constituted the revolution.”⁷³⁸

The importance of framing this distinction in terms of what ‘belongs’ to history and what ‘escapes’ it is that the latter, the singularity of the revolutionary event as individual and collective experience, can neither be reduced to nor derived from the former, the set of macropolitical conditions and processes. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s language, the intensive or molecular dimension cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of, the extensive or molar dimension. Nor is the specificity or experience of the event merely

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit,” in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 252. Foucault introduces this distinction in a dialogue on the Iranian revolutionary movement and the role of religion in the revolt; in doing so, he indicates the limitations of traditional Marxism, both as an explanatory tool for understanding the causes of the revolution and in its reductive analysis of religion as ideology.

occasional (as the contingent occasion for a historically determined process) or epiphenomenal (as the subjective aspect of an objective process, with the former exerting no causal force on the latter); for the collective daily staging of the revolt (protests, marches, strikes, sit-ins, vigils, stands of civil disobedience taken, etc.) is what actually ‘constitutes the revolution.’ For example, in the case of Iran, when “a people rose up in revolt[,] it rose up, of course, in a context of crisis, of economic difficulties, etc., but the economic difficulties in Iran at that time were not sufficiently great for people to take to the streets, in the hundreds of thousands, in the millions, and face the machine-guns bare-chested. That’s the phenomenon that we have to talk about.”⁷³⁹

It is in the following sense, then, that the singular event is both ‘in’ and ‘outside’ history: the phenomenon of revolt is double, containing both an extensive dimension (in the above example, the conditions of macroeconomic crisis) and an intensive one (what constitutes the singularity of the uprising); and it is the latter that is privileged from the (genealogical) perspective of the transformative emergence in history of evental force. The same can be said at the level of the insurrectionary individual, who, in the vertical experience of political uprising, “was double: he had his political calculation, which was this or that, and at the same time he was an individual caught up in that revolutionary movement, or rather that Iranian who had risen up against his king. And the two things did not come into contact, he did not rise up against his king *because* his party had made this or that calculation.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ Ibid, 254.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid, 256, my emphasis.

In other words, to choose the possibility of death rather than the certainty of injustice is neither the result of a calculation of interests nor of determining structures, but the expression of an irreducible agency; and indeed, this “fact” that “people do revolt” is “how subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, breathing life into it.”⁷⁴¹ The irreducibility, to power and history, of the will to revolt is thus a necessary condition for the possibility of political agency and the practice of freedom: “If societies persist and live, that is, if the powers that be are not ‘utterly absolute,’ it is because, behind all the submissions and coercions, ... there is the possibility of that moment when life can no longer be bought, when the authorities can no longer do anything, and when, facing the gallows and the machine guns, people revolt.”⁷⁴²

Once again, the parallel with Kant is apt, for Foucault’s reference to ‘facing the gallows’ echoes the famous “gallows” example from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant aims to illustrate how the fact of reason discloses to us our moral duty (that which ‘elevates a human being above himself’) and thereby our freedom. Like the man who, given the choice between acting unjustly and facing the gallows, realizes that he has within him the power to refuse the former, to prefer death to the certainty of committing injustice, and thereby is made cognizant of his inner freedom; and in turn, like the

⁷⁴¹ Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 452. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it: “It is a question of life. The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity” (Deleuze and Guattari, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place,” 234). It must be noted that this approving use of the term ‘subjectivity’ stands in contrast to the form of subjectivation which, precisely, is the object of Foucault’s (and Deleuze and Guattari’s) politics of de-subjectivation. In the former case, what is at issue is the creation of political agency, that is, subjectivity as the result of a new form of life that is constructed or mode of becoming that is undergone, etc.; in the latter case, the form of the subject is a model or norm imposed or internalized, an individualizing form of self-relation that consolidates the exercise of power, as well as something presupposed by the dominant form of power-knowledge, or what Deleuze calls the ‘image of thought.’

⁷⁴² Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 449-50.

experience of the dynamical sublime, where, confronted in our fragile vulnerability by nature's overwhelming power, we become aware of an indomitable power of a different order within ourselves, capable of resisting even nature's might; the limit-experience of political uprising – the will to revolt as the desire to risk death and disobey rather than suffer certain injustice – discloses to those who insurrect an irreducible agency that no form of power can ever render impossible or utterly dominate. For the 'fact of reason,' Foucault thus substitutes the 'fact of revolt' as a kind of *ratio cognoscendi* of human freedom.

If the principle of connection is the transversal condition of realization and sustainability for political agency, the irreducibility of uprising is its vertical condition of possibility: "Hence, precisely, the need to grasp what is irreducible in such a movement – and deeply threatening for any despotism, whether that of yesterday or that of today."⁷⁴³ However, we must still inquire further into how the vertical and the transversal relate, which will require taking a closer look at the examples of revolt in which Foucault was engaged.

6.4.2 *March and May 1968: Becoming-Revolutionary and the Problem of Collective*

Subjectivation

Before the GIP, Foucault's first direct encounter with political revolt occurred in the student uprisings in Tunisia in March 1968, which he describes as "a real [*véritable*]

⁷⁴³ Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?", 452. In the context of Foucault's essay, what the "hence, precisely" specifically refers to is the importance of how the Iranian uprising is irreducible to the repressive regime that was installed following the fall of the Shah – an irreducibility that is threatening to, and therefore covered over by, both the "Iranian clerics" who "want to authenticate their regime by using the significations that the uprising had," and those in the West who "discredit the fact of the uprising because today there is a government of mullahs" (ibid, 451-452).

political experience for me.”⁷⁴⁴ Foucault lived and taught in Tunisia from 1966 to 1968, and from the beginning, he was “deeply impressed”⁷⁴⁵ by the political activism and courage of the students there. Remarking, in a letter from December 1966, on the reception of Althusser’s thought among the Tunisian students, Foucault writes: “It’s curious to see what is for us pure theoretical discourse suddenly become verticalized [*se verticaliser*] here in an almost immediate imperative.”⁷⁴⁶ Twelve years later, in his interview with Trombadori, Foucault elaborates: “In Tunisia..., everyone appealed to Marxism with a radical vehemence [*violence*] and intensity and with an impressive enthusiasm [*élan*]. For those young people, Marxism didn’t just represent a better way of analyzing reality: at the same time, it was a kind of moral energy, a kind of existential act that was quite remarkable.”⁷⁴⁷

The verticalization of Marxist discourse, elevated to ‘an almost immediate imperative,’ thus refers to the role played by critical thought in giving rise to a collective political experience: an intensive process of becoming-revolutionary, wherein thought both (1) expresses a kind of ethical duty and (2) catalyzes the force of political agency. In other words, and again resonating with Kant, vertical critique is the movement by which

⁷⁴⁴ Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Power*, 279.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid. Foucault elaborates: “That was an experience that greatly affected me: a little before the month of May in France, some very intense student revolts occurred there. It was in March 1968 – strikes, suspensions of courses, arrests, and a general student strike. The police came into the university, clubbed many students, seriously injured several of them, and threw them into prison. Some were sentenced to eight, ten, even fourteen years behind bars – some are still in prison. Given my position as a professor and being French, I was protected in a way, protected from the local authorities, which allowed me to easily do some things and at the same time to get a precise grasp of the French government’s reactions to all that. I had a direct idea of what was going on in all the universities of the world. I was deeply impressed by those young women and men who exposed themselves to fearful risks by drafting a leaflet, distributing it, or calling for a strike” (ibid).

⁷⁴⁶ Foucault, in “Chronologie,” *Dits et écrits I*, 38, my translation.

⁷⁴⁷ Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” 280.

thought, disclosing an existentially gripping imperative through a limit-experience, makes possible the practical realization of human freedom.

For Foucault, then, the Tunisian student uprising manifested the vertical form of political experience proper to revolt, the will to risk ‘an absolute sacrifice’ when faced with the intolerable exercise of power: “what can prompt in an individual the desire, the ability, and the possibility for an absolute sacrifice, without there being any reason to suspect in their action the least ambition or desire for power and profit? That was what I saw in Tunisia, the evidence of the necessity of myth, of a spirituality, the unbearable [*intolérable*] quality of certain situations produced by capitalism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.”⁷⁴⁸ Indeed, it is in just these terms of anti-capitalist struggle that Foucault will situate the Iranian uprising a decade later, and the ‘political spirituality’ serving as its form of expression for the self-composition of a people. However, it is also, precisely, the phenomenon of collective subjectivation that Foucault found wanting in the students revolts in Paris that came two months after those in Tunisia: “People in France spoke of hyper-Marxism, of a proliferation of theories, of a splintering into small groups. It was exactly the opposite, the reverse, the contrary of what had intrigued me [*m’a passionné*] in Tunisia.”⁷⁴⁹

Rather than constructing a movement capable of expressing or realizing the shared experience of the will to revolt as transformative force, which is to say, as political agency, the ‘events of May’ instead devolved into a fractious set of ‘hyper-Marxized’ disputes, limited to the kind of institutionalized discursivity for which we have seen

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, 281. Foucault continues: “That may explain the way in which I tried to approach things from that time onward, away from those endless discussions, that hyper-Marxization, that irrepressible discursivity which characterized university life, and, in particular, Vincennes in 1969” (ibid).

Foucault reproach Derrida. And indeed, it is on the same grounds that Deleuze and Guattari diagnose the failure of French society to realize the transformation made possible in May '68: "When a social mutation appears, it is not enough to draw the consequences or effects according to lines of economic or political causality. Society must be capable of forming collective agencies of enunciation that match the new subjectivity, in such a way that it desires the mutation. ... French society has shown a radical incapacity to create a subjective redeployment on the collective level, which is what '68 demands...."⁷⁵⁰

One might thus conclude about the student revolts in Paris that, on the one hand, they provided a necessary condition of possibility for political agency, insofar as they constituted a vertical limit-event breaking from historical causation and creating the possible it opens onto⁷⁵¹; but that, on the other hand, the transversal conditions of realization and sustainability for political agency were never met, insofar as no collective form of expression or assemblage of enunciation was ever constructed that was adequate to realize the vertical-intensive will to revolt as a force of transformation. In other words, May '68 could not offer a (transversal) solution to the (vertical) problem of material expression.

⁷⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, "May '68 Did Not Take Place," 234.

⁷⁵¹ This would at least seem to be the view of Deleuze and Guattari. It is not as clear for Foucault, who, in his interview with Trombadori, points out the differences in intensity and stakes between Tunisia and Paris: "Actually, when I returned to France in November or December of 1968, I was surprised, astonished, and even disappointed, considering what I had seen in Tunisia. In spite of their violence, their passion, the struggles had not involved the same cost, the same sacrifices, by any means. There's no comparison between the barricades of the Latin Quarter and the real risk of getting, as in Tunisia, fifteen years of prison" (Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," 381).

6.4.3 *A Transversal Form of Material Expression for the Realization of Political Agency: The Case of Iran*

It is in this light that we can understand Foucault's fascination and involvement with the popular political uprising in Iran from 1978 to 1979: namely, as a form of revolt capable of achieving the conditions of realization for political agency, and thereby coming closer to solving the problem of material expression. Emerging at what Foucault depicts as the "dark" historical moment when all hope in anti-capitalist revolutionary politics had been extinguished by the failures of socialist regimes,⁷⁵² the Iranian revolt, as a "movement that wants to disengage itself from both external domination and internal politics,"⁷⁵³ challenged not only a particular government (that of the Shah), but the global hegemonic apparatus of capitalism itself. Hence the radicality of the struggle: "It is the insurrection of men with bare hands who want to lift the fearful weight, the weight of the entire world order that bears down on each of us, but more specifically on them, these oil workers and peasants at the frontiers of empires. It is perhaps the first great insurrection

⁷⁵² See Foucault, "La torture, c'est la raison," *Dits et écrits, II*, 397-8. In this interview, published in December 1977, Foucault names as examples the Soviet block, Cuba, Palestine, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, declaring: "There is no longer a single revolutionary movement, and especially not a single 'socialist' country, with which we could align ourselves and say: 'that is how it must be done! That is the model! That is the line!' It's a remarkable state of affairs!" (ibid, 398, my translation).

⁷⁵³ In Foucault's characterization of the Iranian revolt, there is something of a defense of anarchism, by which I mean a political strategy that operates outside the established institutional political framework so as to radically transform the latter without becoming re-incorporated by it. Before writing that the movement 'wants to disengage itself from both external domination and internal politics,' Foucault, as though to anticipate charges of 'spontaneism,' clarifies: "It is not a spontaneous uprising that lacks political organization..." (Ibid, translation modified; the translators insert the word "only" after "not," which is not justified by the French, *Il ne s'agit pas d'un soulèvement spontané auquel manque une organisation politique*, and unfortunately alters the meaning of the phrase; see Foucault, "Le chef mythique de la révolte de l'Iran," *Dits et écrits, II*, 716) The insurrection gave form to a collective desire to break free of both relations of domination from the outside and the political system from within; and since the former would have been impossible without the latter – that is, since the existing regime was so interlinked with global forces of capitalism and 'modernization' that to go through established political channels would have consolidated these forces, or at the very least, would have remained incapable of directly challenging them –, the Iranian uprising refused representation in a party, or incorporation within the prevailing domestic political framework.

against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane.”⁷⁵⁴

Now, while Foucault’s enthusiasm for the Iranian revolutionary movement is by no means uncontroversial, what concerns us is less the question of whether he was “blind to the dangers of Islamic government,”⁷⁵⁵ than the significance that the Iranian uprising held for him as an event of collective becoming-revolutionary, by which the self-composition of a people would act upon and transform the conditions of the social formation. For what interested Foucault in Shi’ism is not its codification in an Islamic state, but the shared

⁷⁵⁴ Foucault, “The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt,” in Afary and Anderson, 222.

⁷⁵⁵ Richard Lynch, “Review of Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*,” *Foucault Studies*, No 4, February 2007, 174. In a well-known critique of Foucault, Afary and Anderson charge him with uncritical naivety regarding political Islam, arguing that “what continued to override the possibility of a critical perspective was the fact that he was so enamored by the ability of the Islamists to galvanize tens of millions of people through such traditions that he ignored the dangers” (Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 125). There is doubtless something true in this claim, though, as Foucault himself will point out in response to a similar criticism, one must not “merge together all the aspects, all the forms, and all the potentialities [*virtualités*] of Islam within a single expression of contempt, for the sake of rejecting them in their entirety” (Foucault, “Foucault’s Response to Atoussa H.,” in Afary and Anderson, 210). In other words, Foucault was interested in a particular critical ‘virtuality’ of Islam, which imbued it with its potentially revolutionary force; and in this way, just as Foucault distinguishes between the positivist and critical Kantian traditions, or between positivist economico-political liberalism and critical liberalism, so, too, might we distinguish between positivist Islam as a form of government, and critical Islam as a form of collective becoming-revolutionary. Indeed, Foucault makes just this sort of distinction when he writes: “Persia has had a surprising destiny. At the dawn of history, it invented the state and government. It conferred its models of state and government on Islam, and its administrators staffed the Arab Empire. But from this same Islam, it derived a religion that, throughout the centuries, never ceased to give an irreducible strength to everything from the depths of a people that can oppose state power” (Foucault, “Tehran: Faith against the Shah,” 203). It would be in this sense that the Iranian uprising, as a form of experience and subjectivation, is irreducible to the repressive regime of the mullahs that took over in the Shah’s wake. Consistent with this, it should be noted that even at the beginning of the insurrection, Foucault sounded skeptical notes regarding the positive claims about Islamic governance, which he found “not too reassuring” (Foucault, “What are the Iranians Dreaming About,” in Afary and Anderson, 206) in their echo of the slogans from the European bourgeois revolutions. Afary and Anderson also argue, much less convincingly, that Foucault’s enthusiasm for the Iranian revolt betrays both an anti-feminist streak and an ‘Orientalist’ philosophical project. While one can certainly maintain that Foucault was insufficiently attentive to problems of gender in political Islam, to portray Foucault’s work more generally as anti-feminist is to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of his political thought – as, for example, should already be clear from our presentation of his minoritarian transversal politics. Similarly, the charge of Orientalism – that Foucault’s histories present a binary opposition between Western modernity, which he would criticize, and a romanticized conception of a culture that would either be Other than, or before, the modern West – reveals a basic interpretative error, namely, the view that Foucault’s critical histories of the present are undertaken in the name of a return to what preceded them.

critical ethos it inspires when, “in the face of established powers, [it] arms the faithful with an unremitting restlessness. It breathes into them an ardor wherein the political and the religious lie side by side,”⁷⁵⁶ enabling a “revolutionary event ... which is at the same time an inner experience, a sort of constantly recommenced liturgy, a community experience....”⁷⁵⁷ In other words, Shi’ism makes possible the collectivization of a vertical limit-experience – like Bataillean transgression, an ‘inner experience,’ but transformed into ‘a community experience,’ animated by restive ‘ardor’ and realized by way of the ceaseless repetition of public professions of faith through insurrectionary political action.

Seen from this point of view, the Iranian revolt offers a singular example of how vertical and transversal politics can converge so as to satisfy both the conditions of possibility and realization for political agency. The shared vertical experience of uprising becomes the manifestation or expression of what Foucault calls, to his own surprise, “an absolutely collective will,” the like of which “few peoples in history have had,”⁷⁵⁸ indicating one kind of solution to the problem of collective subjectivation. What Foucault had previously assumed to be “like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter” – that is, a transcendent idea for which no corresponding experience would ever be possible, and which is itself a historical product of power-knowledge, “a political myth” used to “justify institutions” –, he encountered in Iran as a singular event: “This collective will, which, in our theories, is always general, has found for itself, in Iran, an absolutely clear, particular aim, and has thus erupted into history.”⁷⁵⁹ And indeed, the

⁷⁵⁶ Foucault, “Tehran: Faith against the Shah,” 201.

⁷⁵⁷ Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit,” 252.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, 252-3.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid, 253.

transformative force of this singular limit-event was realized, at least in part, through the auto-intensifying form of vertical repetition that the popular protests took:

The demonstrations were repeated, and the machine-guns fired yet again. And this occurred in an almost identical way, with, of course, an intensification each time, but without any change of form or nature. It's the repetition of the demonstration. ... [T]he demonstration, in its very repetition, had an intense political meaning. The very word *demonstration* [manifestation] must be taken literally: a people was tirelessly *demonstrating* [rendait manifeste] its will. There was in these demonstrations a link between collective action, religious ritual, and an expression of public right. ... In the streets of Tehran there was an act, a political and juridical act, carried out collectively within religious rituals – an act of deposing the sovereign.⁷⁶⁰

Unlike the generality and theoretical abstraction of the European idea of collective will, the singularity of the collective will in Iran, concentrated by the insurrectionary aim of 'deposing the sovereign,' made manifest a becoming-revolutionary of the people, which was also the becoming of a people *tout court*. Foucault's epistolary comment regarding the Tunisian students – that 'what is for us pure theoretical discourse suddenly verticalizes itself here in an almost immediate imperative' – can thus be applied to the collective will to revolt in Iran, 'an expression of public right' achieved through 'collective action' that takes form in the vertical repetition of 'religious ritual,' intensifying its own transformative effect 'in its very repetition' with each subsequent staging. And unlike other cases of uprising or revolution, such as May '68 and the Cultural Revolution,⁷⁶¹ "the revolt spread without splits or internal conflicts": to use Foucault's examples, there were neither divisions based on class (the oil workers' strike

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid, 254.

⁷⁶¹ "All the same, the Cultural Revolution was certainly presented as a struggle between certain elements of the population and certain others, certain elements in the party and certain others, or between the population and the party, etc. Now what struck me in Iran is that there is no struggle between different elements. What gives it such beauty, and at the same time such gravity, is that there is only one confrontation: between the entire people and the state threatening it with its weapons and police" (ibid, 253-4).

was supported by the bazaar bourgeoisie; the “modern industrialized sector” did not separate from the “‘traditional’ sector”), nor age generation (the liberation of political prisoners did not divide the “old and new oppositionists”), nor culture or political ideology (the students, who were “more westernized and more Marxist,” held common cause with “the mullahs from the countryside”).⁷⁶²

Indeed, it is just this complex unity that contains the key for understanding how the Iranian revolt exemplified a transversal political movement. Unlike revolutions that are led by a vanguard party or some other particular segment of society, where unification is a result of hegemony and centralization, on Foucault’s view, the ‘unified collective will’ in Iran was achieved through a process of transversal connection, operating by lateral proliferation to form a decentralized, non-representational mass multiplicity:

In Iran, the rejection of the regime is a massive social phenomenon. This does not mean that the rejection is confused, emotional, or barely self-conscious. On the contrary, it spreads in an oddly [*singulièrement*] effective manner, from the strikes to the demonstrations, from the bazaars to the universities, from the leaflets to the sermons, through shopkeepers, workers, clerics, teachers, and students. For the moment, however, no party, no man, and no political ideology can boast that it represents this movement. Nor can anyone claim to be at its head. This movement has no counterpart and no expression in the political order. The paradox, however, is that it constitutes a perfectly unified collective will. ... It is the same protest, it is the same will, that is expressed by a doctor from Tehran and a provincial mullah, by an oil worker, by a postal employee, and by a female student wearing the chador. ... This political will is one of breaking away from all that marks their country and their daily lives with the presence of global hegemonies.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶² Foucault, “A Revolt with Bare Hands,” in Afary and Anderson, 211. It is worth quoting the passage in full: “The reopening of the universities could have put into the forefront the students, who are more westernized and more Marxist than the mullahs from the countryside. The liberation of over a thousand political prisoners could have created a conflict between old and new oppositionists. Finally and most important, the strike by the oil workers could have, on the one hand, worried the bourgeoisie of the bazaar and, on the other hand, started a cycle of strictly job-oriented demands. The modern industrialized sector could have separated itself from the ‘traditional’ sector (by immediately accepting pay raises – the government was counting on this). But none of this happened. What’s more, the striking workers gave a tremendous economic weapon to the movement. The shutdown of the refineries dried up the government’s sources of revenue and gave an international dimension to the Iranian crisis” (ibid).

⁷⁶³ Foucault, “The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt,” in Afary and Anderson, 221-2.

Now, Foucault's qualifying phrase 'for the moment' refers to November 26, 1978. In historical hindsight, of course, we know that the return and rule of Khomeini in early February of 1979 also ushered in a return to the rule of a centralized and repressive regime by the end of March. However, just as the "spirituality which had meaning for those who went to their deaths has no common measure with the bloody government of an integrist clergy,"⁷⁶⁴ so, too, must we distinguish the acephalous nature of the revolutionary movement as a 'massive social phenomenon' from the later hierarchy and rigid segmentation of the Islamic Republic.⁷⁶⁵ For the fact that the political agency of the revolt went unsustainable does not mean that it was never realized; and on Foucault's account, the 'singularly effective manner' in which it was realized precisely instantiates the connective strategy of transversal politics. That is, the becoming-revolutionary of the Iranian people proceeded by means of lateral multiplication throughout the social field, creating a network of relays between those who, from a myriad of singular sites, suffer the same exercise of power 'that marks their country and their daily lives with the presence of global hegemonies.'

In such a way, a process of collective subjectivation took form that was capable of manifesting itself as a unified will, or, to speak with Deleuze and Guattari, as a revolutionary subject-group on the order of desire and its irruption. And indeed, for Foucault, what accounts for the singular efficacy of the popular revolt in Iran was how Shi'ism, giving rise to "the thousands of political centers that have been spawned in

⁷⁶⁴ Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?", 451.

⁷⁶⁵ In this regard, Foucault distinguishes between "revolution" and "revolt" in much the same way that Deleuze and Guattari distinguish "revolutions" from "becoming-revolutionary."

mosques and religious communities in order to resist the shah's regime,"⁷⁶⁶ functioned precisely as a non-hierarchical collective assemblage of enunciation. As "a matter of organization[, a]mong the Shi'ite clergy, religious authority is not determined by a hierarchy"; rather, "this power, which essentially resides in the interplay of speaking and listening," comes from articulating a kind of critical 'philosophy of the people' that is voluntarily "*listened to*": "This is true even in the smallest communities, where neighborhood and village mullahs gather around themselves those attracted by their words. From these volunteers comes their subsistence ... and from them comes their influence. But from them also comes the unrelenting plea to denounce injustice, to criticize the government, to rise up against unacceptable measures..."⁷⁶⁷ This would be the radical critical strand of Shi'ism, its popular-revolutionary 'virtuality,' the connective force of which was powerful enough to realize the kind of undivided plebe that Foucault's own political activism in the prison movement and beyond had sought to promote.

We should finally be positioned to understand the connection between vertical and transversal politics. What makes the Iranian uprising such an instructive example of political agency is the way in which Shi'ism provided a transversal solution to the vertical problem of material expression:

...the Shi'ite religion ... is much more than a simple vocabulary through which aspirations, unable to find other words, must pass. It is today what it was several times in the past, the form that the political struggle takes as soon as it mobilizes the common people. It transforms thousands of forms of discontent, hatred, misery, and despair into a *force*. It transforms them into a force because it is a form of expression, a mode of social relations, a supple and widely accepted elemental

⁷⁶⁶ Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?", 207.

⁷⁶⁷ Foucault, "Tehran: Faith against the Shah," 202, emphasis in original.

organization, a way of being together, a way of speaking and listening, something that allows one to be listened to by others, and to yearn for something with them at the same time as they yearn for it.⁷⁶⁸

To function effectively as a form of popular political struggle is to *realize as force* the ‘thousands of forms of discontent, hatred, misery, and despair,’ which is to say, the collective experience of the intolerable; it is to harness and connect an intensive affective multiplicity that traverses the social field, in such a way that it can act upon and transform the conditions of social production, i.e., the extensive set of political, economic, social, and cultural processes of organization. In other words, when it ‘mobilizes the common people’ in this way, Shi’ism satisfies the condition of realization for political agency, enabling the vertical dimension of intensity, which is irreducible to history, to erupt into and transform history as a singular event: namely, as the limit-event of political uprising. And Shi’ism is capable of realizing such transformative force, of answering the problem of material expression, precisely insofar as it constitutes a popular, ‘supple,’ non-hierarchical ‘form of expression’: a collective assemblage of enunciation, ‘a way of speaking and listening’ that allows the articulation of a shared experience of the intolerable exercise of power, as well as a shared desire for transformation; a mode of collective subjectivation, ‘a way of being together’ by which a people composes itself as such; and a ‘mode of social relations, a supple elemental organization’ that would connect transversally across lines of rigid segmentation, enriching the relational fabric.

In short, political agency is realized when the experiential verticality of a collective will becomes materially expressed as force through a transversal form of expression; in

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid, 202-3, emphasis in original.

such a way does the incorporeal materiality of intensity become capable of acting upon and transforming the corporeal materiality of history.

Moreover, a Nietzschean analysis of force is doubly appropriate here: for, in addition to constituting the emergence of a singular event – a reversal of forces that is also the entry of force in history –, popular uprising, as the auto-poiesis of a people, transmutes what is reactive in the experience of the intolerable (‘discontent, hatred, misery, despair’) into an active-affirmative force.⁷⁶⁹ Indeed, just as ethico-political agency is realized through the activity of vertical critique ‘as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings’; so, too, the realization of political agency can be understood in terms of historico-ontological self-transformation. And in the case of Iran, on Foucault’s view, precisely such transformation was made possible by the critical-creative stand of Shi’ism, understood as a way “of living the Islamic religion as a revolutionary force”:

In rising up, the Iranians said to themselves – and this perhaps is the soul of the uprising: “Of course, we have to change this regime and get rid of this man, we have to change this corrupt administration, we have to change the whole country, the political organization, the economic system, the foreign policy. *But, above all, we have to change ourselves.* Our way of being, our relationship with others, with things, with eternity, with God, etc., must be completely changed, and *there will only be a true revolution if this radical change in our experience takes place.*” I believe that it is here that Islam played a role. ... [A]bove all, in relation to the way of life that was theirs, religion for them was like the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁹ To put this point in Deleuze’s language, the becoming-active of reactive force is achieved through the becoming-revolutionary of a people.

⁷⁷⁰ Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit,” 255, my emphasis. Foucault continues: “Shi’ism is precisely a form of Islam that, with its teaching and esoteric content, distinguishes between what is mere external obedience to the code and what is the profound spiritual life; when I say that they were looking to Islam for a change in their subjectivity, this is quite compatible with the fact that traditional Islamic practice was already there and already gave them their identity; in this way they had of living the Islamic religion as a revolutionary force, there was something other than the desire to obey the law more faithfully, there was the desire to renew their entire existence by going back to a spiritual experience that they thought they could find within Shi’ite Islam itself” (ibid).

The ‘soul of the uprising’ – that is, the animating principle of revolt, both its generative and motive force – is the collective desire for deep self-transformation, for a ‘radical change’ in both individual and community experience that creates a renewed mode of subjectivity. And this transvaluative process of collective subjectivation, by which the limit-experience of the intolerable becomes the impetus for the creative realization of a new possible, constitutes the very intensive movement of political agency, taking form (given expression, becoming realized, lived as force) through the Shi’ite religion.

6.4.4 *In the Wake of Tehran: Vertical Auto-Critique as Political Agency’s Condition of Sustainability*

Now, if the Iranian uprising exemplifies the realization of political agency, a two-part question remains: was it able to sustain this agential force? – to which we know the unfortunate answer, as witnessed by the instatement of ‘the bloody government of an integrist clergy’ that had ‘no common measure’ with the spirituality of those who staked their lives in revolt –; and if not, why not?

In Chapter 4, we analyzed the conditions of realization and sustainability for political agency in terms of the transversal connection of lines of flight, and we concluded that such connection faces two dangers: (1) the molar threat of capture, as in institutional appropriation or blockage; and (2) the molecular threat of abolition, as a kind of inner tendency toward destruction. In light of the repressive nature of the regime that installed itself following the Iranian Revolution, it would seem that the failure to sustain

the political agency of the revolt could be explained as a problem of State capture and the re-imposition of rigid segmentation. But while doubtless true, this remains an incomplete explanation, for account must also be taken of the second, more subtle danger; and in keeping with the kind of agential priority we have seen both Foucault and Deleuze accord the micropolitical or intensive dimension, the threat of abolition will have heuristic privilege insofar as it indicates a necessary condition of sustainability for political agency.

Shi'ism provided a form of expression capable of realizing a collective process of becoming-revolutionary; yet this very form is itself “based on traditions, institutions that carry a charge of chauvinism, nationalism, exclusiveness,” so many potential fascisms or tendencies toward reactive force, “which have a very powerful attraction for individuals.”⁷⁷¹ When such destructive virtualities, e.g. misogyny, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia, etc., are activated and take sway, transversal connection no longer operates as the popular movement's principle of composition; and what replaces it is precisely a reactive form of group subjection, a hierarchical mode of organization where identity is predicated on a prior set of exclusions. Therefore, in order to prevent the revolutionary line of flight from collapsing into a line of abolition – which is to say, in order to sustain political agency – these reactionary tendencies must themselves be called into question and overcome. The movement which is ‘a way of living the Islamic religion as a revolutionary force’ must be capable, in turn, of effecting a becoming-revolutionary of this religious form of expression itself.

In other words, if the ‘soul of uprising’ is the collective will for self-transformation, then in order for this will to be sustained as an animating force, it must be capable of

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 260.

continuing to transform itself, of staking out its own limits in order to cross over them. This is no doubt why Foucault, in the days before Khomeini's return, distinguishes and even prioritizes the molecular problem facing the revolt: "Apart from the problem of the immediate succession to the shah, there is another question that interests me at least as much: Will this unitary movement, which, for a year now has stirred up a people faced with machine-guns, have the strength [*force*] to cross [*franchir*] its own frontiers and go beyond the things on which, for a time, it has based itself?"⁷⁷² Having realized itself as evental force, the popular revolt is confronted by a new problem: whether or not its powers of activity are such that it can apply the radical-critical 'ardor' of its 'unremitting restlessness' to itself, as the catalyst for its own continued becoming.

In short, what emerges as a necessary condition of sustainability for political agency is what was analyzed in the preceding section as a condition of possibility for ethico-political agency: namely, the *limit-attitude* of vertical critique. Indeed, this is the form of auto-critique that is necessary for historico-ontological transformation, working by means of the contingency thesis 'to give new impetus to the undefined work of freedom.' In Chapter 2, at the end of our discussion of Nietzschean interpretation and Zarathustra's 'ascent into the depths,' we identified the principle of self-recreative activity as a fundamental aspect of critical verticality, the trajectory of the vertical axis containing within itself the source of its own motility. Bringing together the vertical and transversal components of our analysis, we can now posit, as a solution to the transversal problem of political-agential sustainability (i.e., the danger of abolition), a kind of collective vertical critique: an auto-transformative practice, at once a "permanent critique" and "permanent

⁷⁷² Ibid.

creation of ourselves,”⁷⁷³ which would select out tendencies toward reactive force insofar as they imperil intensive micropolitical processes of connection. As Foucault puts it, “I believe that the work of deep transformation can be done in the open and always turbulent atmosphere of a continuous [*permanente*] criticism.”⁷⁷⁴

Vertical critique would thus meet a necessary condition for sustaining the transversal composition of political agency. The argument for this conclusion can be presented in brief:

1. Transversal connection designates both a condition of realization and a condition of sustainability for political agency: that is, the vertical experience of insurrection cannot be realized as a force (i.e., the vertical problem of material expression cannot be solved) without transversal connection serving as the compositional principle for a collective form of expression; and such transformative force cannot be sustained, cannot renew its proper process of becoming-revolutionary, without transversal connection continuing to function in this way.
2. What threatens the continued functioning of transversal connection, and hence the sustainability of political agency, is the danger of abolition; and it is the tendency toward reactive force that poses this threat, i.e., that turns the line of flight into a line of abolition.
3. Vertical critique, when it functions effectively as a critical ethos (limit-attitude), is the practice or activity of thought that selects out or eliminates these tendencies of

⁷⁷³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 313-4.

⁷⁷⁴ Foucault, “So Is It Important to Think?”, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3*, 457.

reactive force, diagnosing their role in reintroducing rigid segmentation and the intolerable exercise of power.

4. Therefore, vertical critique, when it functions effectively as the limit-attitude, satisfies a necessary condition of sustainability for political agency.

It follows from this argument that one strategic objective for critical thought will be to facilitate the sustainability of political agency by advancing the limit-attitude as a collective ethos. And it is here, the political role of the intellectual returning to the fore, that we encounter Foucault's late concept of vertical critique.

6.5 *Late Critique: The 'Vertical Relationship of Discourse to its Own Present Reality'*

"I dream of the intellectual as destroyer of certitudes and universalities, who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power; who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who ... contributes to posing the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth the effort, and which one (I mean which revolution and which effort), it being understood that only those who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can respond to the question."

— Foucault⁷⁷⁵

6.5.1 *Vertical Critique as a Necessary Condition 'For Any Transformation'*

At the end of section III above, we analyzed the triple political function of the intellectual in terms of (1) a visionary function, by which the intolerable would be intuited and disclosed as such; (2) an enunciative function, by which the conditions for a collective form of expression (or assemblage of enunciation) would be constructed; and (3) an amplifying function, by which a set of lateral relays would be facilitated between a multiplicity of singular expressions of struggle. If the second and third functions refer to

⁷⁷⁵ Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," *Foucault Live*, 155, translation modified; cf. "Non au sexe roi," *Dits et écrits II*, 268-9.

the problem of collective subjectivation and the connective strategy of transversal politics, the first function opens onto a vertical politics: what is perceived and made visible, before it has erupted into history as force, is the political limit-experience of uprising, the intensive germ of revolt the possibility of which no form of power can destroy without ending the power relation as such; and it is the vertical perspective of genealogical critique, orienting the ‘art of bringing out the revolting brutality in what we tolerate out of habit’ so as ‘to sharpen intolerance to the facts of power,’ that affords the mode of vision capable of such ‘political intuition.’

The intellectual as critical ‘visionary’ will thus take up the characteristically vertical perspective in limit-relation to history and power: “one must at the same time look closely, a bit beneath history, at what cleaves and stirs it, and keep watch, a bit behind politics, over what must unconditionally limit it.”⁷⁷⁶ It is the vertical experience of the intolerable that, ‘beneath history,’ disrupts and breathes life into it (history), making political agency possible and constituting the absolute limit of power’s exercise. In turn, it is the vertical critique of the intolerable, understood as a historical ontology of the present, that de-familiarizes the given horizon of intelligibility so that the intolerable can be seen *as* intolerable, and the operation of power, disclosed in its fragile contingency. In this way, critical thought is a necessary condition ‘for any transformation,’ including the transformation of the conditions of social production proper to political agency: “A critique does not consist in saying that things aren’t good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based. Criticism consists in uncovering that thought

⁷⁷⁶ Foucault, “Useless to Revolt?”, 453.

and trying to change it Understood in these terms, criticism (and radical criticism) is utterly indispensable for any transformation.”⁷⁷⁷

Vertical critique is thus integral to transformative agency in general. Indeed, what is at issue here is the agential force of thought itself, for “[t]hought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.”⁷⁷⁸ That is, the activity of critical thought impels the practice of freedom, understood as the labor of transformation conducted by ourselves upon ourselves – what we have been calling ‘ethico-political agency,’ and what, when realized collectively as the ‘soul of revolt,’ constitutes political agency. For it is vertical critique, “the diagnosis of what today is” through an historical ontology of ourselves, that, by “following lines of fragility in the present,” provides a “description ... made in accordance with these kinds of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, that is, of possible transformation.”⁷⁷⁹ This is why Foucault refers to thought as “that essential element in human life and human relations”⁷⁸⁰: if “[f]reedom is the ontological condition of ethics,”⁷⁸¹ and if thought constitutes freedom in relation to action, then thought provides the ontological condition of ethics from the perspective of action.

⁷⁷⁷ Foucault, “So Is It Important to Think?”, *Power*, 457. Lest this position seem to give undue privilege to the role of the intellectual, or suggest a kind of historical idealism, it should be noted that critical thought here is understood in an expansive sense: for example, an event of revolt, such as the case of May ’68 as treated by Deleuze and Guattari, performs the function of critique insofar as it constitutes a collective visionary phenomenon by which a new possible is demanded and created. As Foucault puts it in the passage cited as the epigraph to the fourth section above, ‘One must attend to the birth of ideas and to the exhibition of their force: not in books that would pronounce them, but in the events in which they manifest their force, in the struggles that one conducts for ideas, against them or for them.’

⁷⁷⁸ Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” 117.

⁷⁷⁹ Foucault, “Structuralism and Post-structuralism,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 450.

⁷⁸⁰ Foucault, “So Is It Important to Think?”, 457.

⁷⁸¹ Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 284.

In other words, vertical-critical thought meets the necessary precondition for ethical agency, which is also and necessarily ethico-*political* agency insofar as the conditions of possibility for what we can do (say, think, become) are circumscribed within the historical field of power relations. In turn, as we have seen, the collectivization of the limit-attitude, by facilitating and renewing the process of popular auto-transformation, would satisfy a condition of sustainability for political agency. In both cases, whether at the (ethico-political) level of the conditions of possible action or the (political) level of the conditions of social production, agency is understood in terms of transformative force, just as ‘concrete freedom’ is cast in terms of a ‘possible transformation,’ which is also to say, a transformation of the possible. And in both cases, transformative agency, as the practice of freedom, owes its impetus and sustenance to vertical critique, whether such critical verticality be depicted as the philosophical ethos proper to historical ontology, i.e., the limit-attitude as the experimental practice of auto-critique undertaken in the desire to ‘radically change one’s subjectivity’; or whether as a ‘visionary phenomenon’ (Deleuze and Guattari) disclosing the intolerable as such through a popular movement of intransigence that demands – and, in the demand, produces – a new possible. In this light, the political experience of uprising itself, whether individual or collective, has a vertical-critical structure; and in turn, as we will see below, there is a particular sense in which vertical critique constitutes a form of revolt.

6.5.2 *Return to Kant: The Verticality of the Critical Attitude and the Philosophy of the Event*

Now, we have seen how, for Foucault, the double thought of power and the event is fundamental to a ‘philosophy of the people’ that would compose a subversive form of counter-knowledge. If the guiding thought or problem of transversal politics, to which the enunciative and amplifying functions of the intellectual correspond, is the thought of power, then the critical-visionary function of vertical politics, in turn, is oriented by the thought of the event. It is no doubt for this reason that in an interview from 1978, just before his engagement in the Iranian uprising, Foucault, locating himself within the genealogical lineage of Nietzsche, distinguishes his own work from philosophy “in the classical sense of the word” (à la Derrida) insofar as he (Foucault) is “interested in the event” as a “philosophical category”:

...it was Nietzsche, I think, who first defined philosophy as an activity that leads to an understanding of what’s happening, of what’s happening right now. In other words, we are pervaded [*traversés*] by processes, movements and forces, which we don’t know, and it is doubtlessly the philosopher’s task to be a diagnostician of these forces, to diagnose contemporary reality. ... Philosophy of the present, philosophy of the event, philosophy of what is happening right now.⁷⁸²

Directing its line of descent, genealogy, as a historical critique of the present, grasps contemporary reality as the degree zero of history, which is to say, as the site of emergence of events, understood as the reversal or eruption of forces. As we have seen,

⁷⁸² Foucault, “The Stage of Philosophy: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Moriaki Watanabe.” Clarifying how such a claim about practicing a ‘philosophy of the present’ squares with the largely historical nature of his research, Foucault continues: “It’s true that in my books I try to capture an event that I considered, and consider to be important to our present time, although it is a past event. Regarding madness, for instance, it seems to me that there was a separation [*partage*] between madness and non-madness at a certain moment in the Western world; at another moment there emerged a certain way of grasping the intensity of crime and the problem of man raised by crime. All these events, it seems we are repeating them. We are repeating them today and I’m trying to grasp the kind of event under whose sign we were born and which continues to pervade us” (ibid).

this relation to the present is precisely what accounts for the vertical perspectivism of genealogical critique, its de-familiarizing and auto-doubling functions, and its transformative efficacy as a strategies of truth: the vertical relation of genealogy to history designates a historical ontology of our own present, of ourselves in this present, and of what we are doing when we reflect on this present and ourselves within it, such that we become capable of transforming both (this present and ourselves).

Indeed, it is in just this sense that Foucault, in his penultimate lecture course at the Collège de France in 1983, will place himself in the intellectual tradition that poses “the question of the present as a philosophical event to which the philosopher who speaks of it belongs”: that is, “philosophy as the surface of emergence of a present reality, as a questioning of the philosophical meaning of the present reality of which it is a part, and ... as the philosopher’s questioning of this ‘we’ to which he belongs and in relation to which he has to situate himself.”⁷⁸³ We see here the recursive auto-doubling function, or productive self-referential structure, proper to vertical thought: critical philosophy is both itself an event (‘a philosophical event,’ ‘the surface of emergence’ of the “difference ... today introduce[s] with respect to yesterday”⁷⁸⁴) and a form of reflection upon itself as an event; and it is the analysis of itself as an event that constitutes the very event that it is.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸³ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 12-3.

⁷⁸⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 305. As Foucault will put the point in his discussion of Kant, both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution constitute “self-referring events” (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 15), that is, events that are not only aware of themselves as such, but whose very force is generated from this auto-reference as the entrance of transformative force in history.

⁷⁸⁵ Referring back to our discussion of aesthetic reflective judgment in Chapter 2, we could also put this point in terms of the ‘tautegorical’ structure of vertical-evental thought: the event is both the *content* of critical philosophy (philosophy *of* the event) and the *form* of critical philosophy (philosophy *as* the event). It is in this same sense that intensive-vertical thought is both the thought *of* the vertical dimension of intensity and thought *as* the vertical dimension of intensity, which is also to say, the thought of thought itself as vertical-intensive force.

In other words, the ‘philosophy of the event’ is itself an event of philosophy, which is to say, the singular emergence of critical thought as a transformative force in history.

If anything has changed from the middle to the late articulation of vertical critique, it is that Foucault now locates this kind of evental philosophy in the minor critical tradition of Kant, specifically, in the way that Kant poses the problem of modernity in his writings on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.⁷⁸⁶ By contrast to the horizontal mode in which “the question of modernity had been posed in terms of a longitudinal axis,” i.e., in terms of “the polarity between Antiquity and modernity” and their comparative evaluation, Kant opens up

...a new way of posing the question of modernity..., which is no longer in a longitudinal relationship with the Ancients, but in what could be called a sagittal relationship or, if you like, a *vertical relationship of the discourse to its own present reality*. The discourse has to take its own present reality into account in order, [first], to find its own place in it, second to express its meaning, and third to designate and specify the mode of action, the mode of effectuation that it realizes within this present reality.⁷⁸⁷

Vertical critique thus appears in Kant as an auto-referential form of thought that analyzes (1) the contemporary conditions of its own emergence, (2) the singularity of this emergence as a historical event, and (3) the transformative effect that this event of thought realizes in the field of actuality.

⁷⁸⁶ This lineage still, of course, includes Nietzsche: see, e.g., “The Art of Telling the Truth,” where Foucault describes the minor Kantian tradition as one of “an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present,” running “from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School” (Foucault, “The Art of Telling the Truth,” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 95). For our discussion of the two Kantian philosophical traditions, see the Introduction.

⁷⁸⁷ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 13-4.

(1) In the first case, the contemporary conditions of the vertical critique of modernity⁷⁸⁸ refer to the Enlightenment itself as a kind of collective critical attitude, the general refusal to be unduly governed by arbitrary forms of authority (which refusal becomes realized as a political event in the Revolution): in other words, a philosophical ethos manifesting the kind of restiveness that animates the will to revolt. Indeed, like the ‘centrifugal movement’ or vector of escape proper to the line of flight, the Enlightenment, as Foucault notes, is defined by Kant “simply as ‘*Ausgang*,’ as way out, exit, a movement by which one extricates oneself from something, without saying anything about what one is moving towards.”⁷⁸⁹ More specifically, this form of escape is “‘*man’s way out from his self-incurred tutelage*,’ ... a movement of getting out ... which constitutes precisely the significant element of our present reality.”⁷⁹⁰

(2) Thus, the singularity of the Enlightenment as a historical event, defining modernity by the practice of vertical auto-critique, is the breaking-away from a certain form of self-maintained subjugation. And by posing the question of the Enlightenment in this way, Kant issues a “call for courage” for humanity to lift the “minority condition” in which it has been “maintained in an authoritative way” – a condition which, whether in the domains of religion, law or knowledge, is defined by humanity’s “incapacity to use its

⁷⁸⁸ In a sense, the vertical investigation of positivism from Foucault’s early period (especially in *History of Madness* and *Birth of the Clinic*) was already a vertical critique of modernity. However, in that instance, the object of vertical critique was not modernity as the philosophical ethos of the critical attitude introduced by Kant; rather, it concerned that other, majoritarian Kantian tradition, the ‘analytic of truth’ that gave rise to rational positivism (whether in formal logic or political economy). In this way, we can maintain consistency between Foucault’s early critique of Kant and his later identification with a certain Kantian lineage, since each refers to a different Kantian tradition. Indeed, this apparent ambivalence is already contained in Foucault’s early account of Kant, whose Copernican turn introduced the idea of radical finitude before territorializing this thought in an anthropological positivism, i.e., the man-form.

⁷⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 27.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 28.

own understanding precisely without something which would be someone else's direction."⁷⁹¹

As we saw in Chapter 5, for Foucault, this excessive authority that maintains humanity in its subordinate condition is a form of governmentalization: that is, a complex set of strategies operating through and organizing the social, political, and economic institutions, relations, and practices by which the conduct of a population is managed, and “through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth.”⁷⁹² On Foucault's view, governmentalization emerges historically in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a kind of secularization and expansion of the function of pastoral power, according to which every individual is bound by a relation of absolute obedience to let themselves be governed in each of their actions for the entirety of their lives, and where this submission is mediated by a form of truth linking the self-knowledge of the individual to a dogmatic authority.⁷⁹³ Once only the province of ecclesiastical institutions, this individualizing technique proliferates in every new area where the problem of governing is posed: “how to govern children, how to govern the poor and beggars, how to govern a family, a house, how to govern armies, different groups, cities, States and also how to govern one's own body and mind.”⁷⁹⁴ Governmentalization thus emerges as an individualizing and totalizing regime of power-knowledge that produces individuals as subjects in the double sense of being “subject to

⁷⁹¹ Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 47-8. Foucault's term ‘minority condition’ should be understood in the legal sense of a minor, rather than in the sense of minoritarian becoming discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁷⁹² Ibid, 48.

⁷⁹³ Ibid, 43-4.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 44.

someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [one's] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.”⁷⁹⁵

However, according to Foucault, there develops in agonistic tandem with governmentalization a “critical attitude” that resists it, a practice or “art of not being governed quite so much.”⁷⁹⁶ The three historical points of anchorage for this critical attitude anticipate the three areas where Kant calls for the courage of humanity to exercise its own understanding: in the religious domain, a biblical critique that contests ecclesiastical rule with respect to the truth of the Scriptures; in the legal domain, a juridical critique that asserts the rights of natural law so as to contest unjust political rule; and in the domain of knowledge, a scientific critique that contests unjustified authoritarian determinations of truth.⁷⁹⁷ In each of these cases, critique functions to limit an excessive authority by challenging the production of knowledge through which the latter operates, thereby disrupting the techniques of subjection by which humanity is maintained in a minority condition. As “the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth,” and thus as “the art of voluntary insubordination” and “reflected intractability,” “[c]ritique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.”⁷⁹⁸

(3) We may therefore characterize the transformative effect that the critical philosophy of the event realizes in the field of contemporary reality in terms of the desubjugating self-transformation of those who rise up against an intolerable form of

⁷⁹⁵ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 331.

⁷⁹⁶ Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 45.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, 45-6.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid, 47.

governmentalization. That is, vertical critique, as the ‘art of reflected intractability,’ provides strategic orientation for the intensive will to revolt and renewed impetus for the movement of ethico/political agency. Hence the significant stakes of that tradition of critical thought to which Foucault belongs: “In its critical aspect – and I mean critical in a broad sense – philosophy is that which calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional, or what have you.”⁷⁹⁹ On Foucault’s view, it is this critical attitude that Kant reactivates when he poses the question of the Enlightenment as both a critical analysis of the present condition of humanity and a summons to no longer let what we say, think, and do be governed by dogmatic forms of authority.

6.5.3 *Epilogue: Parrhesia as the Critical Philosophic Form of Revolt*

From a tragic counter-history of rationalist positivism, through an intensive reformulation as the genealogy of force relations, to the critical limit-attitude of historical ontology, vertical critique remains the manner in which Foucault conceives the agential force of thought as subversive or transformative. This analysis accounts for Foucault’s late fascination and identification with Kant’s “What is Enlightenment?”, which Foucault himself describes as “something of a blazon, a fetish for me.”⁸⁰⁰ Further, it sheds light on the political stakes, rarely commented upon, of the turn to Antiquity that guided his historical research in the 1980s, which is typically presented as a movement away from the problem of power toward an interest in pre-Christian ethics (as so many aesthetic and

⁷⁹⁹ Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” 300-1.

⁸⁰⁰ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 7.

ascetic practices of self-care). For if the critical attitude designates the manner in which thought, realized as “a mode of behavior, a form of will,”⁸⁰¹ enables and sustains political agency; then the project “to construct a genealogy of the critical attitude in Western philosophy”⁸⁰² must be understood as a political one. And it is just this project – which, as the vertical critique (genealogy) of critique, demonstrates the recursive auto-doubling function proper to verticality – to which Foucault dedicates his last three lecture courses, finding in the ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia* (‘free speech,’ ‘outspokenness’) “the roots of what we could call the ‘critical’ tradition in the West.”⁸⁰³

Indeed, when, at the beginning of his lecture course in 1983, Foucault situates the tradition of vertical critique in Kant, he does so precisely as a means of orienting his subsequent interpretation of *parrhesia*. Whatever else might be said about the discontinuity of Foucault’s research program between the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and the two volumes that followed eight years later, there is also a clear line of philosophical consistency running from beginning to end of Foucault’s work,

⁸⁰¹ Ibid, 29.

⁸⁰² Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 170-1. At the beginning of his final lecture course, Foucault himself makes quite clear the connection between his interest in *parrhesia* and the problem of power: “Last year I tried to show you that the notion of *parrhēsia* was first of all and fundamentally a political notion. ... [B]y taking up again or undertaking the analysis of *parrhēsia* in the field of political practices, I drew a bit closer to the theme which, after all, has always been present in my analysis of the relations between the subject and truth: that of relations of power and their role in the interplay between the subject and truth. With the notion of *parrhēsia*, originally rooted in political practice and the problematization of democracy, then later diverging towards the sphere of personal ethics and the formation of the moral subject, we have ... the possibility of posing the question of the subject and truth from the point of view of the practice of what could be called the government of oneself and others. And thus we come back to the theme of government which I studied some years ago. It seems to me that by examining the notion of *parrhēsia* we can see how the analysis of modes of veridiction, the study of techniques of governmentality, and the identification of forms of practice of self interweave” (Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, edited by Gros, translated by Burchell, 8).

⁸⁰³ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 170. The three lecture courses in question are *The Government of Self and Others* at the Collège de France (Spring 1983), *Fearless Speech* at UC Berkeley (Fall 1983; also entitled *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia*), and *The Courage of Truth* at the Collège de France (Spring 1984).

insofar as the lineage of vertical critique runs from Nietzsche (first the *Birth of Tragedy*, then the *Genealogy*) through Kant ultimately back to the figure of Socrates. For it is Socrates who, in refusing to follow the unjust dictates of the Thirty Tyrants, “gives, as a philosopher, an example of philosophical resistance to political power, an example of *parrēsia* which will remain for a long time a model of the philosophical attitude towards power: the philosopher’s individual resistance.”⁸⁰⁴

Parrhesia can be thus understood as the individual form of uprising proper to critical philosophy. Recalling Foucault’s experience in the Tunisian student revolts, when philosophical discourse was verticalized into an ‘almost immediate imperative,’ in the case of *parrhesia*, the will to revolt – that vertical-intensive mode of political experience at the degree zero of power’s exercise – finds as its ground the ethical duty of care: “*parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself).”⁸⁰⁵

Foucault analyzes *parrhesia* according to five characteristics, all of which bring to mind the role of Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*.⁸⁰⁶ The first two are frankness, or a direct and unadorned manner of address, and truth, understood as both the sincerity and content of one’s discourse: one speaks frankly and truly, and what one speaks is true. Indeed, the

⁸⁰⁴ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 216.

⁸⁰⁵ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19.

⁸⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, 12-20. Foucault briefly remarks on the *Apology* in this lecture as an example of philosophical *parrhesia*: “In the writings of Plato, Socrates appears in the role of the *parrhesiastes*. . . . [T]he role of Socrates is a typically parrhesiastic one, for he constantly confronts Athenians in the street and, as noted in the *Apology*, points out the truth to them, bidding them to care for wisdom, truth, and the perfection of their souls” (*ibid.*, 23).

‘personal relationship’ between the *parrhesiastes* and the truth that he⁸⁰⁷ speaks, on which he stakes his life, demonstrates the auto-doubling structure of verticality: “I tell the truth, and I truly think that it is true, and I truly think that I am telling the truth when I say it. This doubling or intensification of the statement of the truth by the statement of the truth of the fact that I think this truth and that, thinking it, I say it, is what is essential to the parrhesiastic act.”⁸⁰⁸

The third characteristic of *parrhesia* is danger, since one incurs a risk, and demonstrates the virtue of courage, by frankly speaking the truth. And it is precisely this element of risk that distinguishes the truth-telling activity of *parrhesia* as a disruptive and potentially transformative event: “we can say there is *parrēsia* when the statement of this truth constitutes an irruptive event opening up an undefined or poorly defined risk for the subject who speaks. ... [I]t is a truth-telling, an irruptive truth-telling which creates a fracture and opens the risk: a possibility, a field of dangers, or at any rate, an undefined eventuality.”⁸⁰⁹ In turn, the reason that the activity of such truth-telling “demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger” is that *parrhesia* – precisely like the ‘philosophy of the people’ that Foucault had discussed a decade earlier – is a counter-discursive mode of critique in relation to the unjust operation of power, “com[ing] from

⁸⁰⁷ Because of the historical specificity of the concept of *parrhesia* and its almost exclusive application to men, Foucault insists on retaining the masculine pronoun: “Responding to a student’s question, Foucault indicated that the oppressed role of women in Greek society generally deprived them of the use of *parrhesia* (along with aliens, slaves, and children). Hence the predominant use of the masculine pronoun throughout” (Joseph Pearson, *Fearless Speech*, 12, n. 4).

⁸⁰⁸ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 64. Cf.: “If we distinguish between the speaking subject (the subject of enunciation) and the grammatical subject of the enounced, we could say that there is also the subject of the enunciandum – which refers to the held belief or opinion of the speaker. In *parrhesia* the speaker emphasizes the fact that he is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciandum – that he himself is the subject of the opinion to which he refers” (Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 12-3).

⁸⁰⁹ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 63.

‘below,’ as it were, and ... directed towards ‘above’”: “*Parrhesia* is a form of criticism ... in a situation where the speaker ... is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor. The *parrhesiastes* is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks.”⁸¹⁰ This fourth characteristic, criticism, explains why Foucault considers *parrhesia* to be something like the original form of critical attitude in the West, functioning precisely as a limit to power.⁸¹¹

Finally, what moves the *parrhesiastes* to undertake this philosophical practice of frankly, truly, and courageously critiquing the undue exercise of power is the feeling of ethical duty: “No one forces him to speak, but he feels that it is his duty to do so.”⁸¹² Duty is thus the fifth characteristic of *parrhesia*, and here, once again, Foucault rejoins Kant. If, as we saw in section IV, Foucault effectively substitutes the limit-experience of political uprising for Kantian moral feeling as the *ratio cognoscendi* of human freedom; then in turn, we may now conclude that it is moral feeling, disclosing “a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty,”⁸¹³ which compels the *parrhesiastes* to rise up and stake his life so that the critical truth he speaks may limit or modify the excessive effects of power.

In sum, parrhesiastic truth-telling exemplifies the activity of vertical critique as a properly philosophical event of revolt, for “the speaker uses his freedom and chooses

⁸¹⁰ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 16-8.

⁸¹¹ See, e.g.: “the function of *parrēsia* is precisely to be able to limit the power of the masters” (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 161). Cf. “One of the oldest functions of the philosopher in the West – philosopher, I should also say ‘sage’ and perhaps, to use this villainous contemporary word, ‘intellectual’ –, one of the principal roles of the philosopher in the West has been to pose a limit, to pose a limit to this ‘too much’ of power, to this overproduction of power each time and in every case that it threatens to become menacing. The philosopher, in the West, more or less always has the profile of the anti-despot” (Foucault, “La philosophie analytique de la politique,” *Dits et écrits II*, 537, my translation).

⁸¹² Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*

frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.”⁸¹⁴ In so doing, the *parrhesiastes* demonstrates three kinds of agency: (1) ethical agency, insofar as he freely chooses to speak out on the basis of the duty to care for others and himself; (2) ethico-political agency, insofar as his speaking out constitutes a practice of freedom by which he shapes his relationship to himself, which relationship is itself immanent to the field of power relations; and (3) political agency, insofar as such speaking out is ‘an irruptive event which opens a fracture’ and aims to transform the conditions of the social order.

⁸¹⁴ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 20.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION: ON THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR POLITICAL AGENCY

In the preface to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, published shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault, reformulating the historico-critical enterprise of his oeuvre, posits three basic principles of thought. In light of our preceding analysis, these principles can be understood as designating thought's three vertical traits. The first is "the principle of irreducibility of thought": like the vertical dimension of revolt that is irreducible to history, thought itself is that irreducible aspect of experience which cannot be explained in terms of historical causation; thus, while all forms of experience "may perfectly well harbor universal structures" and "may well not be independent of the concrete determinations of social existence," "neither those determinations nor those structures can allow for experiences ... except through thought."⁸¹⁵ That is, thought designates the ineliminable intensive dimension of experience that accounts for the possibility of transformative agency, such that "[t]here is no experience that is not a way of thinking and cannot be analyzed from the viewpoint of a history of thought," i.e., from the perspective of genealogy, by contrast to the reductive viewpoint of a social determinism (e.g., traditional Marxism, structuralist history, etc.).

⁸¹⁵ Foucault, "Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 201.

Second is “the principle of singularity of the history of thought: there are events of thought.”⁸¹⁶ In addition to its irreducibility, “thought has a historicity which is proper to it,” which entertains “complex relations” with “all the other historical determinations (of an economic, social, or political order)”, but which remains distinct from the latter. Indeed, this is what Foucault, referring in 1968 to the “axis of description” orienting *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, had characterized as thought’s “vertical dimension,” “the relations that are able to obtain between a form of knowledge and the social, economic, political, and historical conditions in which this knowledge is constituted.”⁸¹⁷

That is, thought not only has a history, but is itself fundamentally historical and thus, as is sometimes said, contingent ‘all the way down’: thought is inseparable from the historical field of problematization in which it emerges. Even when functioning critically as ‘outside thought’ to work upon and transform what Deleuze calls the dominant ‘image of thought’ (e.g., the ‘God-form’ of the classical period and the ‘man-form’ of the modern period⁸¹⁸), a relation of immanence obtains between thought and the historical field of force relations in which it intervenes; indeed, it is in just this sense that the intensive reconceptualization of verticality allowed the relation between vertical critique and history to no longer be cast in terms of transcendence. In short, the history of thought is composed of so many singular events, and thought itself must be grasped as a historical force, entering into (potentially transformative) relation with other kinds of forces ‘of an economic, social, or political order,’ without being reducible to these.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Foucault, “Interview avec Michel Foucault,” *Dits et écrits I*, 684-5, my translation.

⁸¹⁸ See Deleuze, *Foucault*, “Appendix: On the Death of Man and Superman,” 124ff.

If the first principle of thought refers to its intensive aspect, its incorporeal materiality that cannot be reduced to the corporeal materiality of history, the second refers to thought's apparition within this corporeal materiality, embodied in practices capable (in principle) of acting upon and transforming the extensive conditions of the social formation. And if the first principle is a challenge posed by (critical) philosophy to (traditional) history concerning the relation between thought and freedom, conversely, the second is a challenge posed by (critical) history to (traditional) philosophy concerning the historical contingency and singularity, rather than universal necessity, of thought.

Finally, connecting the critical strains of both philosophy and history, the third principle of thought, echoing the philosophical ethos of historico-critical ontology, is “the principle of the history of thought as critical activity”: critique “does not mark out impassable boundaries or describe closed systems; it brings to light transformable singularities. These transformations could not take place except by means of a working of thought upon itself.”⁸¹⁹ In other words, it is the auto-critical movement of thought, or the auto-affective structure of thought qua critique, that is necessary for transformative agency; and this ‘working of thought upon itself’ precisely describes the vertical operation of thought, its recursive auto-doubling function, the first instance of which we analyzed in the Kantian sublime. If the first and second principles refer, respectively, to the aspects of thought that escape and belong to history, the third refers to that aspect of thought situated at the limit between them, at the degree zero of history as the becoming-force of the intensive, or the emergence of a singular event.

⁸¹⁹ Foucault, “Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*,” 201.

With this view of the threefold verticality of thought in place, let us conclude by outlining the set of necessary conditions for political agency. First, a distinction must be drawn between political agency and ethico-political agency. *Political agency* refers to the transformation of the conditions of social production: it is essentially transformative, a rupture in a historically determined process or causal sequence. In Deleuzian parlance, political agency would thus be a line of flight collectivized and sustained. *Ethico-political agency*, on the other hand, refers to the work that one conducts upon oneself as a free being, and thus most basically to a practice of freedom: namely, the activity of thought as “freedom in relation to what one does.”⁸²⁰ Ethico-political agency is thus the germ of transformation, brought about through vertical critique, that is, through the special manner by which thought takes itself up, works upon, and transforms itself. Vertical critique, in turn, can play this role by virtue of thought’s two other vertical traits: its irreducibility, which accounts for how ‘subjectivity is brought into history, breathing life into it’; and its historicity, which explains how it can act upon the conditions of history.

Political agency and ethico-political agency are therefore distinct, but each can also be conceived through the other. On the one hand, political agency can be derived from ethico-political agency, since the latter is the germ of all transformation, including the collective transformative force of political agency. In other words, there is no agency, including political agency, without the element of thought. And this element of thought –

⁸²⁰ Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” 117. In a sense, this is simply a Kantian account of ethical agency conceived as critical autonomy, but the ‘agent’ in question is far more complicated, since in addition to being situated as an embodied being, she is emplaced in a historical field of force relations. That is, her relation to herself is itself a form or historical product of these force relations, thus political, but also mutable by virtue of its very historical contingency, thus doubly political: both an effect of power and site of possible resistance. Hence the inseparability of ethical agency and the political, which is to say, precisely, ethico-political agency.

as freedom in relation to what one does; that is, as opening the concrete space of possible transformation in relation to what one does; that is, as the transformation of the possible, of the conditions of the possible, in relation to what one does, says, thinks, becomes – *just is* ethico-political agency. This might also be put: ethico-political agency is a precondition for political agency. In turn, however, ethico-political agency can be understood as a form of political agency, since the latter refers to the transformation of the conditions of social production, and what ethico-political agency does is work upon the historical conditions of its own social production, separating out what is contingent so as to enable the experimental practice of becoming-otherwise.

There is thus a reciprocal circuit set up between ethico-political agency and political agency. Ethico-political agency is a precondition for political agency and is constituted through the movement of vertical critique (e.g., the contingency thesis, history of limits, limit-attitude), which prepares the vertical political experience (the intolerable) that is itself a necessary condition of possibility for political agency. In turn, vertical political experience requires a transversal form of expression in order to meet the necessary condition of realization for political agency (becoming-force). And this transversal form of expression must continue to undergo its own process of becoming-revolutionary – in other words, transversal connection must continue to operate as the compositional principle of collective subjectivation – in order to meet the necessary condition for the sustainability of political agency, a condition requiring vertical critique (which checks against the threat of abolition and reactive force) as a kind of collective critical attitude. Finally, it is this work of the critical limit-attitude, in turn, that reconstitutes the practice

of freedom, understood as thought's labor of concrete transformation, which is to say, again, ethico-political agency.

In short, with respect to political agency: (1) ethico-political agency and vertical experience are its necessary conditions of possibility; (2) transversal connection is its necessary condition of realization; and (3) vertical critique is its necessary condition of sustainability, reconstituting ethico-political agency in turn. The solution to the vertical problem of material expression (how vertical intensity, which is irreducible to history, can act upon and transform the conditions of history) is transversal connection as the compositional principle of collective subjectivation. In turn, the solution to the transversal problem of material expression (how the line of flight can be sustained, connected to other lines of flight, rather than collapsing into a line of abolition) is vertical critique as the collective principle of self-transformation and practice of ethico-political freedom.

VITA

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