

## Articles

# Michel Foucault and the Semiotics of the Phenomenal

ADI OPHIR *Tel-Aviv University*

### 1. Lacuna in Semiotics

#### 1.1

In every search for knowledge one presupposes that there is more to the phenomenal field one studies than what meets the eye. A play between those phenomena that *present* themselves to an observer and *absent* entities or phenomena, and the orders, structures or laws that govern these, lies at the heart of any *search* for empirical knowledge. On the basis of this play of presence and absence read by a particular discourse<sup>1</sup> into (or out of) a more or less defined phenomenal field, phenomena are constituted *qua* signs for that discourse's participants.

This awareness of "the semiotic power of the phenomenal" is not new. It is reflected, for example, in the all too well-known metaphor of "the Book of Nature". The metaphor has long since become trite, while nature has grown more and more mechanized. Science strives to understand nature as free of God; yet by depriving nature of its creator, the

<sup>1</sup> I am using "discourse" or "discursive field" (champ discursif) in Foucault's peculiar sense which lies somewhere between a structured language game and a systematic pursuit of knowledge; cf. below 393-394.

omnipotent Emitter of signs had been effectively silenced. Nature is no longer a slate upon which the Word is inscribed, a medium through which God speaks to man. A tacit and erroneous assumption about the intentionality of signification as a constitute element of intelligible signs (which dates from St. Augustine, if not earlier)<sup>2</sup> has caused a modern shift of attention away from the semiotic dimension of the phenomenal to the human phenomena of semiosis.<sup>3</sup>

Modern semiotics, which grew out of that shift, is said to be the science of the sign in its "pure form" and in the variety of its manifestations. Yet in both the European and Anglo-American semiotic tradition, an important aspect of the phenomenon of the sign has been mostly ignored. Recent attempts to generate a general, comprehensive theory of Semiotics, e.g., those by Greimas (1966, 1970), Todorov (1972), Eco (1976) or Sebeok (1976), pay little or no attention to the signifying power of the phenomenal.<sup>4</sup> In general, modern semiotics has been dominated by an interest in language or languages, paying little tribute to what classical semiotics called "natural signs". Even when natural signs or "indices" received systematic attention,<sup>5</sup> it was given regardless of the

<sup>2</sup> For the intentionality of signification in ancient semiotic conceptions cf. Marcia Colish, "The Stoic Theory of Verbal Signification and the Problem of Lies and False Statements From Antiquity to St. Anselm", in Brind'amour and Vance (1982). On the other hand, if signification is interpreted as inference (e.g., of an antecedent from a consequent), the emitter of signs is irrelevant for the analysis of the moment of signification and the act of inference. This interpretation, which goes back to Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus Mathematicos*, viii, 245), finds a clear expression in Peirce (1953, Vol. 4, 533ff.), and a refinement in Eco. Eco says that any act of inference *may* become a semiotic act once the association of antecedent and consequent "is culturally recognized and systematically encoded" (Eco, 1976, 17). However, the intentional emission of signs is not a constitutive factor for such cultural encoding (*ibid.*). Having remarked this, Eco, like most modern semioticians, is preoccupied with intentional signs.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Saussure considers language a privileged domain of semiology (Saussure, 1960, 33-34). Accepting this claim Hjelmstev argues that every conceivable semiotic system is translatable into a natural language but not vice versa (Hjelmstev, 1961, 69). Barthes (1977) and Greimas (1966) considers semiology part of linguistic, while Morris (1946) thought that semiotics should provide a meta-language for linguistics.

<sup>4</sup> Greimas seems to be an exception. He speaks indeed about the semiotics of the natural world and argues that the extra-linguistic world should be considered "non plus comme un référent absolu, mais comme le lieu de la manifestation du sensible, susceptible de devenir la manifestation du sens humain, c'est-à-dire de la signification" (1970, 52). But the semiotic systems with which Greimas is concerned are exclusively conventional. He considers natural phenomena as far as they have been endowed with *cultural* meanings, are interpreted in order to recover those meanings, and used in order to exploit those meanings in the process of communication. This leaves the signifying power of the phenomenal within the scope of convention; it does not account for the fact that a certain type of convention, the scientific one, establishes phenomena as signs precisely because it assumes that their signifying power is not a matter of convention but of the way reality itself is constituted. It is with this aspect of phenomena as signs that the paper is mostly concerned.

<sup>5</sup> Indices have been studied, but not with a view to the problematic that concerns this paper. See, e.g., Prieto (1966). The study of symptoms generally follows the medical paradigm (cf. Shands, 1970; Eco, 1976, 223; Sebeok, 1976, 126), or else, tries to reduce

semiotic dimension of the phenomenal field as such, and of specific phenomenal fields as they are constituted within the different sciences.

All empirical disciplines, from physics to linguistics, from geology to history, consider (by posing or exposing) certain distinct phenomena *qua* signs that "stand for"<sup>6</sup> the objects of study, be these essences or particles, structures or laws. In any knowledge-seeking discourse there exist definite types of relation of signification between elements of the phenomenal field (the discourse's "raw material"), and the objects to be known. Knowledge is gained, at least in part, from the systematic interpretation of those elements of the phenomenal field identified as significant, i.e., as signs. Intellectual changes derive to some extent from transformations in the types and patterns of modes of signification.

Modern semiotics has inadequately addressed this issue of signification in the context of the systematic search for knowledge.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of this lacuna in semiotics, a neglected aspect in the work of Michel Foucault will be presented and interpreted.

## 1.2

Foucault touched on the margin of modern (French) semiotics. Not infrequently, in his tacit dialogue with the field, he was criticized either for not paying semiology its due or for disregarding its critics. François Wahl, for example, accuses Foucault of ignoring recent criticism, especially Derrida's, that undermines both Saussure's and Husserl's concept of the sign—a concept allegedly still accepted by Foucault.<sup>8</sup> In his archeological analyses, however, Foucault deals precisely with that aspect of the phenomenon of the sign mostly neglected by the semiotic

symptoms (most notably, Jakobson, 1970, 10). Under the influence of Foucault's early work, Barthes relegated symptoms to the status of signifiers, and argued that symptoms turn into signs only when mediated by language in the framework of a scientific discourse (1972, 38). But here too, language is brilliantly discussed while the constitution of the real that allows signification and guarantees the knowledge that the interpretation of signs provides is completely ignored.

<sup>6</sup> A sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce, 1953, 2.228). "I propose to define as a sign *everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*" (Eco, 1976, 16).

<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, one may argue that so far the philosophy of science, especially of the natural sciences, has had little to say about the semiotic dimension of scientific activity.

<sup>8</sup> F. Wahl, "La philosophie entre l'avant et l'après du structuralisme" in Ducrot et al. (1968). Wahl recognizes the fact that "l'épistémè, come tout ordre, enveloppe une sémologie" (*ibid.*, 307), and he does a great deal to explicate the semiotic system of each *épistémè*. But Wahl does not consider the connection between the mode of signification in each *épistémè* and the way it grounds its claims to know. Also, he is preoccupied with the explicit, more or less reflexive conception of the sign in each *épistémè* as articulated by Foucault and he pays little attention to the silent organizing of the whole epistemic field into its signifying and signified elements. Another important aspect of Foucault's work which Wahl fails to notice is Foucault's own semiotic presuppositions as employed in the archeological and genealogical analyses.

traditions in this century. Bypassing Wahl's criticism, this paper addresses directly the aspect Wahl misses in order to shed new light both on Foucault's work and on its possible contribution to semiotic consciousness (but not to semiotics as a science, which will remain beyond the scope of this paper).

Focussing mainly on *The Birth of the Clinic* (BC), and *The Order of Things* (OT), and touching upon *The Archeology of Knowledge* (AK), and *Discipline and Punish* (DP),<sup>9</sup> it will be shown that, according to Foucault, any configuration of a systematic pursuit of knowledge—within the scope of an *épistémè*, or more modestly, a discourse—presupposes a more or less constant relation between phenomena *qua* signifiers and their significeds.<sup>10</sup> This presupposition is crucial, for the interpretation of the phenomenal field as a system of signs<sup>11</sup> can yield claims to know, and knowledge may be derived from the interpretation of phenomena *qua* signifiers, only when the validity of such a relation is guaranteed. Moreover, it can be argued that Foucault's three *épistémès* and his own analysis of discourse (especially in its genealogical phase) fit neatly into a matrix of four modes of signification derived analytically from a rather general concept of the sign. This paper will thus begin with a brief, schematic presentation of this matrix, and end by suggesting its possible implications for Foucault's later analysis of Power/Knowledge and for social theory in general.

## 2. Four Modes of Signification

### 2.1

Let us assume a general, though not entirely innocent, concept of the sign. Following Eco, who basically adopts Peirce's definition of the sign (with certain modifications, irrelevant for our purposes),<sup>12</sup> signification may be defined as:

(A) a *relation* between a distinct, perceivable element (signifier) and another element (signified) from a linguistic or extra-linguistic plane.

9 References are made to the English translations; abbreviations follow the English titles.

10 Wahl is right when he notes that in each *épistémè* "la relation entre les relata signifiant et signifié reste toujours de même nature, et ... le signe conserve toujours la même fonction" (in Ducrot, 1968, 309).

11 For the distinction between "language" and a "system of signs" cf. Todorov (1972, 136-137).

12 Eco prefers Peirce's to Saussure's definition of the sign for two reasons crucial for my purposes: (a) because it "does not demand ... the qualities of being intentionally emitted and artificially produced"; (b) because it "can also be applied to phenomena that do not have a human emitter ..." (Eco, 1976, 14-16). The paper is limited to one of the three relations usually associated with signification (cf., e.g., Barthes' "The Imagination of the Sign" in Barthes, 1972). Ignored are the relations of the particular sign to the system of signs of which it is a part, and to the series of signs within which it actually appears.

The signifier may stand or substitute for its signified in any one of a number of modes of "substitution" (e.g., representing, manifesting, referring, tracing) while announcing itself as such;

(B) a relation of "substitution" governed by a code whose origin, coherency and validity, limits and constancy, and domains of application varies among different semiotic systems;<sup>13</sup>

(C) a relation that does not exist "in-itself", but always "for another", that is, for an interpreter, without necessarily assuming a subject as the emitter of signs and emission as intentional.

Ignoring other relevant factors of signification (such as contexts of emission and interpretation of signs, the establishment of a code) one radical semiotic question concerning the search for empirical knowledge shall be considered: How can the visible be a sign for the invisible, the audible for the inaudible, the present for the absent? What justifies an interpreter in claiming knowledge about a signified through the interpretation of a phenomenon as a signifier? Or, more precisely: What should an interpreter presuppose regarding the nature of the "substitution" when the interpretation of phenomena *qua* signifiers yields claims to know the significeds? In posing this, we are, in fact, questioning the very validity of the code and its ontological status. Foucault's notion of an epistemic order may be interpreted, it will be argued, as the claim that the entire intellectual enterprise of a whole epoch is governed by a single persistent answer to the above question. But before returning to Foucault, a brief reflection on the above definition of signification as a bi-focal relation will illustrate four general modes of "substitution" which may be deduced analytically.

(1) Since signification is a bi-focal *relation*, it is subject to a general distinction (which found a clear formulation in Leibniz) between two possible types of relation: any relation is either "*convenient*" or "*congruent*".<sup>14</sup> A relation is convenient when there is no *ontic* common denominator between its relata; it is *congruent* when one element is an *ontic* part of the other or when there exists a third entity of which the two elements of the relation are *ontic* parts. Hence, a signifier may be related to its signified either by convenience (i.e., signifier and signified are two separate entities) or by congruence (i.e., signifier and signified belong to the same entity). The existence or the lack of an *ontic* common

13 Code is that which gives the relation its systematicity; it is "a system of constraints" imposed upon the elements of the relation, to use Todorov's words (Todorov, 1972, 132).

14 Leibniz distinguished between "relation of comparison"—which he also called "relation of convenience"—and "relation of connection". (*Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, A:vi, I-95, 285, 371; also, cf. N. Rescher, 1981, 57-58). "Congruence" covers connection; any two congruent elements are ontically connected, being a part and its whole or two parts of the same whole. As for "convenience", it is understood here as a relation between two elements which may be connected only through a comparison, i.e., by means of a comparing mind that posits the relation between them.

denominator is relevant to the moment of signification.<sup>15</sup> In other words, according to this distinction, either signification is a relation between two *relata* that—in principle—belong to two separate ontic planes (convenience), or else it holds between two distinct entities precisely because they are ontically related (congruence). To illustrate: a word signifies a thing by convenience; a symptom signifies disease by congruence (both, of course, according to certain, but not all, grammatical and medical conceptions).

(2) Since signification is a relation of "substitution", the absence of the substituted (i.e., signified) and the presence of the substitute (i.e., signifier) is implied. The presence of the signifier seems a necessary condition for signification. With regard to the absence of the signified, an effective distinction may be drawn: either the signified is absent in principle and can never be made to appear as such in a phenomenal field save through its signifiers, or else its absence is a contingent fact, and its appearance a real possibility. Example: God is the ever-absent Signified; fire, signified by its smoke, may appear in the phenomenal field at any moment.

Two widely held characterizations of the sign should be dismissed according to this analysis. The first views signs as mere products of human *convention*; hence signification seems to be always a relation of *convenience*. The second considers the absence of the signified as a constitutive feature of signification; hence a present signified seems a contradiction in terms.<sup>16</sup> In both characterizations an unjustified primacy is given to the linguistic sign. Even if there is no sign without an established human convention (and this is precisely the function of the code in [B] above), a convention may be established upon an ontic assumption regarding the *nature* of a signified entity to manifest itself through some of its more distinct elements. It is human convention that regards these elements as signs, but it is an assumed ontic connection between signifiers and signified that allows one to consider those elements as signifiers. The absence of the signified is indeed a necessary condition for the *moment* of signification—that which is fully present and known as such does not need to be announced by signs. But what is necessary for the moment of signification should not be transferred to the *nature* of the signified. In fact, co-presence of signifier and signified

15 Under an appropriate description, any two *relata* may be interpreted as ontically connected or separated. Example: a heavenly body and a terrestrial body in Aristotelian and Galilean cosmology.

16 For intentionality see note 3 above, and Eco's critique of Saussure mentioned in note 11 above. As for the absence of the signifier see Husserl, *Ideen*, #99-111, and Derrida's Critique in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*, part I. Derrida is critical of the assumption but has no doubt that it is an essential one, predominant in the semiotics and metaphysics of the West, and therefore, that it should be systematically deconstructed. See also Derrida for the way he understands that assumption in "The World Turned Upside Down", *The New York Review of Books* 30/16, 77-78.

is necessary at times for a particular mode of signification; the sign on one's door, for example, or the mark on the body of the condemned in an execution ritual.<sup>17</sup> ("Meaning" is clearly just one possible signified among many others, such as tangible objects, intangible ideas, as well as half tangible signs.)

The two distinctions may seem trivial. However, the intersection between them yields an interesting matrix:

	Convenience	Congruence	Relation Substitution
e.g.:	1 a name and its bearer	4 smoke and fire	signified is contingently absent
e.g.:	2 a word and its meaning	3 symptoms and disease	signified is necessarily absent

In this discussion, Foucault's three *épistémès*, designated briefly as Renaissance, Classic and Modern, will be presented as governed by three different modes of signification characterized by squares [1] to [3] accordingly. It will be shown that Foucault's own empiricism is based on a fourth mode of signification, characterized not surprisingly by square [4] in the matrix. The interpretative work endows the abstract typology above with some substance. In turn, some logical coherency will be conferred on the seeming arbitrariness of Foucault's archeological stratification of knowledge.

### 3. The Archeology of Knowledge

The semiotic dimension of discourse is not an explicit feature of Foucault's analysis. Nevertheless, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's systematic reflection upon his previous research, something akin to a general proposition regarding the signifying power of the

17 Cf. Foucault's analysis of punishment before "the birth of the prison": the body of the condemned was a display of marks; the spectacle of the scaffold was a festival of signification, of the imprints of marks (*DP* part one). The whole analysis of *Discipline and Punish* may be rephrased according to the three modes of signification designated above. The three main punitive institutions Foucault analyzes (torture, the theatre of punishment, and prison) would occupy squares [1], [2], and [3] in the matrix accordingly. Cf. Ophir, forthcoming.

phenomenal within discourse is implied. Any discourse has its own unique "surface(s) of emergence" in which its own "objects" appear, leave traces, or are somehow represented. For example, among possible surfaces of emergence for nineteenth-century psychopathology, Foucault mentions "the family, the immediate social group, the work situation, the religious community" (AK 41). In all these institutions, well-defined spatio-temporal frameworks constituted the phenomenal fields for psychopathological phenomena and the space in which the objects of psychopathological discourse were manifested. Discourse is then equipped with "a grid of specification", a set of rules and procedures for the differentiation, identification, and selection of distinct "relevant" phenomena. Discursive practices apply a grid of specification to a definite phenomenal field thus constituting the identification of distinct phenomena *qua* signifiers, whose signifieds are what a discourse posits as its objects. Such a grid actually translates, or sublates, the phenomenal into a different space in which objects, now concepts in a theory, "are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, and derived from one another" (AK 42).

Thus, a discourse has two types of "spaces of differentiation" (AK 91-92), which Foucault earlier entitled a "space of localization" and "a space of configuration" (BC 3-16). Within a given discursive field, each statement contains, among other rules,<sup>18</sup> the rule for relating distinct phenomenal elements from the first space to their corresponding objects and concepts in the second. A statement determines a definite mode of "substitution", relating an observable phenomenon to an absent theoretical entity (which may be a concept, an unobservable object, but also an order or a structure of phenomena). The search for empirical knowledge may culminate in the establishment of regularities, structures, or laws that govern a discourse's objects. But this search should consistently presuppose or be accompanied by an interpretive work that deciphers meanings in definite phenomenal fields organized as systems of signs.

#### 4. *The Birth of the Clinic*

##### 4.1

*The Birth of the Clinic* is "a book about space, about language, and about death" (BC ix). Spatial descriptions are systematically employed in the book. They serve in the reconstruction of a (medical) language

18 A statement is a set of rules that relate a series of signs (in the form of a proposition, a sentence, a table, a map, etc.) to a speaking subject, to a correlative field in which referents are differentiated, to other statements, and finally, to pre-established modes of its possible reproductions. The statement is a set of discursive rules, to be carefully distinguished from grammatical rules embodied in the sentence, and logical rules, embodied in the proposition (AK 79-117).

that incorporates (clinical) death in order to understand (sick) life, i.e., the nature of disease. For Foucault, medical discourse, is, above all, a discourse about diseases. Their spatial descriptions are organized into three distinct, non-contiguous planes within which distinct elements of medical discourse are spatially arranged. Diseases *appear* for medical observation in a "space of localization" (SL); they become *objects* for medical theory in a "space of configuration" (SC); and they become objects for political discourse and practice in a "social space" (BC 3-16).<sup>19</sup>

SL is the space where a disease "takes place", has its "site", where its signs and symptoms appear. But this is not necessarily the space where a disease assumes its "objectivity", where it exists as an entity for which there is a corresponding theoretical concept. In seventeenth-century nosology, for example, disease existed apart from both the symptoms that suggested its nature, and the signs that announced the course of its development; it resided in a space totally separate from the space of the body in which signs and symptom appear (BC 90). Disease was a concept, an essence, a class in a general order of diseases.

The distinction between SL and SC is employed throughout the analysis of medical discourse. Distinct phenomena in SL, deemed meaningful for the discourse that studies that space, are nothing but signs. More precisely, the elements that appear in SL are signifiers whose signified are the objects in SC. If the two spaces converge, as is the case in modern medical discourse, signification may be a relation of congruence, and signifier and signified may or may not be co-present. If the two spaces remain separate, as is the case in classical medical discourse, signification is then a relation of convenience and the two *relata* can never be co-present in the same space.

In the third space, the geographical-social space, diseases occur very differently. In the social space disease is an object for the language and the gaze of a regime that controls epidemics, allocates money for hospitals, or regulates the certification of physicians. This is where the police operate when supervising a plague-stricken population or looking for the sources of an epidemic. This space serves political discourse and the social agents dealing with diseases as the SL of their objects, thus replacing a sick individual body with the living space of a whole community, a city or a nation.<sup>20</sup>

19 Foucault uses "space" in both literal and metaphorical sense (the phenomenal as well as the social space should be taken literally here). It is precisely this double meaning of space that makes the notion so effective; see his discussion of the "table" in the preface to *OT* and 398.

20 The "social space", its internal organization, and its relation to the other two planes are beyond the scope of this paper. This space deserves, however, a special attention in any systematic account of Foucault's work. It is a key concept in both *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish*; its total absence from *The Order of Things* is characteristic of the "disembodied" tone of Foucault's analysis at that stage.

The state of medical discourse in the classical period (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), the instability and deviations it suffered in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the revolution it later underwent, may be described in terms of the relation among the three "spaces" noted above. In short, the history of medical discourse turns on the changing relations among the three spaces. Following Foucault, it is possible to delineate several phases of those changing relations, of which some were successive while others took place simultaneously. The main phases are briefly described below.

## 4.2

For medical discourse, as it was studied in the French Faculties throughout most of the classical period, SC was dissociated from SL and practice was separated from theory. It existed in a social space of its own—at home (for the well-to-do) or in the hospital (for the poor). The space in which diseases were conceived as "essences" was an ideal space represented by the taxonomic table. A disease localized in the individual body and its history as a series of organic events, were factors viewed as independent of the disease's configuration as an object. No necessary relation was perceived between the site of a symptom and the nature of the disease manifested by it (BC 11; 90-91). SL and SC never met; signification was a relation of convenience. Signifier and signified could never hold places in the same ontic plane, and the taxonomical signified was absent in principle from the domain of its phenomenal signifier.

## 4.3

It was in the old clinic that theory and practice met for the first time in the modern era. A system of observation and examination was developed there, with the learning process linked to the observation of patients as well as to re-evaluation of the theoretical description of their diseases (BC 58-62). A privileged region of the social space was differentiated in order to let sick bodies play a double role. The patient as a subject to be cured was an object available for the manipulation of medical practice; the patient as a "case" became a site for the pursuit of knowledge.

The old clinic provided a framework for the first systematic attempt to correlate SL and SC and confront signifiers with their signifieds (BC 82-85). This was the first context within which the ontological presupposition of medical signification could be made explicit and challenged. Even so, the two spaces were still considered ontically separated and signification remained a matter of convenience. Disease continued to be regarded as an essence whose symptoms manifested its being and whose signs announced its becoming, without taking part in that being; i.e.,

the development of disease was not yet apprehended as part of its being (BC 89-90). The old clinic constituted a circumscribed nosological field in which disease was a text to be deciphered and the patient's body was the graphical representation of that text (BC 59). The hermeneutical enterprise still excluded manipulative inquiry and experimentation. Yet, for the first time knowledge was constantly tested and contested by an accumulating experience, whose systematic documentation was made possible due to medical discourse's new niche in the social space.

## 4.4

A new phase took place in the clinic when disease lost its "essential" character. The sick body was still a text to be read, but its meaning was defined from the sum-total of its signifiers. Now, disease consisted of nothing but all its symptoms (BC 92). A disease's "probability" (the validity of an interpretation) was calculated by the ratio of the signs that had already emerged to the total number of signs attributed to that disease. The localization and configuration of disease, although already belonging to the same space, were again considered as two separate modalities of its reality. They related to each other through temporal (a series of pathological events) and probability (the accumulation of signs) functions. Medical discourse employed grammatical and chemical analogies to account for this relation. As a combination of letters, for example, disease was a name, a configuration without substance (BC 117-119), whose being was reduced to a series of manifestations in SL. Whether on the body's surface, or in language, disease occupied a two-dimensional space that had no volume. But this sufficed for the first, short conflation of SL and SC; while the signifiers and signifieds of medical discourse belonged to the same ontic domain they remained related by convenience, much as letters are never parts of the name they inscribe.

## 4.5

It was with the last transformation that medicine passed the threshold of modernity. With Bischat, the "tissular" analysis of the body, and pathological anatomy, SL became a surface of SC. Disease was located where it is configured. In opening up the whole body, the autopsy constituted many "surfaces of appearances" of pathological events, whereas disease was conceived as a process of degeneration; a growing disorder within each of these surfaces (BC 157). Disease became an object configured in the depth of the body through a pathological, temporal process, culminating in death. Disease could be localized anywhere on or inside the body but its SL remained a surface, being always accessible for the autopsic gaze that any clinical observation

anticipated (BC 158-159). Disease was hidden in the volume of the whole body as the very *process* of that body's degeneration that could never be exhausted by even a lifetime of observation. Distinct elements of SL now became signs of disease, its nature *and* its development, and were at the same time *parts* of the disease they signified. A disease's signs were conceived as segments of its reality, a moment in its course. Signification became a relation of congruence, although disease was considered *as* a whole pathological process and remained an ever absent signified. However, this congruence made possible a manipulative intervention guided by an examining gaze and followed by a planned observation. The gap between medical theory and practice was finally bridged.

Apart from the short period when disease was conceived as a name inscribed in a textualized body, the history of the clinic presents us with two general modes of signification. In both cases the signified remained absent in principle, yet the *classic* mode was based on an ontic hiatus between signifier and signified, whereas the *modern* mode was based on their ontic link. Two different grounds for claims to know based on the interpretation of medical signs followed; they will be explicated below, through a brief exposition of *The Order of Things*. There, within a wider and more philosophical context, Foucault gives the two modes of signification systematic articulation, asserting that they reigned for two entire epochs in the history of the West.

## 5. *The Order of Things*

### 5.1

*The Order of Things*, like the *Birth of the Clinic*, is a book about space. This fact is made clear from the outset in the book's preface, through Borges' "heterotopia", his "Chinese" classification of animals, and Rousset's concept of the "table" (OT xviii-xxii). The spatial arrangement of things is a necessary condition for the distinction between the Same and the Other (OT xv). As such it has a double meaning, which Foucault introduces through the double sense of the "table" drawn from Rousset. On the one hand there is "the nickel-plated, rubbery table, swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun devouring all shadow...". On the other hand, the table is a *tabula* "that enables thought to operate upon entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and differences—the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language intersected space". Finally, the two senses are not independent of each other but "superimposed" (OT xvii).

A translation into the terminology of the *Birth of the Clinic* (never to be repeated by Foucault) is natural. What is the "glittering table" if not

the "space of localization", the surface upon which things appear, the field of phenomena *qua* signs? What is the *tabula* if not a "space of configuration" of meanings, the site for ordering, classifying, and differentiating objects? And what is the meaning of that "superimposition" if not the fact that the glittering table and the *tabula*, SL and SC, the signifier and the signified, must relate to each other through some modality of signification, the former being a manifestation, a representation, a trace, a signature or a symptom of the latter? It is this table with its double, superimposed, senses, an SL-SC combination, which Foucault calls "an Order" (OT xix-xxii). It is one such Order that characterized, according to Foucault, a whole *épistémè* during a definite, protracted period of time. He delineates three of these in the West since the Renaissance.

### 5.2

The Renaissance<sup>21</sup> was "a culture in which the signification of signs did not exist" (OT 43). By this Foucault means that Renaissance discourse lacked a clear-cut separation between SL and SC. Or, Renaissance discourse let its signifiers and signifieds maintain a relation of *convention* within the *same* ontological plane in which both *relata* were co-present. Any discursive move had to establish anew both the separation and the link between the two *relata*, and could establish it more or less arbitrarily.

Renaissance discourse could not assign a clear cut distinction between SL and SC because of the role *resemblance* played in its system of signs. Resemblance was at once that which enabled something to signify, the connection between a mark (as a signifier) and a thing (its signified), and that which was signified through the very act of signification (OT 42). Everything which appeared could bear the mark of resemblance to everything else, and could be marked by something else that resembled it. Resemblance was what made Nature speak and God appear to man. By bringing resemblance to light, an unstable relation between marks and things marked was established, since with a slight move of a stylus that relation could be inverted, and signifiers turned into signifieds, or vice versa.

Deciphering the meaning of signs was a hermeneutical act in which resemblance between signifiers and signifieds came to light. Differentiating and identifying signs were semiotic acts in which the mode of resemblance that constituted something as a sign was established, and the things that were alike were discovered (OT 29). The whole visible world, Nature as well as texts, was a world of marks and things marked; only resemblance was invisible. The whole visible world was an inde-

21 The name is used here to designate Foucault's first *épistémè*, not necessarily the historical epoch.

finite SL in which words and things were completely intertwined. But at the same time, or rather in any moment of interpretation, it became an SC for the marked things or words. Resemblance itself, with its four modes (*OT* 17ff.), did not have a place in this world but was what in fact sustained it, rendered it an indefinite text, and provided the basis for its endless interpretation. Nature and texts (of the ancient authors and the Scriptures) did not oppose each other in that great chain of resemblances but rather were complementary, resulting from a certain division within one indefinite and continuous surface, the face God turned to man (*OT* 29-30, 33).

Without a unified system of signification in the Renaissance, there were no restrictions on the spatial arrangement of either marked objects (in SC) or objects as marks (in SL). Thus, Aldrovandi, for example, could classify the various aspects of an examination of animals under headings like anatomical description, method of capturing, allegorical uses, habitat and legendary mansions, the animal's food and the animal as a food (*OT* 129). Though reminiscent of Borges' "Chinese Encyclopedia" of animals (*OT* xviii), the difference between the heterotopia of Borges and Aldrovandi is telling. Unlike Borges, there is nothing logically impossible in the space Aldrovandi created, one only had to encompass the whole universe in order to draw the appropriate table. That universe included the allegorical and the literal, the daemonic as well as the earthly, all within the realm of the knowable. It is no wonder that erudition and magic, observation and speculation, casually mingled throughout the Renaissance (*OT* 32). Against the background of an indefinite open space of differences, four main types of resemblances were revealed under a hermeneutical gaze that constantly looked for marks without leaving any of its own on the space it traversed.

## 5.3

In the classical period the monotonous indefinitely variegated surface of differences broke down, and was divided into two. Resemblance withdrew into a "murmuring" background from which identities and differences, "the Same" and "the Other", emerged (*OT* 71, 120, 162). For the empirical sciences, physics as well as botany, SL was precisely that continuous surface of murmuring resemblances, of illusory affinities, continuities, and oppositions that had to be differentiated into their distinct elements. A carefully controlled and restricted observer who surveyed this space learned not to see what should not be seen (since it could not be measured or ordered), and to grasp only that which could meet both the eye and the eye's mind (since only the nameable was comprehensible; *OT* 132-134). The elements "screened out" of SL were then ordered in SC as an entirely separate space of real entities.

Order had two different modes in the classical period, quantitative-algebraic and qualitative-taxonomic, but the two belonged to the same *mathesis* (*OT* 247). Both modes allowed analysis and comparison of distinct elements; they both made these operations possible, always presupposing a pre-established order, and never discovering or constituting an unknown one. The two modes differed only in terms of their analytical systems (*OT* 53-58). Algebraic operations reduced SL to equal, measurable units that were then recombined, compared through measurement, etc. Taxonomic operations reduced SL to the smallest units of nameable differences, and then reorganized the whole field into a hierarchy of differences which constituted an order of identities, classes, or species. In principle, the geometrical space in which the abstract units of equality (points, mass, forces) were ordered was not different in kind from the space in which the abstract units of identity and difference (class, species, value) were organized. In both cases there was an ontic difference between the chaotic continuum of resemblances (SL) from which the objects of discourse were "saved", and SC, the space in which objects were identified, differentiated, and finally ordered or quantified.

What enabled this division of the world into a chaotic SL and an ordered SC was another division, introduced with the Renaissance's decline, between words and things, language and reality. On the one hand the aim of a naturalist, for example, was to successfully designate a phenomenon, which meant a secured passage from SL to SC. A scientific language freed the field of visibility from everyday misleading language and gave each thing its true name, i.e., its taxonomic character, its place in the table (*OT* 159-161). On the other hand, the name so given to the thing was merely a representation of its true essence, which the mind could grasp only as represented by language. The scientist might also move back from SC to SL and impose on it the organization of the table, as he did, for example, in the botanical garden, or in the collection in the natural history room (*OT* 137). That garden, however, was nothing but a representation of SC, of the order of beings, and it needed a representing language to cause that order to emerge. Language was placed between the visible and the ideal, the phenomenal and the real, but also between things and the mind, which could grasp the true nature of things only when their names were known.<sup>22</sup>

A note here about time. Within the sphere of the table time was frozen. Time might act upon the table only from without, either through its

<sup>22</sup> In the Renaissance, Nature was "trapped" between two layers of language: that which assigned signs their identity and function (semiology), and that which deciphered the meaning of signs (hermeneutics). In itself, Nature was "neither mysterious nor veiled" (*OT* 29). In the classic *épistémè* language took the same position: being both transparent and invisible it was placed between two layers of the real, phenomena and essences.



transformation as a whole, or by casting light on as yet unobserved species, for which squares were pre-fixed in the table (OT 152-157). Within the table order was established once and for all (OT 218), deviations and mutations included (OT 154-155). This must have been so since representation, that mode of signification upon which the table was based, excludes temporality. The representing signifier substitutes a represented signified that is present somewhere else—always present and always somewhere else. The representing and the represented are linked by an absence immune to temporal change, at least so long as representation takes place. But that which is no more can have no re-presentation; it cannot be called back into presence. That which was and is no more could only leave *traces*. A trace is a remnant of past existence; it signifies because it was once a part of that which it now traces and while it signifies, it witnesses the time that has passed no less than a past object. The absence which links a trace with its past gives full presence only to the flow of time; in representation, on the other hand, an ever-present signified is absent, and this absence can be overcome only through a (temporary) bracketing of temporality.<sup>23</sup>

## 5.4

Classical *épistémè* disappeared when the trace replaced representation; that is when History became possible. But for this the table had to be dispersed and assumed a third dimension, a volume: "The space of order, which served as a commonplace for representation and for things... is from now on shattered.... Things... define for themselves an *internal* space, which, to our representation, is on the exterior" (OT 239).

Entities were capable of becoming objects of signification when they left traces on a surface of a mostly hidden volume of which they were a part. Differences were not reorganized on the surface where they appeared into an order of the Same and the Other. Rather, the identity regarding which there were differences remained hidden behind that surface while binding them together (OT 256-259), constituting them as its signs and witnesses. Representations were turned into traces, and the surface upon which they appeared became a veil of hidden objects, to be uncovered through interpretive work. In political economy, representations of value were apprehended as traces of labor; in biology, representable elements of living beings became traces of organic structure and processes; in philology, words were said to convey whole inflectional systems (OT 237). The new objects of these sciences assumed their form in a space (SC) that became three dimensional, with one of its faces turned towards an interpretive consciousness.

23 "Trace and representation" are deconstructed by Derrida in, for example, "Difference" (Derrida, 1963) and "Plato's Pharmacy" (Derrida, 1981).

How distinct phenomena signified the objects of which they were parts and which gave them their meaning is itself a question open to interpretation. In the modern *épistémè*, signification is a relation of congruence, and representation becomes one of its extreme, liminal cases. Without representation, language lost its function to mediate transparently between thought and things; language could now become an object of a science, not merely the medium of all sciences. Signification thus became a problem for critical (formalist or hermeneutical) reflection on language (OT 295-299).

When SC and SL were optically linked, time could be integrated into the order of things. In the classical period, time was external to that order and was able only to transform that order as a whole or make some of its parts more visible than others. Now time could become a constitutive force of that order, able to control the formation and inner development of things, not only their external succession (OT 239). Time could assume such a role at the level of objects (SC) only because it could leave traces (in SL) of the objects it transformed. The new ontic relation between SL and SC made it possible for historicity to pervade the objects of the three domains surrounding man: labour, language, and life. On the basis of that historicity the historical interest in these domains has become possible (OT 368-369). But it is only on the basis of a new ontology of the semiotic relation that historicity itself has become possible.

## 6. Foucault's Postmodern Semiotics

## 6.1

It is possible now to summarize the semiotic import of Foucault's three *épistémès* in terms of the general classification of modes of signification presented above (393).

*Renaissance*: Resemblance is a relation of convenience. Only resemblance remains absolutely hidden in the Renaissance chaotic network of signs, while everything else is manifested in various degrees. Signifieds are contingently absent.

*Classic Epistémè*: Representation is a relation of convenience. A Platonic schism separates the phenomenal from the real. Once the phenomenal field is organized according to the "table", its distinct elements represent necessarily-absent categories of that table.

*Modern Epistémè*: Signification is a surface-depth relation. Distinct elements of a surface refer to, betray, or manifest traces of a hidden signified—be it a structure, a process, or a substance. The signified is absent in principle. The signifier is endowed with its signifying power because it is a manifested surface, a part of the hidden signified. Signification is a relation of congruence.

Three squares of our matrix are neatly populated by the three *épistémés*. The fourth, it will be argued, is inhabited by Foucault's own reading of signs. The results are represented schematically below:

Convenience	Congruence	Relation/Substitution
Renaissance 1	Foucault 4	Contingently Absent
Classic Ep. 2	Modern Ep. 3	Necessarily Absent

In *The Order of Things* Foucault claims that the same order of knowledge, the same mode of signification of the phenomenal, and the same ontic relation that mode implies, pervade an entire epoch. It may well be that no period has been characterized by such a uniformity, and that Foucault's periodization is not entirely justified. It is, however, probable, that during a certain period one of the phenomenal's four modes of signification becomes dominant. What matters for us is not the exact historical span over which one such mode reigned, but the fact that each of them required a different metaphysical ground for its claims to know. Perhaps it is that shared presupposition of a metaphysical ground that effected the consolidation of one mode of signification and its reign over an intellectual epoch. The Renaissance needed that great similitude between microcosm and macrocosm as an underlying principle, for it rendered signification through resemblance a legitimate source of knowledge. Classic *épistémé* required mind as a mirror of nature, and a nature noetically constructed, and it could rely on a benevolent creator to provide both. And modern *épistémé* required an active agent to hold together surface and depth, an a-temporal and non-spatialized order and its historical and local manifestations. It found that agent in the constituting subject, man as a replica of God, who nonetheless maintains an infinite distance from the divine. Endowed now with the power to constitute objects, man's knowledge is limited to those objects he has constituted.

While signification could take place without any such metaphysical ground, it would then lack legitimate claims to know.<sup>24</sup> Smoke would still signify fire, but only as a matter of human convention, as Hume argued. If the link between the phenomenal and what it signifies is not firmly anchored to metaphysical ground, the power of the phenomenal to signify is restricted to the rules and conventions of the language that has invested such a power in the phenomenal field it has organized. The signifying power of phenomena would yield legitimate claims to know only if the language Nature speaks to man is readable, independent of

<sup>24</sup> Different metaphysical guarantees may be postulated, of course, but they should provide the same ontic features provided by God, an Intelligible Nature, and a Mind that mirrors it, or a constituting subject.

that language's contingent, if not arbitrary, rules. Those attempts to transcend the limitations of natural language, either by means of an appeal to a "chosen language" (e.g., Hebrew or Greek; cf. OT 33, 36), or through the use of an artificial formalized language (cf. OT 298-299), presuppose a perfect, miraculous, correspondence between the signs of the authoritative language and their phenomenal referents. Such a metaphysically guaranteed correspondence is the basis for valid signification in which a phenomenal signifier can signify an absent object or order, and is in turn signified by words.

Foucault exposes each *épistémé*'s metaphysical ground for the interpretation of the phenomenal, thereby deconstructing the semiotics involved in the search for truth without any engagement in a direct or immanent critique. The death of God and "the end of man"—understood as a deconstruction of the "subject", its historization and dissemination<sup>25</sup>—are cultural facts, characteristic of the postmodern period, and not necessarily the result of explicit metaphysical arguments. Both this death and this end undermine the metaphysical ground of modern *épistémé*'s semiotics, and delegitimize its claims to know. If this death and this end are accepted as given without seeking refuge in the shade of a new metaphysical guarantee, it is impossible to retreat and incorporate the modern mode of signification in any serious search for knowledge; the other two modes have long ago become obsolete.


One does not need Foucault's archeological analyses in order to recognize that, in the West, the interpretation of Nature has long endured without the metaphysical guarantees of the previous *épistémés*. According to the most influential stream in the philosophy of science, a rapidly expanding army of scientists seems to be constructing a foundation-less monument for reason. A majority of those who have reflected upon science in the last two decades have come to admit the historicity, cultural-context dependence, and linguistic embodiment of science.<sup>26</sup> With regard to the issue of choosing among different modes of signification of the phenomenal, the implication may well be that, since no metaphysical ground is being sought anyway, anything goes. This implies that the choice is not made upon any normative ground. Rather, it is actually governed by considerations foreign to the pursuit of knowl-


<sup>25</sup> About the dissemination of the subject see "What is an Author?" in Foucault (1977), and "Man and his Double" in OT. The theme of the historization and dissemination of the subject may lend a unifying basis for Foucault's work as a whole, as he himself formulated it in a retrospective overview of his work. See the two interviews with Dreyfus and Rabinow, "The Subject of Power" and "The Genealogy of Ethics" (appended to Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> The list is too long to be reproduced here and the names are too well known. Note, however, that I have assumed the anti-realist conception of science as a cultural state of affairs. There are still important attempts to salvage science out of what seems to be its postmodern predicament (e.g., Putnam's), while there are others who are already rejecting in that predicament (e.g., Lyotard).

edge, be it external constraints imposed upon scientific discourse, or power relations within it. But there is another possibility. It may be the case that another mode of signification, the one contained in the fourth square of our matrix, does not require any metaphysical ground in order to yield legitimate claims to know and yet is not entirely given to forces foreign to the search for truth.

6.2

The dotted line signifies a circle. No single line, taken separately, constitutes a sign; the lines signify only when taken together. The signified is "a circle", but it is neither the concept of a circle nor a fully formed circle that exists somewhere else. Circularity is the *order* of the dotted lines. Since it is not the *idea* of a circle but a particular order of phenomenal elements that is signified here, the signified is co-present with its signifiers (assuming no other hint is introduced into the context of this signification). Any signifying line then is a *part* of the signified order. The dotted line substitutes, however, for a fully present circle, otherwise its circularity (the circle as their order) would not have been perceived. Therefore by taking the  as a sign of this particular circle (but not of the circle's concept), the signifying relation employed is of the fourth type: congruence and a contingently absent signified.

Again, the dotted line signifies a circle. But now a tacit assumption of the previous signifying moment becomes clear. The lines signify their own order, with a moment of substitution occurring here only if the pattern is contingently incomplete due to spatial, temporal, or perceptual limitations. In other words, the signified order is an hypothesis about the location of other similar elements to be identified once the scope of the observed field is enlarged, observational tools improved, or observation span extended. This is true for the first more complete pattern that could have been a partial representation of a figure like the following , and not necessarily a circle. Since the circle is a conventional, easily recognized figure it provides a potentially misleading code. But without further ontological backing, any such signification would suffer from the same uncertainty, and be similarly open for refutation. Given this mode of signification, interpretation is a matter of putting forward hypotheses postulating both a code and a signified; refutation is a matter of deconstructing a whole code as well as negating a particular interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

27 In other words, this is what Peirce called "abduction"; being a "hypothetical inference" that differs from both deduction and induction. Abduction is based on the interpretation of a particular case as an instance of a general rule, which is neither deduced nor inductively inferred; rather, the rule is hypothetically posited as a necessary and integral moment of the interpretive process (Peirce, 1953, 2.623-5; 4.541; 5.145, 171, 196; cf. Eco, 1976, 131-133).

The dotted line may be replaced with elements of any other phenomenal field, for example, human interaction in a tribal society, a series of oral or written versions of myths, or a collection of written documents.<sup>28</sup> Within each phenomenal field certain elements are identified and located, such as gift exchange, mention of incest in myth, references to authors and authority. Identification of each element, and of each element's position vis-à-vis others, is carried out by means of a theory-laden language and within a phenomenal field preorganized at a certain level of well-informed perception (of phenomena qua meaningful signs).<sup>29</sup> At this stage no particular element signifies anything. The elements are then classified, divided, and regrouped by the observing scientist, who works to discover orders in a phenomenal field through an actual or imaginary manipulation of his/her objects. Long before all the information has been processed, a certain pattern emerges; the patterned elements now signify an order which clearly transcends their present, contingent,<sup>30</sup> dispersion, of which they are a part.

At this juncture in our schematic description, the scientist confronts a clear metaphysical choice.<sup>31</sup> He or she may think about order as manifested by the patterned elements, shared by other like elements in similar yet unobserved (perhaps unobservable) fields, while transcending all these. Here the scientist has opted for a necessarily absent signified. He or she is obliged to account for the way the absent order and its present, ever-partial, manifestations, are fixed together. Within the matrix of signification, our scientist is situated in the modern square. His or her signified orders maintain an ever-hidden residue and are still pervaded by essentialism. They are steeped in Hegelian dialectics of essence and phenomena, depth and surface.<sup>32</sup>

But there is an alternative way to interpret order. In the other option order is not to be reified as it emerges through its signifying elements on

28 Including a phenomenal field linguistically organized, that is, black figures drawn upon a white background in the context of writing, or a sequence of sounds in the context of speech.

29 This is a case of "undercoding" in Eco's terms: a system of signs that uses signifieds of a lower system as its signifiers. Overcoding, on the other hand, occurs when there is a system whose code is unknown (yet), and into which certain rules of interpretation are projected. This is the case of premature understanding: it characterizes, for example, the anthropologist's first encounter with a foreign tribe, or the interpreter's first reading of a foreign text (Eco, 1976, 133-136).

30 The dispersion of elements is contingent since the observed pattern is an outcome of the scientist's—not only nature's—adventures, and depends upon the process of discovery.

31 It is a juncture in our description, not in the process of discovery, of which that description does not pretend to give an account, and in which the metaphysical choice may precede any investigating gaze.

32 Does this critique hold for marxism, psychoanalysis, or structuralism, all of which seem to postulate hidden "structures" that govern orders of phenomena? Much depends on one's interpretation of each of these doctrines. Foucault himself is apparently undecided, at least in *The Order of Things* where he uses unusually cryptical and evasive language to speak of "psychoanalysis and ethnology" (10, v).

the page, in the tribal environment, or within the spatio-temporal framework of an institution. Nor are speculations made about that which governs order itself. Other orders that emerge in the same or other phenomenal fields may be partially or fully isomorphic with the order first established.<sup>33</sup> If then becomes possible to envisage a phenomenal field that encompasses all relevant definite fields in time and space, and in which new orders may emerge as a result of some combination of "local" orders. Yet even these higher-type orders are limited to the phenomenal field of their signifying elements. Under this description, knowledge constitutes the establishment of orders of definite elements within a phenomenal field, as well as the ability to predict a patterned occurrence of yet unobserved elements.

This type of knowledge is obviously not free of ontological commitments, of the kind implied, for example, by the descriptive language and its associated grid of classifications. But it is knowledge free of any "grand" metaphysical commitment, of the kind required in the three *épistémès*. Under the constraints illustrated above, signification does not depend upon a hidden agent that works behind its scene and grants the elements of order with the power to hold them in line or gather them into an order. To interpret order itself as a sign of a hidden power is to move from the fourth to the third square in our matrix. While many make this transition, it is certainly unwarranted according to the devastating critique of *The Order of Things*.<sup>34</sup>

## 6.5

The scope of this paper can not encompass a general thesis of post-modern semiotics. Yet in following the work of Foucault one may reveal the tension between the modern and postmodern semiotics in his own writing, as well as his solution to the dilemma of order and power within an anti-metaphysical, anti-foundationalist, interpretive framework.

Foucault's ambivalence is best exemplified by his key concepts, "statement", "discursive practices", and "discursive formations". Common to all these discursive entities is the fact that they are identified by the set of rules governing them. Foucault's positivistic temperament often leads him to a systematic reconstruction of these sets of rules; rules of discourse are his most prominent signifieds.

The rules, however, never appear on the page or the surface of the document at stake, and Foucault, after all, is primarily a student of documents. They also never appear "behind" the page, constituting, as

it were, the "deep meaning" of its signs. Rules, then, are the way certain elements, identified and differentiated on the surface of many documents, are "rarified", dispersed and ordered. It is only through exposing a regularity of pre-established discursive elements that discursive rules and practices, and the statements that embody them, may be discovered (AK 117). Each discursive element assumes a signifying power for the analyst (which differs from the power of a linguistic sign to induce meaning or to refer to an object) only in the context of this regularity. And it is only this regularity, of which it is a part, that it may signify.

Discursive elements signify a discursive formation, practice, or rule, in the same way that moves on a chessboard signify a rule of the game. A rule cannot be reduced to a series of moves from which it is inferred by an outside observer. Neither does a rule exist on the board of a game, nor is it located in a table of rules that "represents" the game, nor is it a part of the game's "deep structure", of which the board presents a mere "surface". Where, then, does the rule exist? Where is it "con-figured"?<sup>35</sup>

The analogy of the game illustrates that although Foucault recognizes and differentiates between discourse's two spaces (SL and SC) he does not establish between them one of the semiotic relations that governs the three *épistémès*. Foucault opts, it seems, for a different mode of signification but in *The Archeology* he remains ambiguous about that type of signification. The signified rule or formation is not a hidden entity, but its ontological status is not altogether clear. Discourse is not represented by any particular text or other material "localizations", and remains hidden from the naive reader. Yet for the analyst it appears through a series of texts and other documents. "Neither hidden, nor visible, the enunciative level [i.e., the level of statements, of discursive rules] is at the limits of language [*langage*] ... its periphery rather than its internal organization, its surface rather than its context" (AK 112). Foucault moves here to a new ontic plane, the precise nature of which he is as yet undecided. This plane occupies an intermediate position between the external context, discourse's material-practical envelopment, and the "deep meanings" of discourse's enunciations that are always absent from its phenomenal surface. But the exact relation among these three layers is an issue effectively avoided by Foucault (AK 45-46).

In *The Order of Things* Foucault regards discourse as if it were autonomous and analyzable independently of its historical-practical embodiment. But there is no methodological backing for such an assumption, and it is doubtful whether Foucault ever considered it viable. In *The Archeology* he mentions only the existence of an interplay between "a system of real or primary relations" (discourse's material-

33 There is no signification when an order is first established (cf. Eco, 1976, 17), unless a specific pattern is recognized from other contexts and is already codified in discourse.

34 Such a move from the phenomenal order towards ever-hidden signifieds is sanctioned by many others, of course, most notably, perhaps, the later Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Derrida. Historically, one should go back, as Foucault does, to Nietzsche, with his adornment for surfaces and wells and distrust of immediate sense impressions. In

35 This certainly reminds one of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules in his *Philosophical Investigation*, especially #81. Cf. Saul Kripke (1982).

practical envelopment), a system of "reflexive", meta-discursive relations, and discursive relations proper. Had he pondered the nature of that interplay he may have become engaged in a surface-depth analysis of the kind discarded in *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology*. The search for the interplay between "discursive relations" and "primary, real relations", is a search for the seemingly hidden agents that keep regularities in order, as well as for the power(s) that force (or forbid) certain discursive possibilities upon discourse's participants. This sort of investigation calls for going beyond the surface of discourse and of discourse as a surface, towards that which governs it from "behind" or "below", leaving only traces where discursive relations are configured. Without a different interpretation of that power emerging from "primary relations", inquiry into the interplay of discursive and non-discursive relations necessitates a retreat into the metaphysics and semiotics of the modern *épistémè*.

## 6.6

In the interviews that followed the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (in which power is one of the main themes), Foucault faces the problem explicitly, even if not systematically. He rejects the notion of power either as a reified, hidden agent, or as some kind of diffused, but still unified, energy.<sup>36</sup> Rather, power is seen in terms of actions that regularly limit or change the field of possibilities for others' actions. For Foucault, there is no power but "power-relations" and the "exercise of power";<sup>37</sup> in other words, there are only modifications of actions by other actions. Modifications may be achieved through threats and sanctions, control and manipulation of a spatio-temporal framework of activity, division of labour, training, etc. All such moments of modification are: (1) observable; (2) documented by contemporary observers; (3) displayed in different kinds of regulations. The exercise of power becomes intelligible and notable whenever and wherever it is possible to identify *regular* modifications of actions by other actions. (Regularities differ in kind and intensity, but this should not concern us here.)

Thus power almost becomes identified with order: power orders and an identified order exhibits the exercise of power, which is essentially the gathering of elements into order. In the analysis of discourse there is nothing "behind" the establishment of discursive regularities. But there is an ongoing search for more comprehensive and more abstract orders, of which already-established orders are elements and signs. At this stage

36 See, for example, the interviews gathered in Foucault (1980) and "Questions of Method", in *Ideology and Consciousness* 8 (Spring 1982), and "The Subject of Power" in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982). For the relation between Foucault's main texts, published as books, and the minor publications that surrounded them see my "Homage to Michel Foucault", *Jyuan* 34/1-2 (1985).

37 "The Subject of Power", Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982, 216-221).

of his work Foucault localizes power and discourse;<sup>38</sup> he usually prefers local analyses to a search for order of a higher type that may govern a whole epoch and a whole *épistémè*. Nonetheless, the partial manifestation of order, for example, in a single classroom whose life was documented, or along a diffused series of texts, would signify an order that pervades for a time an entire domain of human activity.

Thus, Bentham's text, *Panopticon*, reveals a remarkable isomorphism between the order of its main discursive elements and the order among real disciplinary and punitive regularities in the modern prison (DP 199-205). Signification, however, is not just a matter of postulating a higher type of order by means of rearranging lower regularities. In the case of the *Panopticon*, it is not the text alone that signifies reality. The order of power observed within certain real prisons and other disciplinary institutions, serves Foucault as an anticipatory sign of the text's order, and provides him with a hypothetical code according to which the *Panopticon* signifies a fully developed model of power relations. In this sense, the "architectural figure" the text presents is reminiscent of an ideal type. But it is not a textual representation of an ideal type nor is the ideal type a construction originating in the social scientist's mind. Rather, the *Panopticon* is the ideal type itself; it is the signified par-excellence, whose surprising presence as a Benthamian text<sup>39</sup> confers an articulated clarity upon all its partial signifiers; those which the scholar identifies meticulously in series of documented punitive regularities. However, since this is a signified which is co-present with its signifiers, their relation may be inverted with a shift of perspective, attention, or interest. This is precisely what occurred when the *Panopticon* became a symbol of the disciplinary phase of modern power-relations.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault's use of the *Panopticon* is a fine example of the "textualization" of the world and the "materialization" of the text. Indeed, the deconstructionist phrase: "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (Derrida, 1976, 158), may serve as an adequate characterization of postmodern signification.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, the non-discursive world of phenomena is textualized into scientific discourse—only as such it is rearranged into its signifying elements. On the other hand, phenomenal aspects of

38 Foucault stresses repeatedly the need to localize power, to develop "microphysics of power relations". See e.g., "Power/Body" and "Truth and Power" in Foucault (1980). Cf. Gilles Deleuze's review of *Discipline and Punish*: "Ecrivain non: un nouveau cartographe", *Critique* 343 (1975).

39 Cf. Foucault's account of his encounter with the *Panopticon* in "The Eye of Power", Foucault (1980, 146-148).

40 See, for example, the interviews concerning Foucault's analysis of the *Panopticon*, "The Eye of Power", and "Questions of Geography", in Foucault (1980), and note especially the addressed questions.

41 The term "postmodern" is used in a rather technical way to designate the square that follows the modern one in the above matrix. The scope of this paper does not allow a further account of Foucault's postmodernity. For more on this matter see Scott Lash, "Postmodernity and Desire", *Theory & Society* 14/1 (1985).

textuality—the space of writing so emphatically emphasized by Derrida among them—has acquired a status of a *sui generis* discursive element which must be part of any analysis of discourse. Foucault opens the way for the phenomenal aspects of discourse when he refers to rules for the “materialization” of discourse (i.e., reproduction of statements; AK 100), when he considers maps, graphs, or drawings as statements (AK 82), or more generally, by the very fact that he considers his material as “documents” to be rendered into “monuments”.<sup>42</sup> The analyst who rejects any depth interpretation of meanings remains close to the surface of discourse, in the double sense of superficiality, as he takes note of discourse’s phenomenal aspects and accepts the meaning of its words at their face-value.

The world’s textuality is a direct result of that denial of the Hidden Signified, or the necessarily absent signified, be it in the form of God or Man, of History, Life or Power. In postmodern signification, no hidden agent governs the manifestation of the phenomena by which it is signified. Rather the order of a series of dispersed, meaningful phenomenal elements is postulated as its new signified. Every time an order is postulated it is subject to criticism, which does not look for the existence of a metaphysical foundation or its lack, but seeks theoretical deconstruction and practical transgression of the presumed order. In a sense Foucault still deals with traces, reminiscences of human activity that left their marks in books, tables, walls and artifacts. But there is no attempt to move from the trace towards its origin.<sup>43</sup> The path of inquiry leads from traces to orders of traces and the interrelations of these orders. One may recall here the Renaissance: signification is to be found everywhere; no signified is necessarily absent; any signified may be turned into a signifier; the world has been textualized and texts have been spatialized; discursive and non-discursive elements intermingle within the same ontic plane open for an indefinite process of signification. Only postmodern “order” (or regularity) has replaced Renaissance simultaneity, critical interpretation has replaced a kind of inviolable hermeneutics, and an erratic series of semiotic hypotheses and refutations has replaced a single-minded expansion of dogmatic semiosis.

The difference is crucial. Postulating order presupposes classification, but it does not rest there. Rational arguments of all kinds are mobilized for the establishment of an order, and in this sense “anything goes” indeed.<sup>44</sup> But the arguments appeal to no authority embodied in texts or persons, and the order they establish should still be reconsidered as new bits of the phenomenal field are screened and read. Signifi-

cation proceeds through the projection of an order without foundation. Ordered signifiers assume adequate representation of a more comprehensive order. Representation, however, is not a mirror of the real but rather the configuration of its statistical sample; in the same way it depends upon the classifying language used in the inquiry, and upon a series of coincidents that determine the position of the sampler vis-à-vis his/her material. The signifying power of phenomena in postmodern semiotics resembles a statistical survey in that it is not predisposed to inquiry; it is postulated through inquiry and is constantly revised with its results.

What this means is that codes do not last long, that their deconstruction is an ongoing practice, and that each interpretive move threatens to undermine an order or to transgress it. It also means that when a theory deals with contemporary practices and their genealogy, each time an order is deciphered (a new code is postulated) new channels of transgression are made possible. Theory constantly shifts the domain where transgression is possible as it redraws the lines of order that call for transgression and reconstructs the field in which struggle takes place.<sup>45</sup> Finally, it may be said that Postmodern semiotics, as it is embodied in Foucault’s later work, involves a new type of relation between theory and practice.<sup>46</sup> Or is it the case that when theory abandons its traditional, “neutral”, seemingly impractical position, and demands for itself a greater share of the field of real social struggle, a new mode of signification is required?

#### References

- BARTHES, ROLAND, 1972  
*Critical Essays*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; translation of *Essais critiques*. Paris: Seuil, 1977
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1977  
*Elements of Semiology*. London: Jonathan Cape; translation of *Elements de sémiologie*. Paris: Seuil.
- BRIND'AMOUR, LUCIE and EUGENE VANCE, editors, 1982  
*L'archéologie du signe*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- DERRIDA, JACQUES, 1973  
*Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; translation of *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

42 AK 7; cf. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in Foucault (1977).

43 Foucault discusses the concept of origin in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (Foucault, 1977).

44 There are no rules for the interpretive analysis, no guides for the sort of texts to be studied, and no method for rendering “documents” into “monuments”.

45 I can only hint at the concept of transgression here. Foucault writes about it explicitly in his “Preface to Transgression” (Foucault, 1977); cf. C. C. Lemert and G. Gillan (1982, 26-28, 63-91).

46 Foucault and Deleuze converse about the need for, and the reality of, a new relationship between theory and practice in “Intellectuals and Power” (Foucault, 1977).

- \_\_\_\_\_, 1976  
*Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press; translation of *De la grammatologie*. Paris: de Minuit, 1981
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1981  
*Dissemination*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; translation of *La dissemination*. Paris: Seuil, 1983
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1983  
*Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; translation of *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: de Minuit.
- DREYFUS, L. HUBERT and PAUL RABINOW, 1983  
*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- DUCROT, OSWALD, et. al., 1968  
*Qui'est-ce que le structuralisme?* Paris: Seuil.
- ECO, UMBERTO, 1976  
*A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- FOUCAULT, MICHEL, 1972  
*The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon; translation of *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1973
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1975  
*The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books; translation of *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1977  
*The Birth of the Clinic*. New York: Vintage Books; translation of *Naissance de la clinique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1979  
*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*; selected essays and interviews ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1979  
*Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books; translation of *Surveiller et punir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1980  
*Power/Knowledge*; selected interviews, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon.
- GREIMAS, A. JULIEN, 1966  
*Sémantique structurale*. Paris: Larousse.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1970  
*Du sens*. Paris: Seuil.
- HJELMSLEV, LOUIS, 1961  
*Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Baltimore, MD: Waverly.
- JACOBSON, ROMAN, 1970  
*Main Trends in the Science of Language*. New York: Harper & Row.
- KRIPKE, SAUL, 1982  
*Wittgenstein: On Rules and Private Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- LEMERT, CHARLES and GARTH GILLIAN, 1982  
*Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- MORRIS, CHARLES, 1946  
*Signs, Language, and Behavior*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- OPHIR, ADI, forthcoming  
 "The Semiotics of Power: Reading Foucault's *Discipline and Power*". Manuscript.
- PERCE, CHARLES SANDERS, 1953-1958  
*Collected Papers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- PIRETO, LUIS, 1966  
*Messages et signaux*. Paris: P.U.F.
- RESCHER, NICHOLAS, 1981  
*Leibniz's Metaphysics of Nature*. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel.
- SAUSSURE, FERDINAND DE, 1960  
*Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library; translation of *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.
- SEBEOK, THOMAS A., 1976  
*Contribution to the Doctrine of Signs*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, 1917  
*Adversus Mathematicos*. London: Loeb Classical Library.
- SHANDS, HARLEY C., 1970  
*Semiotics Approaches to Psychiatry*. The Hague: Mouton.
- TODOROV, TZVETAN and OSWALD DUCROT, editors, 1972  
*Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage*. Paris: Seuil.



CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY  
 SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME 14, 1988  
 PHILOSOPHY AND BIOLOGY

EDITORS:  
 Bernard Linky and Mohan Matthen

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Bernard Linky and Mohan Matthen | Introduction  |
| Michael Ruse                    | Evolutionary Ethics: Healthy Prospect or Last Infirmary?              |
| Elliott Sober                   | What is Evolutionary Altruism?  |
| W. Ford Doolittle               | Hierarchical Approaches to Genome Evolution                           |
| R. J. Hankinson                 | Galen Explains the Elephant   |
| Edwin Levy                      | Networks and Teleology  |
| Alexander Rosenberg             | Is the Theory of Natural Selection a Statistical Theory?              |
| John Collier                    | Supervenience and Reduction in Biological Hierarchies                 |
| Paul Thompson                   | Conceptual and Logical Aspects of the 'New' Evolutionary Epistemology |
| Thomas G. Wegmann               | Technology: The Driving Engine of Current Biological Advance          |

This Supplementary Volume is free to individual and student subscribers to *CJP* Volume 18, 1988.

PRICE:

CDN \$14 in Canada  
 US \$12 outside Canada  
 Please add \$1.50 for postage  
 and handling and 50¢ for each  
 additional copy.

ORDER FROM:

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY PRESS  
 THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
 2500 UNIVERSITY DRIVE N.W.  
 CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA T2N 1N4

ISSN 0229-7051

ISBN 0-919491-14-6