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Foucault's Art of Seeing

JOHN RAJCHMAN

In his book called *Foucault*, Gilles Deleuze says of Michel Foucault that he was a great seer, a *voyant*. He declares that Foucault's seeing, and his discussion of seeing, are a constant and central part not only of his histories but also of his thought. He says that those who fail to take this part of his thought into account "mutilate" it to the point where it becomes comparable to analytic philosophy, something "with which it does not have much in common."¹

Deleuze attributes many things to the visual part of Foucault's thought. The territory of the visual spans knowledge, art, ethics, and politics, and so it illustrates why Foucault had no difficulties in dealing with "the relations of science and literature, or the imaginary and the scientific, or the known and the lived."² The visual is also central to the way Foucault's thought would develop. It is the other component, along with "discourse," of what Deleuze sees as Foucault's "neo-Kantianism," and so it is linked to the theme of the "transcendental imagination" in Kant, and to the attempts on the part of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to go beyond intentionality to the "opening" of Being. But Deleuze also applies to Foucault the categories of the Danish semiologist Louis Hjelmslev that he had found useful in his study of film. He says that Foucault was a great "audiovisual" thinker, who was "singularly close to contemporary film."³

I think Deleuze is the first to "see" this side of Foucault's thought and to demonstrate its general importance in his work.⁴ I will not follow all the intricate

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Paris, Editions Minuit, 1986, p. 57; English translation forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. One might trace an original view of "vision" in Deleuze's readings of philosophers. Thus, for example, in the '60s, he also presents Spinoza, philosopher and lens-polisher, as a *vivant-voyant*. Spinoza said that the geometrical demonstrations of his *Ethics* were as "the eyes of the soul"; Deleuze sees a vital optical method of rectifying those sad passions that ruin life, a way of polishing the glass for an inspired free vision. Deleuze's latest book is about Leibniz and the Baroque.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

4. In an essay titled "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought" (in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Cousins Hoy, London, Basil Blackwell, 1986), Martin Jay provides a useful inventory of some of the places where



Wood engraving of a ship of fools from a 1498 Latin translation of Sebastian Brant's work.

paths Deleuze gathers together in his analysis. I will try to present what I think Deleuze had in mind in somewhat different terms. I start with Foucault's art of historical depiction.

Historical Pictures

Foucault was an exceedingly *visual* historian. His histories are filled with vivid pictures that stick in the mind. Visualizing events or historical depiction is, of course, an art which itself has a history. Events have not always been visualized in the same way or under the same description. Michelet might be one example. So would a whole aspect of the "new history" with which Foucault associates his work in the Introduction to the *Archeology*, where an attempt would be made to "turn documents into monuments"—the preoccupation of the new historians with the "spaces" in which people lived, and the reconstruction of *tableaux de mœurs*—the sort of thing useful in making "period films."⁵ But Foucault's pictures are more than such *tableaux*. They are puzzles that call for analysis. They form part of a philosophical exercise in which seeing has a part.

A frequent device in Foucault's writing is before-and-after pictures. One is shown a picture from one period and then one from another. Thus the question of how one passed from one system of thought to another is visualized. The device occurs throughout, but is particularly prominent in the two "birth" books, the birth of the prison and the birth of the clinic.

In *Discipline and Punish*, one is shown the picture of the excruciating execution of Damiens, regicide, and then a timetable of observed activities. In the *Birth of the Clinic* one is shown Pomme's bathing cure of a hysteric in which

Foucault discusses matters visual. But I am not convinced that he succeeds in understanding what is involved in that discussion. His basic idea is that Foucault, like many of his compatriots, was "against vision." Yet it is not clear what he could mean by this. To say that Panoptic surveillance is a "diagram" of a form of power, or that it contributes to making this form of power self-evident and so acceptable, is not to be against vision, or even to make vision central ("oculo-centrism"). Jay seems to start with the hypothesis that a host of diverse French thinkers were united in a sort of conspiracy to "denigrate" the visual, and that, across the Rhine, in German sociology, more "optimistic" views are to be found. If one replaces "the visual" with "the rational" in this formulation, one finds a familiar pattern of disqualification of contemporary French thought, expounded in a more shrill manner by Apel than by Habermas. For Jay really to join this polemic, he would have to show that the French thinkers in question identified the visual with the rational, or were opposed to the one because opposed to the other. I think this would considerably compound the difficulties or incoherences in the original charge of irrationalism. Failing this, Jay owes some account of what he means by "the visual," and what it would be to "denigrate" or be against it. I discuss Habermas's views in a forthcoming essay for *New German Critique*.

5. It would be interesting to study in which ways *Annales* historians have come in fact to contribute to period films. In "Anti-Rétro" (*Cahiers du Cinéma* [July 1974]), Foucault discusses such films as *Lacombe Lucien* and *The Night Porter* in relation to the "rétro-style" in clothes and home decoration. His analysis of the return to previous styles is neither that of "simulation" or empty recycling, nor that of anamnesis.

the "heat" of her nervous system is "dried out." And then one is shown Bayle's careful examination of the lesions in the brain, that "dingy-looking pulp."

In both cases we have pictures not simply of what things looked like, but how things were *made* visible, how things were *given* to be seen, how things were "*shown*" to knowledge or to power — two ways in which things became *seeable*. In the case of the prison, it is a question of two ways crime was made visible in the body, through "spectacle" or through "surveillance." In the case of the clinic, it is a question of two ways of organizing "the space in which bodies and eyes meet." With Bayle, the eye acquires depth, and the body, volume; in examining the brain he is looking into the depths of the individual body where disease is located. Pomme was still looking for that general "portrait" of the disease which allows for the classification of fevers.

In both instances Foucault links the two techniques of making things visible to a larger conception of seeing in the period. This is one theme in Deleuze — what he calls *visibilités*. There is a history not simply of what was seen, but of what could be seen, of what was *seeable*, or visible. A "visualization," a scheme through which things are given to be seen, belongs to the "positivity" of knowledge and power of a time and place.

But there is a second feature of Foucault's before-and-after pictures: the one which proposes a philosophical exercise in seeing. For, at the end of the analysis of the passage from before to after, one is led to "see" the depicted events in a new light, or in a different way — in the light of their underlying, unseen concepts. Thus, after reading *Discipline and Punish*, it is hard not to "see" annular prison construction in a new light, hard not to be surprised that "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons."⁶ This is the aspect of Foucault's historical depiction Deleuze calls *évidences*. Foucault would be a "seer" because of the way "visibility" and "evidence" are linked in his history, and in his thought.

Visibility

Foucault finds in what he calls "the classical age" a whole range of ways of seeing, and of letting things be seen, which would have been unthinkable in the preceding period in which the eye was linked to the ear in the deciphering of "resemblances": in the classificatory tables of its forms of knowledge; in the primacy it accords to perceptual evidence; in its conception of madness as "dazzled reason"; in its conception of painting; in its utopian literature of the transparent society; in its natural histories as well as in its way of "displaying" mad people, so different from the "ship of fools." Foucault tried to determine the deep conceptual organization which gathered these seeings together into a form of "visibility" different from others.

6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Pantheon, 1977, p. 228.

Foucault's hypothesis was that there exists a sort of "positive unconscious" of vision which determines not what is seen, but what *can* be seen. His idea is that not all ways of visualizing or rendering visible are possible at once. A period only lets some things be seen and not others. It "illuminates" some things and so casts others in the shade. There is much more regularity, much more *constraint*, in what we can see than we suppose. To see is always to think, since what is seeable is part of what "structures thought in advance." And conversely to think is always to see.

What makes the visual intelligible is itself unseen. It is an anonymous body of practice spread out in different places. As Deleuze puts it, "*visibilités* are neither the acts of a seeing subject nor the givens of a visual sense."⁷ In the *Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault discusses "enunciative modalities" as properties of discourse. But in his histories he also discusses "modalities of seeing" as properties of visual intelligence: who sees what or whom and where are integral features of the visual thinking of a period and not an independent fact about its contexts. And this visual thought is rooted in a specific sort of "material existence"—the spaces in which it is exercised (such as hospital, prison, museum or home), and the techniques through which its images are reproduced and circulated (such as printing, markets, and so forth).

In one sense, it is "the subject" which is given in the forms of "visibility." Foucault finds that the same organization a period assigns to inner or psychological processes recurs in external "public" ones such as making maps or illustrating scholarly works. Thus the scheme of Renaissance resemblances is placed, by the classical period, within the imagination as a source of error to be cleared up by proper observation. And, with the birth of the clinic, the "visionary space" in which disease had been discussed is put into the head of the patient. Visualization belongs to the great internalizing or psychologizing practices Foucault associates with modernity. Thus, Freud's idea of dreaming as a way of showing to oneself one's innermost desires, contrasts with Artemidorus's scheme where dreams are ways of making visible one's fortune in a hierarchical society.⁸

The visual thinking of a period would thus have a positive organization. But that organization is not rooted in keeping something concealed. As Foucault came to realize, the "classical" way of making madness visible was not based on the repression or concealment of the true way of seeing it. The conceptual scheme that determines what can be seen is, in the phrase of the *Archeology*, "invisible but not hidden." The visibility of a period may be invisible to it, but

7. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 65.

8. I contrast Freud's view of dreaming with that of Artemidorus, as discussed by Foucault in *The Care of the Self* (John Rajchman "Ethics after Foucault," *Socialtext* [Winter 1985]). In his early introduction to his translation of Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* (*Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. XIX, no. 1 [1984–5]), Foucault objects to Freud that he reduces the dream to the dream-report. But in his mature work the visibility of dreaming is understood in historical rather than existential terms.

not as something hidden or kept from sight. What is invisible is just the light which illuminates things or makes them visible.

In short, visibility is a matter of a positive, material, anonymous body of practice. Its existence shows that we are much less free in what we see than we think, for we do not see the constraints of thought in what we can see. But it also shows that we are much *more* free than we think, since the element of visibility is also something that opens seeing to historical change or transformation.⁹ That is the problem of *évidence*.

Evidence

Evidence, in both English and French, comes from *videre*, to see. In the course of its history, the word acquires the senses of proof, testimony, and clarity or indubitability to the mind. Ian Hacking has studied one change in the concept of evidence in his history of the “emergence of probability.”¹⁰ It is the one that made Hume possible.

There is one sense of the French word *évidence* which is particularly marked in Foucault's visual idiom — the one English translates as “self-evidence”: what is

9. See the remarks in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. 14): “What I react against is the fact that there is a breach between social history and the history of ideas. Social historians are supposed to describe how people act without thinking, and historians of ideas are supposed to describe how people think without acting. Everybody both acts and thinks. The way people act or react is linked to a way of thinking, and, of course, thinking is related to tradition.”

The idea of *visibilités* is that how people act and react when they see something is made possible by a particular way of thinking related to tradition. One might understand in this light the project Foucault announced in the last pages of the *Archeology of Knowledge* to study painting as a “discursive practice” rather than seeing it as “pure vision that must be inscribed into the materiality of space,” or as “naked gesture,” or as “always a way of saying” (Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, Harper & Row, 1976, pp. 193–194). Painting would be “shot through with positivity”; the self-evident character of its “visuality” would derive from a materially rooted way of thinking. Thought would make one particular kind of visuality seem natural or essential to painting. To study such “positivity” would consist in asking how the concepts were brought together under which paintings could be seen, where, by what means, by whom, and so forth. Through what “system of thought” were the “objects” of painting, the class of things that could be painted, specified? And how was this delimitation connected to the spaces in which it could be seen (church or château, gallery or museum) and those in which it came to be made (studio, academy, etc.) and so to the legal and economic rules that governed its ownership and its circulation? In what way was the mode of “being a painter” conceived? How did technological innovations become part of the rationality or intelligibility of the “techniques” open to painting? How did the “materiality” of painting become more than the “context” in which it was seen or made, part of the way it was conceived (as when Foucault says that Manet was the first museum painter)? And in which ways was this construction of the conceptual space of painting linked to other or associated fields in the thinking of the age? To study thus the “events of the visual” in the history of painting would suppose that people are much less free to paint than they think, that there is much more conceptual “regularity” in the practice of painting than they imagine; but since that regularity is also what opens painting to change and transformation, people are much *more* free to paint than they imagine.

10. Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

taken for granted or accepted without question. Foucault introduces this concept of evidence into his historical depiction in a new way.

In a discussion with historians, Foucault explains that his way of seeing the birth of the prison was an attempt to see “events” behind self-evident entities and continuities, and so to “event-alize” history. One starts with a *rupture d’évidence*, a break with self-evidence, with “those *évidences* on which our knowledges, our agreements, our practices, rest.”¹¹ And then one asks how such “*évidences*” arose and took form. Where there is self-evidence, one tries to uncover the singular formation of an event unseen.

Evidence is used in this sense in both birth books. Thus, in the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault says that “the exact superposition of the ‘body’ of disease and the body of the sick man . . . is *self-evident* only for us.”¹² And, in *Discipline and Punish* he refers to the “self-evident character (*le caractère d’évidence*) that the prison form soon assumed.”¹³ There is both a legal and an economic self-evidence to the prison form; together they explain why, despite the fact that the prison was not doing what it was meant to do, “one could not ‘see’ how to replace it.”¹⁴

“Seeing” in this sense is part of doing. We cannot see what to do because we are “prisoners” of the self-evidence of one way of seeing what to do. We participate, we do our bit, in the practices which make that way of seeing self-evident to us—a participation or acceptance we can refuse. Thus in Foucault’s idiom, *evidence* is related to the *acceptability* of a practice. It is part of what makes a “strategy of power” *tolerable*, despite its difficulties. Thus, to see the events through which things become self-evident is to be able to see in what ways they may be *intolerable* or *unacceptable*. It is to try to see how we might *act* on what cannot yet be seen in what we do. It is, in short, a “critical” art, and it is in exercising it that Foucault would be, in Deleuze’s term, a seer or *voyant*.

For Deleuze, a seer is not basically, nor in the first instance, someone who can depict future events. Nor is he necessarily the sort of “visionary” or “utopian” who looks forward to the place where everything that ought to be is finally made transparent to all.¹⁵ “A seer,” says Deleuze, “is someone who sees some-

11. *L'impossible prison*, ed. Michelle Perrot, Paris, Seuil, 1980, p. 44.

12. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, Vintage Books, 1975, p. 3.

13. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 232.

14. *Ibid.* In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault also says, “I wanted first to dwell on that quite recent and banal notion of ‘sexuality’: to stand detached from it, to get around its familiar self-evidence (*contourner son évidence familière*) . . . it was a matter of *seeing* how an ‘experience’ came to be constituted in modern Western societies . . .” (*The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Random House, 1985, pp. 3–4 [translation revised and emphasis added]).

15. In the “Eye of Power,” referring to the work of Jean Starobinski, Foucault briefly alludes to the Rousseauistic dream of a transparent society (in *Power/Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon, 1980, pp. 152–153).

thing not seen.”¹⁶ Foucault's art of seeing is an art of exposing the unseen *évidences* that make the things we in fact do acceptable or tolerable to us.

Deleuze finds this sort of seeing in the work Foucault did for the Group for Information about Prisons, of which Deleuze was a member. A kind of “public space” of discussion with prisoners was opened up. It was in this space that Foucault “saw something which at the time no one else saw.” This act of seeing required a *rupture d'évidence*: the gap between the self-evidence of the economical and legal conception of the prison, and what was actually going on. In this gap one could start to see something intolerable in those practices, which opened up a question for historical analysis: an analysis that would initiate new ways of seeing and thinking not simply about French penal institutions, but also about the strategic organization of power in modern societies, its relations to forms of knowledge and modes of living. Foucault's seeing would lie in this critical opening in thinking. Says Deleuze:

He saw things, and like all people who know how to see something and see it deeply, he found what he saw to be intolerable. For him to think meant to react to the intolerable, to something intolerable that he had seen. And the intolerable was never the visible, it was something more. . . .¹⁷

One sense of “evidence” in the study of history is the sense of the “eye-witness” to actual events as distinct from the “eye” that reads forthcoming events. Foucault's idea of the events of evidence has to do with the eye of *historians*. In *fictional* depiction, Foucault found a similar aim of making visible the unseen spaces of seeing. In Maurice Blanchot's depiction of the “space” in which encounters transpire and words are exchanged, he saw, in fiction, an attempt

not to show (*faire voir*) the invisible, but to show the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible. Hence [fiction] bears a profound kinship with space. . . .¹⁸

In several interviews, Foucault also describes his *own* histories as fiction. It is not that these histories lack the validity that would distinguish them from fiction. It is rather that they share an *aim* with fiction: the aim not of explanation, or of showing how our ways of seeing and doing are historically necessitated, but, on the contrary, of showing how things might be otherwise, beyond our self-evidences. That is why the history of the “evidences” of the way things are seen includes the “evidences” in the thinking of historians. To “see” is to open history to new domains and new questions, “to do this history of the ‘objectification’ of

16. “An Interview with Gilles Deleuze,” *History of the Present* (Spring 1986), p. 1.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Foucault/Blanchot*, New York, Zone Books, 1987, p. 24.

those events historians take as objectively given.”¹⁹ When Foucault says that he writes works of history that are more than works of a historian,²⁰ it is in part because of this other aim of seeing, which the philosopher would share with the writer.

Seeing is important in Foucault’s work as philosopher and historian in this sense as an art of trying to see what is unthought in our seeing, and to open as yet unseen ways of seeing. A peculiar idiom of space and sight unfolds in Foucault’s writing that moves in many directions. I would now like to bring various facets of this idiom into focus, to look at seeing in knowing, seeing in doing, seeing in thinking, and in living.

Seeing in Knowing

Foucault did not see knowledge as simply built up from ordinary perceptual evidence through a logic of inference, inductive or deductive. He was concerned with the ways seeing in knowledge has been itself conceptually constructed. In his idiom a *savoir* requires, and sets up, a way of *spatializing* itself, a sort of “technology of the visible.” Foucault wanted to get away from what might be called our modern philosophical obsession with what we call “observation” in knowledge—a piece of philosophical “self-evidence” he found in different forms in both phenomenology and positivism. Our philosophical conception of observation is a recent one, and it prevents us from seeing how knowledge is *in fact* “spatialized” or “visualized.” In science, seeing is more than meets the eye.

“Ocular metaphors,” it has often been observed, occupy a central place in our vocabulary of knowing: truth is something we say we see. But these metaphors have not always worked in the same way. Foucault thought the changes were in part due to the *actual* ways people invented to “spatialize” their knowledge, the *actual* role of seeing in knowledge. Richard Rorty reviews the analytic literature which shows how the Cartesian idea of perception differs from the “hylomorphic” seeing in Scholastic thought; nature is mirrored in a new way.²¹ But in Foucault’s archeology of the visual, the emergence of the Cartesian privilege of perception, with its idea of evidence as transparency to the mind, is a rather more complicated one.

In the “Discourse on Language,” there is talk of a general change in seeing that would arise in Britain of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, captured in the precept “look rather than read, verify rather than comment.” It involved a whole “scheme of possible, observable, measurable, classifiable objects,”²² a scheme which preceded the actual collection of the “contents” of knowledge.

19. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 9.

20. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979.

21. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 218.

22. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Pantheon, 1970, p. 43.

This change matches with what, in the *Order of Things*, Foucault calls a "reorganization of culture in which we are still caught," where the eye no longer deciphers the "prose of the world," and where, therefore, "the eye was . . . destined to see and only see, and the ear to hear and only hear."²³ There thus arises the doctrine of separation of the senses central to the emergence of the new discipline of "aesthetics" in Lessing and Diderot.²⁴

In knowledge, one place we see the change is in the "spatialization" of the natural histories of the classical period. In the classifications of Linnaeus, plants were studied, without microscopes, in terms of their visual "character," the colorless, odorless, "primary qualities" of a planar space. The principle of classification of elements and their arrangement in this space was based on a sort of "optics" of plant morphology, one which could be shown through the illustrations the new printing techniques made possible, and one which figured in the account of the "reproduction" of the plants themselves. It is this conceptual reorganization or "spatialization" which made natural history "nothing more than the nomination of the visible."²⁵ The "natural histories of the classical period," Foucault argues, "did not become possible when men looked harder and more closely,"²⁶ but when what they saw was organized in this new way.

The *Birth of the Clinic* records another change in seeing that occurs in French medicine at the end of the eighteenth century. Foucault is again at pains

23. It would be the same "separation of the eye" that characterizes the classical primacy of observation in knowledge, which would characterize the classical primacy of perception in painting. The tradition of *ut pictura poesis* would be challenged by saying that painting employs a different sort of sign, or has a different form, from poetry; it would be given to the eye alone, not to the ear. There would emerge an examination of this form through which painting presents itself to the perceiving eye, which would permit the "criticism" of paintings to be distinguished from their "commentary." This classical distinction between criticism and commentary, or between form and content, would then initiate a long debate Foucault here sees Mallarmé as changing (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 78–87).

24. Clement Greenberg's "formalism" is "classical" in this sense. He even cites Lessing in his attempt to find the principle of the turn to abstraction in modern painting in a process by which each of the "classical" arts would turn to the specific problems of its "medium." Such would be the secret of the isolation of "form" central to the avant-garde's attempt to preserve the "value" of art in an age of kitsch and socialist realism. In thus making the physical medium the privileged object of visual intelligence, Greenberg thought he had discovered the *essence* of the visuality or opticality of the visual arts. Historically, this essence was rooted in the classical self-evidence of painting as a perceived object; and there is a self-declared *positivism* in Greenberg's account of abstraction in modern art. What now seems invisible in Greenberg's conception of the essence of the visual is precisely the famous "eye" of the formalist critics that has learned to see only forms, and the way that eye was transferred to painter or sculptor as an obligation to "purify" his visual intelligence by seeing his object in "purely" formal terms. What that eye could not "see" was the other *conception* of the visual found in Duchamp, dadaism and surrealism. On this point, see Rosalind Krauss on the optical unconscious ("In the Blink of an Eye," forthcoming). Thierry de Duve contrasts the essentiality of Greenberg's conception of the avant-garde with the "pictorial nominalism" of the Duchampian avant-garde, where the question of how the visual is itself to be named or conceived becomes a central artistic problem (in *Le nominalism pictural*, Paris, Editions Minuit, 1984).

25. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 43.

26. *Ibid.*

to dispute the view that “men looked harder and more closely.” He disputes the account of the change in medicine in which the eye would move from fantastic imaginings to the careful observations of things. This is part of his general quarrel with the dichotomy between the imaginary and the epistemic, or the ideological and the scientific, in the history of knowledge.²⁷

In fact, he argues, the “visionary space” in which doctors, physiologists, and patients discussed disease was itself a quite regular and coherent form of “spatialization,” one based on recognizing the “portrait” of the disease in the body. And, what was involved in the “birth of the clinic” was a change in the whole idea of what it is to be “seen” by a doctor—where, with what instruments, and under what concepts.

Foucault argues that the change cannot be explained by “thematic contents,” or “logical modalities,” or the use of quantitative methods alone. It is the “space” of disease itself which changes, the place in the individual body where it is located, and the institutional “space” in which such localization occurs. Moreover, there was nothing inevitable about the change; one had to wait decades to get cures. The explanation for the change turns on institutional factors which emerge through the new programs of the French Revolution.

In this way, Foucault tries to show that it was the complex “spatialization” of disease which accounted for the role of observation in the new medicine, and not the primacy of observation which accounted for its new conception of illness. Such processes of “spatialization,” however, are not the same thing as “theory-dependence.” Foucault is not saying that medicine started to use a new theoretical vocabulary with which its “observation-reports” were “laden.” It is rather a matter of the construction of a “space” in which not just observation, but also theory, becomes possible.

Foucault might be said in this regard to extend the distinction Georges Canguilhem had developed in his study of the reflex between “the history of theories” and the “history of concepts.”²⁸ There is a history of the *concepts* through which things were given to be seen, which is separate from the history of *theories* about them. In particular, Foucault was interested in the history of how the concepts of visualization came to be embedded in institutional practices, or what he calls “tertiary spatialization.” Thus, in *Discipline and Punish*, he goes on to explain that

One of the essential conditions for the epistemological “thaw” of medicine at the end of the 18th century was the organization of the hospital as an “examining apparatus.”²⁹

27. See the discussion of science and ideology in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, pp. 184–186.

28. In his *Michel Foucault and the History of Reason* (forthcoming), Gary Gutting presents a clear and detailed account of Canguilhem’s distinction between the history of concepts and the history of theories. His book is a good corrective to the view that Foucault was against objectivity or rationality.

29. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 185.

For through this "apparatus" was "established over individuals the visibility by which they were differentiated and judged."³⁰

The spatial "scheme" of a form of knowledge is not only distinct from the theories which occur within it; it often precedes and makes them possible. Thus the singular manner in which the general hospital gave mad people to be seen precedes the elaboration of the classical theory of madness, and the architectural reorganization of prisons precedes the new theory of crime. The relation between theory and visualization in knowledge is not fixed or given as in the Kantian idea of a "schematism" locked in the recesses of the human soul. It is rather a matter of contingent historical configuration.

In asking how such entities as "madness," "illness," or "crime" were made visible in the knowledge of different periods, Foucault thus focused on practices of "spatialization" that were more complex, and more deeply embedded in external processes, than the mere exercise of the naked eye aided with a theoretical vocabulary. In his archeology of seeing in knowing, what he "excavated" was how the eye of observation was oriented in such practices, in a manner that does not simply derive from theory.

He thus revived an old philosophical debate about seeing and *reality*. From the fact that disease is "spatialized," does it follow that it is not "real"? Does it follow that when a physician sees a patient he is not seeing something real, but only the phantom of the discourse of his time? One source of such questions is the old idea that the real is what is observable.

Ian Hacking takes on just this idea in his discussion of the question, in the philosophy of the natural sciences, as to whether or not abstract or theoretical entities are real.³¹ Hacking argues that it is the obsession with "observation" in the philosophy of the natural sciences that has obscured the recognition of the role of complex experimental apparatuses in what one might call the "visualization" of theoretical entities in physics or genetics. Natural science also has its "modes of spatialization"; there is a whole natural "technology of the visual" as there is a human one: observatories, microscopes, cyclotrons. And experimentation is central to them.

For Hacking, "observation" is a misleading inheritance of logical positivism. In apparent allusion to Foucault, he says that phenomenology and positivism both descend from a "change in seeing" that occurs around 1800. Then would be forged the link between what is observable and what is real. Thus, in Hacking's example, both phenomenologists and positivists can agree that while meatballs are real, mesons are not.

In particular Hacking says that the positivist preoccupation with observation has led to two philosophical themes which have conjointly obscured the role

30. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

31. Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

of experimentation in natural science: Willard Quine's idea of semantic assent, and Norman Hanson's idea of theory-laden observation. Together they have led to the obtuse idea that, in physical science, seeing is saying. In fact, verbal "observations reports" that test theories are quite rare in physics. What matters is rather that engineering that evokes or constructs entities in highly artificial conditions. The relation between experimental engineering and theory is a complex and variable one. It is a matter of history; it is not given in a "logic" of inferring theory from perception. To understand experiment is to understand the question of what makes modern science modern; for the link between theory and experiment is part of a larger history of the link between technology and science, which helped to determine the very sense we give to "technology."

Hacking writes in praise of Francis Bacon, philosopher of experiment. Bacon's idea not of observation, but of "prerogative instances" gives a better picture than Carnap's of the way theoretical entities are made visible. Thus Hacking proposes to substitute an experimental for an observational realism. As far as he is concerned, if you can spray electrons, then they are real—just as real as meatballs. He thinks that it is the Hanson-Quine idea that seeing is saying that has induced philosophical doubts as to whether or not there exist real entities outside the verbalizations of science. Experimentation is a corrective; it offers a better way of understanding the sense in which theoretical entities can be said to be real.

Foucault's archeology of the "spatializations" of madness or illness, while it disputes simple observational realism, nevertheless does not lead, in a parallel way, to the sort of "pragmatic realism" which says: if you can cure a patient, then the illness you have seen in him is real. On the contrary, it leads in the opposite direction of a sort of nominalism; and in the *Archeology of Knowledge*, for example, Foucault talks of "de-presentifying" the very things of which he writes the "archeology."³²

Our knowledge is, of course, such that we can "do" things to illness or madness just as we can to electrons or genes. But seeing and doing are not related in the same way. In the case of illness or madness, the construction of seeing, and the way it fits in institutions and comes to be related to other fields, never loses contact with the way certain "real" social problems are seen.

There is one sense in which Foucault's question about how we "see" psychotics is a different *sort* of question from that of what we should do about atoms or genes—even if our best *theory* about psychosis should turn out to be a genetic one. For he is not asking what to do with the psychoses our knowledge lets us see, but whether we can or want to refuse the "evidences" of the way they are given to be seen in a whole range of practices, and invent other ways of seeing/dealing with them. It is this sort of interconnection between seeing, doing, and practical self-evidence to which he turns in *Discipline and Punish*. In

32. Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 47.

that book he draws a distinction between disciplinary and Baconian ways of seeing.

A central topic is "normalization." "Normality" as a fundamental category of our behavior, and even of our identity, becomes "visible" through an expanding network of practices in the nineteenth century. One of the basic things our knowledge makes visible to us is *abnormalities* both of persons and of societies.

One source is precisely medicine, the change in what it means to be "seen" by a doctor. There had been no independent way of identifying illness except as the deprivation of the state of health in the whole body. Then physiological anatomy introduced criteria for being a diseased organ independent of the health of the whole person. "Normality" could be defined as the absence of pathological symptoms in the organs. Abnormality started to be related to degeneracy. All this was part of the change in the medical gaze: when a doctor "saw" a patient he began to ask not "what is the matter with you?" but "where does it hurt?"

But this new rationality of the normal came to be applied in other places — for example, in Durkheim's attempt to distinguish "normal" from "pathological" states of societies, or to specify the "degenerate" portion of a population. The art of seeing "abnormality" fit within a network of practice. And it is the organization of that network that was rather different from the one that allows us to spray electrons.

In *Discipline and Punish*, the term "technology" enters Foucault's methodological lexicon. Discipline involves a new "technology of the visual." There is a comparison with experimental devices, and with Bacon, philosopher of experiment. As telescopes, microscopes, and prisms helped transform not simply what physics could see, but the place of "seeing" in it, so the techniques of surveillance and examination (that "microscope of behavior") not simply made such things as the "abnormal" or "criminal" personality visible; they also helped change the place of the visual in knowledge and power. These "observatories of human multiplicities," writes Foucault, introduced "an obscure art of light and the visible" which was "secretly preparing a whole new knowledge of man."³³

And yet there is a basic difference between the two types of visual technology, or of the place of the visual "technique" in knowledge and power. "Another knowledge, another power," says Foucault. Then he refers to Bacon:

On the threshold of the classical age, Bacon, lawyer and statesman, tried to develop a methodology for the empirical sciences. What Great Observer will produce the methodology of examination in the human sciences?³⁴

But he quickly adds:

33. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 171.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

Unless, of course, such a thing is not possible. For, although it is true that, in becoming a technique for the empirical sciences, the investigation has detached itself from the inquisitorial procedure, in which it was historically rooted, the examination has remained close to the disciplinary power that shaped it. It has always been and still is an intrinsic element of the disciplines.³⁵

Bacon's conception of experiment may have roots in Inquisitorial procedure—putting Nature to the rack to extract her secrets—but the technique has long been cut loose from the sorts of problems the Inquisition was designed to deal with. In the case of discipline and its technology of seeing, its “art of light and the visible,” by contrast, we see a process through which it multiplied and complexified its links to the problems it was designed to deal with; it spread out in a range of institutions where it retains the rationality of a “technical matrix.”

In the difficulties that arose from the implementation of “hard” technologies such as the steam engine, the electric plant, or the television, the focus of the “problematization” was not on the “evidence” of seeing steam, electricity, or electrons. By contrast just what Foucault found important in anti-psychiatric protest or prison revolts, was the way it questioned the very “technical matrix” of the disciplines which made the madman or the criminal visible; the way it exposed the very “evidence” through which those practices are accepted.

Thus the “philosophical” problem of “seeing electrons” is not at issue in the great questions of what to *do* with them, make war or energy. But the problem of “seeing psychoses” is involved in the questioning of what we should do about *them*. Seeing and doing are related in different ways. Another knowledge, another power. That is why the philosophical attitude towards one can be realistic, and towards the other, nominalistic. The realist of experiments and the nominalist of disciplines can agree that seeing in knowledge is a more complex matter than inferring from perception. For their differences lie in the way knowledge comes to be “visualized” or “spatialized.”

Spaces of Constructed Visibility

“Space” is a constant topic in Foucault's histories and in his thinking. As already indicated, it plays a prominent role in his study of medicine, and then it is taken up in a different way and generalized in his study of penal practices. The “spaces” we call the “territories” of states also become central in his study of the “police science” which helped introduce a new administrative sort of rationality, and a “geo-political” orientation and organization of war and diplomacy.

In the historical study of space, Foucault was impressed by the work of such

35. *Ibid.*

social historians as Bloch, Braudel, and Ariès. He thought their work might serve as a corrective to one tendency in the philosophy of time in Bergson, Heidegger, and Sartre—the tendency of putting “space” on the side of the “pratico-inert,” while reserving for time the great questions of project and history.³⁶

A significant portion of Foucault's discussion of “space” is devoted to the problem of *visibility*—how spaces were designed to make things seeable, and seeable in a specific way. In his histories of the visual unthought, the construction of space plays a key role.

During the course of an interview devoted to space, Foucault declares:

I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other.³⁷

“The spatial distributions in which (people) find themselves”—that names a recurrent topos in Foucault's work: hospitals, poorhouses, museums, public baths, schools, homes, asylums are all spaces in which one can reconstitute the rationality of an elaborate construction of what can be seen. They are spaces of constructed visibility.

We are surrounded by spaces which help form the evidences of the ways we see ourselves and one another. Where we “dwell,” how we are housed, helps in this way to determine who and what we think we are—and so they involve our freedom. We are beings who are “spatialized” in various ways; there is a historical spatialization of ourselves as subjects.

Foucault's analysis of “spaces of constructed visibility” brings out how they serve to “constitute the subject,” the way they serve to construct the spatialization of the subject or his “being in space.” “The art of light and the visible,” which such spaces are designed to deploy, is one which makes certain *kinds* of properties of ourselves stand out as self-evident.

Foucault suggests it is just this link between visibility and constructed space which would make a “technological” history of the art of architecture possible. For the art of building is, among other things, an art of rendering visible, and so discovers one of its central interconnections with power. Architecture helps “visualize” power in other ways than simply manifesting it. It is not simply a matter of what a building shows “symbolically” or “semiotically,” but also of what it makes visible about us and within us. Châteaux and churches may do this through the way they manifest divinity, sovereignty, and might. Before the museum, they may supply, as Malraux stressed, the central “imaginary” spaces which secure the categories through which art was given to be seen. But in

36. Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” *Knowledge/Power*, pp. 149–150.

37. Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, p. 86.

Ledoux's salt mine Foucault finds another relation between power, visibility, and constructed space, one connected to new problems of poverty and work, one to which Bentham would give the name "panopticism." The construction of buildings is involved in the new "art of light and the visible," which doesn't look up to the glory of those who possess or embody power, but looks down to the marginalized anonymous mass that escapes it.

The art or technique of the visual in "panoptic" architecture is not exhausted by the wondrous contrivances that make the constant surveillance of the inmates of its enclosed space invisible to them. Panoptic establishments also inscribe in cellular stone the new sorts of classifications designed to deal with wayward populations. They are constructed to facilitate the introduction of the "examination" procedures that rank and judge people according to their "visible" characteristics. This spatialization makes the new classifications, unlike contemporary botanical ones, "disciplinary"—what makes a person classifiable submits him to an "individualizing" control. Thus Foucault says, where natural taxonomy links category and character, disciplinary tactics link the singular and the multiple; they give attention to each and every member of a multiplicity individually. They make the categories into which the "character" of people are slotted "visible" in them; they create in people an "individuality" that is endowed with certain "essential" or evident sorts of properties. Thus it is not simply that the "eye of power" looks down rather than up. What it sees is no longer heroic acts, but dysfunctional personalities. It focuses light not on illegal acts, but on behavioral deficiencies. It "spatializes" this new thing which is the "personality" of an individual.

Bentham's panoptic scheme is related to the "self-evidence" of his great moral principle of the rational calculability of the good of individuals. For one's good to be tabulated one must be "seen" in a certain way, or under certain categories, just the sort of categories architecture would serve to make visible. An art of spatializing human multiplicities would then be central to the formulation of utilitarian ethics.

Ludwig Wittgenstein tried to show that "looking within" or "introspection" was nothing more than a rule-governed art of language. Foucault's analysis of the rules that govern the art of space shows that when we look within we often see not so much our Cartesian minds as the worrisome sources of our behavioral deficiencies, but that in this, we are no less participating in a practice which makes the sort of thing we see seem self-evident to us.

Seeing in Power

"Spatialization" is thus one technique in the exercise of power. That is why it cannot be separated from the "effective practice" of our freedom, or our relations with one another. There is a political history of the visual unthought: a history of the way forms of power "visualize" themselves. A principle of this history is that "visibility" is one of the great "self-evidences" of the workings of

power. Power becomes acceptable or tolerable through its spatialization or the way it is given to be seen.

Thus, in the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault says, "Power is *tolerable* only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of itself . . . would it be *accepted* if it were entirely cynical?"³⁸ One way it masks itself is to get people to "see" it in a certain way. Power conceals itself by visualizing itself. Its workings become acceptable because one sees of it only what it lets one see, only what it makes visible.

We are fascinated by the pomp, the "ostentatious signs" of power. That contributes to the "self-evidence" of our idea that it is owned or possessed, where in fact it is being anonymously exercised. One reason we don't see discipline as the form of power that it is is that we don't see how it makes us visible. The inspector in the tower doesn't possess or embody, doesn't *see*, the power he implements. The sort of "visibility" the disciplines introduce conceals not simply how they work, but what they are. We don't "see" discipline as power, because we don't "see" power as strategy.

In particular the techniques for visualizing power as sovereignty, nobility, and law have prevented us from seeing it as anonymous technique. In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault suggests how this proposition might be applied to the analysis of fascism. Something as the neo-Classical facades of panoptic prison architecture concealed the strategic construction of visibility within, so the great fascist "premodern" rituals of the ostentation of sovereignty, law, and blood concealed the very "modern" way its power in fact was working, and so helped to make it tolerable.

Seeing Through Desire

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault introduces another theme: the history of the sort of *pleasure* we take in what we see. He came to think that it is because it belongs to what we conceive of as our "sexuality" that we are *fascinated* by it, that we want to *expose* (or *exhibit*) it, a fascination and an exposition which are linked to *knowing* it, or to the sort of truth it might tell us about ourselves: "We have invented" declared Foucault,

a peculiar pleasure in knowing that truth, in discovering it and exposing (or exhibiting) it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it.³⁹

It has not always been this way. What has been taken to be most glorious or problematic about our sexual experience has not always been this thing that fascinates us, and which we must expose; the "spaces" and "techniques" which give it to be seen in this way have not always been with us. We have not always

38. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon, 1978, p. 86.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

been fascinated by our sexual *desire*, this dangerous thing Freud would be the first to have the courage to look at straight on.

Foucault wanted to determine how the “self-evidence” of this sexuality we must show and see arose in our knowledge, our agreements, and our practices. One place he looked was in what might be called the “voyeurism” of the nineteenth-century medicine of sexual deviancy: its special curiosity, its prurient preoccupation with its object—a “fascination” structurally not so unlike the “pornographic” search of one’s “secret life.” Foucault takes this interest as a historical property of a medical discourse and practice, not as a quirk of the doctors taken individually. But it was also a property of the “spaces” they worked in, a fact about a medical art of making sexuality visible, an incitement to see and show its dangerous truth.

One example is Jean-Marie Charcot’s La Salpêtrière, where Freud made his “discovery” of the unconscious. That space was not simply a space of constructed visibility, but also a space of the *incitement* to see. “It was an enormous apparatus for observation, with its examinations, interrogations and experiments.” But it was also:

a machinery for incitement, with its public presentations, its theatre of ritual crises, carefully staged with the help of amil nitrate, its interplay of dialogues, palpitations, laying on of hands, postures which doctors elicited or obliterated with a gesture or a word, its hierarchy of personnel who kept watch, organized, provoked, monitored, and reported, and who accumulated an immense pyramid of observations and dossiers.⁴⁰

And yet it refused to *name* what it thus incited to see: sexuality.

Charcot was said to be, and called himself, *un grand visuel*. And in his obituary, Freud says of Charcot that he was an artistically gifted seer, that the chaos of symptoms was set in order by the eye of his spirit, that he talked incessantly about the merits and difficulties of seeing in the ward of the sick, in which he said he found his greatest *satisfaction*. But, adds Freud, while he was a seer, a *visuel*, he was not a thinker or a “brooder.” He could not *name* theoretically what he saw. In this obituary we see the beginnings of what, for Freud, it would mean to “observe” the processes of unconscious desire.

Charcot invented a differential diagnostic scheme for the various “types” of *la grande hystérie*, as they were exhibited in the scenographic tableaux he staged. It was this typology which allowed him to connect hysteria to witchcraft, as it was depicted in paintings. But the explanatory part of his theory connected the bodily “poses” of the hysterics only to mysterious “organic lesions” of the cortex; sexuality was not a causal factor.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–57.

In this manner, he overcame the confusion of symptoms which had made hysteria emblematic of those mental disorders whose symptoms were a form of dissimulation or lying. But the staging of hysterical poses opened the possibility of a sort of counter-movement on the part of the hysterics: the possibility of disrupting the clear space of visibility, by introducing a sexual body. In this way, sexuality got into the picture. "I believe," Foucault said at the Collège de France in 1974, "that there was a *battle* of hysteria. . . . Hysteria was the set of phenomena of *struggle* that unfolded around this new medical machinery which was the neurological clinic."⁴¹

In the face of this sexual body, Charcot was obliged to turn away his "admirable gaze." Babinski gave up the theatricalization of the sickness and invented as an explanation "pithiatism," or the aptitude to let oneself be theatricalized. But Freud resolved to say, and to say theoretically, just what this space gave to be seen. The origin of hysteria, he said, lay in a woman's relation to her *sexuality*. And, around the theme of sexuality, Freud began to devise ways to connect what the hysteric *showed* with what she *said* in a new sort of space: the space of psychoanalysis.

With this sort of analysis, Foucault hoped to account for one feature that would distinguish the fascination and exhibition of sexuality in our society; one he sees Freud as having basically extended: its *medicalization*. What it is that we still want to see and to show about our sexual experience is its abnormality, its perversion, its sickness. And that fascination is an integral part of the pleasure we take in *knowing* about it.

One technology employed in Charcot's demonstrations was the new art of photography, and the photographs of the hysterical postures were published by the surrealists, who, as is well known, took a particular interest in the relation of seeing to mental disorder.

The Eye of Thought

What is it then to see the events in what is unthought in our thought? One visual image Foucault offers is that of surrounding the event with a sort of "polyhedron of intelligibility," the sides of which would extend indefinitely in many directions.⁴² It is to multiply the things associated with its "intelligibility,"

41. Quoted in Jacques Lagrange, "Versions de la psychanalyse dans le texte de Foucault," in *Psychanalyse à l'université* (April 1987), p. 263. In "The Ethics of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (*Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. XII [Summer 1987], p. 122), Foucault says that hysteria strikes him as the "very illustration" of a struggle of being constituted as mad: "It is not altogether a coincidence that the important phenomena of hysteria have been studied exactly where there was a maximum of coercion to compel individuals to consider themselves mad."

42. Deleuze says Foucault's "conception of the visible seems pictorial, close to Delaunay, for whom light . . . created its own forms and its own movements. Delaunay said: Cézanne broke the fruit-dish, and we should not glue it together again, as the cubists do." (Cf. also *Image-Temps*, where Deleuze has similar things to say about the non-expressionist use of light in the films of Rivette

and the ways they are associated with it. The greater and more specific the internal conceptual analysis of the event, the greater the external processes with which its “invisible” or “evident” intelligibility is linked. Thus in Foucault’s analysis of the event of the prison-form, he finds an intelligibility that connects it to pedagogical practices, professional armies, British empiricism, the new division of labor, and the invention of gunpowder, through the transference of technical models to other domains, new applications of theories, or new strategies to deal with local problems.

Foucault thus starts with the idea that there may be no such thing, no such “essence” as *the* visual, something that might be described by a “phenomenology of perception” or a “theory of the gaze,” something which, following Martin Jay, Foucault would be against. Rather, history presents us with many different singular sorts of visual intelligibility, ways of seeing and making seeable, the unity of which is not to be found in the nature of the eye, empirical or transcendental, or in “the imaginary order.” Where and when “the visual” acquires the status of essence, universality, and necessity, the philosopher’s eye must look for the singular and contingent processes that make it self-evident, and so acceptable.

Something as in the philosophical task captured in Wittgenstein’s famous precept “don’t think, look!”, the philosopher’s eye, the eye of thought, is neither contemplative nor introspective. It does not look up to see the forms it has forgotten, or look within to see the point from which action should proceed, or the self-certainty from which knowledge should be derived.⁴³ It looks *out* to those events in thought through which things are given to be seen. It looks out in order to *change* its way of seeing. Thus in 1981, Foucault declared:

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience—always in relations I *saw* taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized something cracked, dully jarring or dysfunctioning in the things I *saw*, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography.⁴⁴

When a philosopher “sees” something problematic or dysfunctioning around him, he doesn’t turn his eye around to the ideals in whose light the problems appear as imperfections or counter-instances; he doesn’t turn it within to see the true or authentic self in whose light the problems figure as distortions or mystifications. His seeing starts a form of theoretical work which, in analyzing

[*L’Image-Temps*, Paris, Editions Minuit, 1985, pp. 20ff.].) This is of course not the only way of connecting Foucault’s art of seeing to modern pictorial practices.

43. Foucault briefly discusses Plato’s “famous metaphor of the eye,” in Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, pp. 367–368.

44. “Est-il donc important de penser?” *Libération*, May 30-31, 1981.

how the problems arose and were conceived, transforms his way of seeing them — and so his way of *living*.

Ethos, Beauty, Danger

“Fragments of an autobiography” — Foucault’s art of seeing is also a philosophical art of living. His theoretical work is “autobiographical” not because it is a way of transcribing his experiences, but because it forms an exercise in which to periodically question the given conceptions of his experience, and so look for new ones. Autobiography in this sense is not the attempt to provide an image or picture of who one was or how one should be seen, but a form of work to change oneself by changing one’s way of seeing.

Foucault’s writings do not unfold as a single doctrine or theory of things. At particular moments he changed his mind as to his aims, objects, and methods. As in the case of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, or Heidegger, his thought is punctuated by transformations in the way he conceived of his own philosophical task. In the Introduction to the volumes published shortly before his death, he pictures this process as an exercise or *ascesis* of disengaging himself from himself in his work (*se déprendre de soi-même*), through “essays” that try to alter his way of seeing things. But he adds, there is an irony in this process. It is precisely such efforts to free oneself from oneself that makes one’s work one’s own; one finds who one has been by always getting away from oneself.

Such is the irony of the efforts one makes to change one’s way of seeing (*façon de voir*). . . . Have they in fact led to thinking in another way (*penser autrement*)? Maybe at best they have allowed one to think in another way what one already thought, and to see what one has done from a different vantage point and in a clearer light. . . .⁴⁵

And the new light under which Foucault saw what he had been doing in his previous work was the light of “problematizations”:

I now feel I better perceive how . . . I was proceeding in this enterprise of a history of truth: to analyze . . . the *problematizations* through which being gives itself as what can be, and what must be, thought, and the *practices* through which these *problematizations* are formed.⁴⁶

There may be no final “enlightened” solution to our relations with pain, illness, crime, madness, and death. And yet it is a historical fact that there arose various forms of intelligibility or rationality in the way people actually came to see such things, and the way they consequently erected around themselves forms of knowledge and action, and modes of living. Those experiences have not

45. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 11 (translation revised).

46. *Ibid.* (translation revised).

always been seen as raising the same sorts of problems. To analyze their history is to see the specific sorts of danger or problem which led to the evidence of a particular way of conceiving and dealing with them. Thus, according to his new way of seeing, what he would have been studying, in his previous work, is how people *saw* what is dangerous in being mad, ill, or criminal, how they envisaged those dangers and made them “visible” or “spatialized” them in knowledge and action.

Foucault proposed to view his histories of madness, of illness, or of crime as histories of just what it was in the experience of madness, illness, or crime which was so problematic as to become something which both could be, and *had* to be thought. And he began to associate such problematizations of experience with particular modes of living or being, modes of being a person of a particular sort. Thus he would have been asking what are the problematizations and consequent practices “by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives of himself as a living, speaking, laboring being; when he judges himself as a criminal?”⁴⁷

In the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault had looked for something more basic than the “mindless phenomenologies” of the “encounter” between doctor and patient, and the “so-called ‘liberal’” notion of a contract or pact between two individuals. He had tried to see a “major event in the relations of man to himself and to the language of things.”⁴⁸ The new “spatialization” of illness in the pathologies of the individual organs would have fundamentally changed the relations people had to themselves and to one another in “being ill.” It would introduce a whole new sort of “ethical” intelligibility of the problems of doctor, patient, and pathologist.

Similarly, Foucault’s history of madness may be read as an examination of how “being mad” was seen as a source of danger in society and in the individual. Thus there arose a new way of seeing the problem of madness. The class of inmates in the General Hospital may seem heteroclit to us. It answered to a perfectly intelligible way of seeing a problem, a “sensibility” for which the central danger to society and self had become *idleness*. This way of seeing derived in part from a theological promotion of idleness over vanity as the cardinal sin. It also arose from a new conception of labor and poverty that was to become the target of a new administrative sort of rationality. And it was central in the thinking through which the hysteria of idle women could enter medical discourse.

But as the techniques of moral assignation in the “enlightened” asylums of Tuke and Pinel show, there arose a question not simply of dangers from without,

47. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

48. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. xiv.

or in social relations, but also from within, or in one's relation to oneself, and so to others. Guilt, shame, irresponsibility, weakness, or the will as forms of relations to one's self arise within different spaces and under different conceptions; they are conceived in relation to particular dangers or problems.⁴⁹

The new light of problematization thus brought into focus the *ethical* concerns of his previous histories. It offered Foucault a way of thinking about the origins and the changes in the very conception of ethics: its basic questions, what it supposed to be true about us, the sorts of relations it was thought to have with knowledge, law, or politics.

To be sure, Foucault had not been worried about the justification of the principles of ethical action; rather, he had been studying how ethical thought and practice had seen and responded to certain sorts of problems or dangers: the ways *it* had conceived of the obstacles one must overcome to be good or do right, the ways *it* had rationalized a way of dealing with what it saw as wrong, sinful, or evil.

The possibility of a history of ethics arose that would study the specific sorts of dangers or problems it was designed to overcome. But, in studying this history, we should not look "for the solution of a current problem in the solution another problem raised at another moment by other people."⁵⁰ The history of the problematizations of "ways of being" in ethics is not a nostalgic one. "History," Foucault said, "protects us from historicism—from the historicism that calls on the past to respond to questions of the present."⁵¹

Rather, Foucault says, the analysis of problematizations is itself "dangerous." In the *Order of Things*, Foucault had already said that when, in modern thinking, the "cosmological" form of moral thought is no longer possible, it is thought itself which becomes dangerous—a "perilous act."⁵² And, speaking of his "pessimistic activism" in a late interview, Foucault declared:

I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not the same thing as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.⁵³

In his last work, and in his last conception of his work, Foucault connected his art of seeing to the "ethico-political choice" one makes of "determining which is the

49. In his *L'Etat Providence* (Paris, Grasset, 1986), François Ewald argues that accidents constituted a new sort of danger or problem, which, for example, does not figure in the sort of catalogue of the evils of the eighteenth century one finds in Voltaire's *Candide*. With the insurance strategy used to administer the risks of accidents emerged a new sort of "juridical experience" and a new class of rights.

50. Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, p. 343.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

52. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 328.

53. Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, p. 343.

real danger.” The choice of trying to see just what it is that we have to struggle against in order to free ourselves (and free ourselves *from* ourselves). And this freedom is dangerous, since we can never have in advance a determinant or complete picture of it.

For, as a thinker and seer, Foucault was concerned with a situation, prior to the possibility of deductive normative reasoning, where one sees something must be done without yet knowing what. A space not of deduction but of questioning and analysis is thus opened up between the choice one makes and what one does, in which one tries to conceive what the danger is which one does not yet fully see, but in relation to which one must take action. It is one’s responsibility to this thing that troubles, but which one can’t yet describe or name, that requires one to work to change oneself. One’s work is the attempt to change one’s way of seeing and living in relation to those specific dangers one does not yet know what to do about.

Foucault thought that this kind of relation between seeing, living, and action might be conceived as an “aesthetics of existence” which contrasted with the one he tried to reconstruct in the ancient ethical schools of *savoir-vivre*.

In Foucault’s reconstruction of ancient ethical thought, what in sex was seen as dangerous enough to become the object of a whole practice of self-transformation was not yet the sins of the flesh or the odd desires that fascinate us and that lurk in the pathogenic recesses of our heads. It was the excessive activity that threatened a loss of self-mastery in those meant to rule—a danger to the *ethos*, the fitting mode of being, of the free adult male. But the *ethos* of the “civic man” in his health, home, and courtship, around which the ancient ethical practices turned, was rather different from the ethos of the Christian “inward man,” and the Augustinian problem that all sexual desire is tinged by the Fall, and is the model of sin in general, or the “democracy of shame” that linked the Christian community to the problem of poverty. Foucault sought to analyze these great changes in the problems of “being sexual” in terms of the ethical practices in which one is asked to transform oneself under a particular conception of one’s experience, aims, and obligations.

In the analysis of the ancient arts of being virtuous, seeing and being seen played a significant role. As has often been observed, the ancient conception of “beauty”—beauty in the ethical sense—was a particularly *visual* one. And yet such activities of “presentation of self” were “problematized” and conceived in a rather different manner from the questions of identity, authenticity and engagement Sartre associated with “the gaze.” If the proud virile body of the master was a “lived body,” it was lived in a different way than the one Sartre had envisaged in his account of our “concrete relations” with ourselves and one another. Seeing oneself and one’s mode of living had a different sort of intelligibility in this ethics.

Self-mastery was like the visualized evidence of one’s fitness to rule. One had to be able to show, and to show *truly*, one’s state of temperate control of soul

and body as something noble and beautiful to be glorified for posterity. The aim or telos of the self-forming practices was thus a beautiful accord or harmony between who one is and what one does and says. Beauty was an ethical category; seeing and showing oneself were thus part of an etho-poetics, an aesthetics of existence. And the link between visible beauty and mode of being took place and was formed in certain "spaces," the *oikos*, and the *agora*. The *oikos* was a "space of constructed visibility." Discussion of marital duties was a discussion of the distribution of roles and natures in the "space" of the *oikos*, whose "roof" divided what was inside from outside. Thus there was the problem of makeup and paint in a debate about pleasures and truth: makeup can have no place in the beautiful way the mistress of the house must "carry herself," in which "standing and walking will give her body that certain demeanor, that carriage (*allure*) which, in the eyes of the Greeks, characterized the figure (*la plastique*) of the free individual."⁵⁴ In this idea of beauty, *mimesis* was a category at once of one's relation to oneself, or one's "figure," and of the relation of the "figure" of a work to what it makes appear.

If Hegel saw in this Greek experience of beauty a first "moment" of that to which spirit returns in the work of history which passes through art and religion to the state, for Foucault, the Greek experience is rather a "lost evidence," a solution to a danger no longer ours. The art of making oneself in the image of an active freedom no longer has the same central and self-evident place in our ethical thought. We have lost the "ethopoetics" that made existence the object of an aesthetics. We see other dangers, and deal with them in other ways. Our disciplined "docile and useful" bodies are not the "self-possessed" bodies of the ancient master. The Benthamite spaces which helped give the calculability of what is good for us its central ethical importance are rather different from the spaces in which the ancient question of the wisdom of the good life was raised.

For there to be a modern "aesthetics of existence," the very concept of beauty in living must change. This is the change Foucault associated with Baudelaire, and with the modern principle that "the subject is not given." For us the danger is not that we might fail to become what we are meant to be, but that we might only be what we can see ourselves to be. In ancient thought, freedom was something beautiful to be made visible in soul and body; and the loss of freedom could thus be seen as something ugly. But when "the subject is not given," our freedom ceases to have an image. It is that which we can never yet see. Its beauty lies in this danger. For us, beauty no longer resides in the

54. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 162. In "The Ethics of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault says, "The Greeks, in fact, considered . . . the freedom of the individual as an ethical problem. But ethical in the sense that the Greeks could understand. *Ethos* was the deportment and the way to behave. It was the subject's mode of being and a certain manner of acting *visible to others*. One's *ethos was seen* by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events, etc. For them that is the concrete expression of liberty. That is the way they 'problematized' their freedom" (p. 117 [emphasis added]).

perfection of a living harmony between ourselves and the “spaces” in which we can become what it is natural, given, and possible for us to be, but in what cannot yet be seen or named about us in the spaces we inhabit.

Beauty in living would lie in a dissonance or disharmony between one’s given nature and one’s possibilities of existence, between one’s identity and what one can see in oneself and in the processes going on around one. The danger of beauty thus gives rise to an *oeuvre de soi* in which to see what one should do is to change one’s mode of living, and in which changing one’s mode of living involves changing one’s way of seeing, one’s *façon de voir*. One changes oneself as one comes to see what is dangerous in one’s existence, and comes to see what is dangerous by changing oneself.

Foucault thus came to think of the art of seeing he had been practicing as an “aesthetics of existence,” an art of living. In this art, the events one sees going on around one interrupt one’s sense of one’s self and cause one to think and to rethink. Foucault’s exercise in seeing and thinking would then be the exercise for a modern *ethos* of freedom — the freedom for which we never yet have the image and the *ethos* in which beauty lies in coming to see the real dangers we must face.

Seeing Outside

This attempt to move out from oneself in the “essays” one writes is not so unlike the “attitude to modernity” Foucault finds in Baudelaire. In the course of a late discussion of Kant’s paper on enlightenment, he says that Baudelaire’s “exercise on himself” as a writer would transpire in “another, different place,” outside the realm of society and politics — the place Baudelaire called “art.”⁵⁵ How, then, is Foucault’s “art of seeing” related to the way he saw this “art”? And, in particular, what does this “art of seeing” have to do with the conception of “modern” art and literature, which he himself advanced in a series of essays in the ’60s, but from which he later sought to distance himself? It is important for Deleuze’s reading to establish a continuity throughout Foucault’s work based in his early conception of work or *oeuvre*.

In the last pages of *Madness and Civilization*, one can already find the germs of this question in the discussion of *absence d’oeuvre*, a post-Romantic idea with roots in Sade and Hölderlin, in which one’s relation to madness would be linked to one’s *oeuvre* not as its expressive content, but as the unsayable or unspeakable source from which the work would emerge, and into which it would again disappear.⁵⁶ “*Absence d’oeuvre*” doesn’t mean there is no work or that one is out of work, as the English translations oddly suggest.⁵⁷ Rather through one’s work

55. Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, p. 42.

56. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 229ff.

57. Richard Howard’s “the absence of the work of art” would translate *l’absence de l’oeuvre* not *l’absence d’oeuvre*. Alan Sheridan thinks the term means “an unproductive idleness, outside human achievement” (in Alan Sheridan, *Foucault: The Will to Truth*, London, Tavistock, 1980, p. 15).

one tries to say something as yet unsayable, or to see something as yet invisible, and so one opens out a space of a sort of rhythmic "disappearance" of oneself in and through one's work. The "being of language" (as distinct from its regulated use in "discourse") would offer the occasion and the condition of this modern "attitude" to oneself in one's work. In the '60s Foucault argued that this was a conception basic to the work of such writers as Klossowski, Bataille, and Blanchot.

English-language discussion has mostly ignored this theme in Foucault's own oeuvre. And yet it is the one Derrida admired in his critical review of Foucault. It is also the one which Deleuze invokes in another way in his presentation of Foucault as seer. In effect, he sees Foucault as bringing the exercise of writing as *désœuvrement* into the fields of history, politics, and epistemology. Deleuze says the "being of language," which would be the condition and occasion of literature is also the condition and occasion of Foucault's archeology of discourse. And he says the opening of visibility, or "the being of light," which would be the chance of the visual arts, is also the condition of Foucault's art of seeing.⁵⁸

That is one reason Deleuze can say that Foucault is "singularly close to film." For the central concept in Deleuze's own analysis of the role of thought in film is the concept of *désœuvrement*. In response to Godard's prognostication of an end to film theory, he says "the concepts of film are not given in film."⁵⁹ There is a sort of "filmic unthought" from which film tries constantly to free itself and so open itself to other ways of thinking and showing. Thought in film is a *tout ouvert*, a conceptual ensemble open to transformation. As such it can be analyzed as a great art of conceiving of light, movement, time, and space, of conceptualizing the viscosity of the "spaces" through which we are given to be seen. Deleuze contests the attempt of Christian Metz to make narrative the central question around which filmic thought must turn, and the resulting choice one would have to make between the good abstract or theoretical film, and the bad commercial, ideological, narrative one. The viscosity films make intelligible is not that of the physical medium theory must purify of all *récit*; it is a tacit conceptual organization which links film to the way space, subjectivity, and time are philosophically understood.

And yet, after '68, or with his "political" turn, one hears a good deal less

58. Deleuze tends to pair "discursivity" with words and concepts and "visibility" with things and intuitions or sensibilities. But, according to another reading of Foucault's idiom, one can "say" things with images and space just as one can "show" things with words or sentences. Language is one way of "spatializing" or "visualizing," and there are "evidences" of discourses just as there are of "sensibilities." Conversely spaces or images can make statements. Thus, for example, just as much as the letters on the typewriter keyboard, it might count as an *énoncé* that, during the colonial period, maps were made with Britain at the center. Perhaps the relation between ways of seeing and ways of saying in Foucault lies in the histories of the tacit thinking that underlies them, and does not easily match with the traditional distinctions between concept and intuition, or word and thing.

59. Deleuze, *L'Image-Temps*, p. 365.

about the “being of language” (or of light) in Foucault’s work, and the figures of Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and Bataille cease to haunt the margins of his institutional histories. As I say in my book, Foucault changes his mind about Sade and Bataille. And in a posthumously published interview from 1975, Foucault himself says as much.⁶⁰ He says that in his essays on such figures as Blanchot and Bataille in the ’60s, it was not the idea of literature itself which was important to him. The reference to such figures in his histories, he says, was a matter of simple *constat*, something he would have noted in passing as though on a walk. What was important to him in Blanchot was the attempt to get out of a certain “Hegelianism” that assigned literature a privileged expressive role in history, and to ask instead about the singular place a society would accord to the writing it calls literary. Blanchot was one way out of a certain style of philosophy; it offered the possibility of another way of thinking in which one tries constantly to see outside the bounds of seeing and think outside the bounds of thinking. But at the same time, Foucault says he came to adopt a “negative attitude” towards the “sacralization” of this new conception of literature which took hold in the university, a sacralization, which, paradoxically, this new literature had first intended to resist. He says there arose an “ultra-rationalist” and “ultra-lyrical” idea of a literature radical in referring only to itself, in which writing would acquire inviolable rights to “subversion,” and in which the more involuted one could make one’s writing, the more “revolutionary” one would become. Foucault saw this idea as a form of “political blockage,” and presents his own books on Roussel and Rivière as his way out of the new academic sanctification of literature.

Nevertheless, one can argue that his early ideas about the oeuvres of modernity did not altogether disappear from his thinking. If *absence d’oeuvre* ceases to be an object of his histories, it comes to supply something of the *ethos* of his work as historian. Rather than being the obscure hero of his histories, Nietzsche would be someone he would put to a new *use*; and he would continue Baudelaire’s “attitude to modernity” in his own work in another way. It is thus that Foucault would extend the place Baudelaire called “art” to a particular ethic of thinking, seeing, and living.

In his 1966 essay on Blanchot, Foucault says that “absence” is not inside a work but *outside* it; modernist literature is not the literature that turns in on itself, but the one that opens itself outside itself; it does not make beautiful forms appear within, but it takes those forms outside of what they have been. Perhaps this sort of “absence” became part of Foucault’s view of his own oeuvre: what we cannot yet see in the forms of knowledge, action, and experience through which we are given to ourselves. Foucault’s philosophy was about possibility: what we *can* think and what we *can* change in what we think. He wanted to do a history not of what is true or false, but of what can be; not of what to do, but of what can

60. “Foucault, passe-frontières de la philosophie,” *Le Monde*, September 6, 1986.

be done; not of how to live but of the possibilities of living. He thus discovered a kind of “impossibility” that was not logical but historical: not the impossibility of a round square or a non-existent god, but of what is no longer or not yet possible to think; not what is meaningless, but what is not yet or no longer meaningful. Such “absence” was a matter of a historical constraint on thought, which it would be the work of philosophy to bring to light.

In this sense Foucault’s art of seeing might be said to be the art of seeing outside ourselves, or seeing the “absence” in our work. Not to look within to a true or authentic self; not to master one’s time by holding it in one’s thought; not to find a place for oneself within society or state, but to look out from oneself, to open one’s time to what has not yet been seen, to transform or displace one’s instituted, assigned identity at a time and place. In this sense Foucault’s art of seeing is an art of looking out, which would “give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.”⁶¹

61. Hoy, ed., *Foucault Reader*, p. 46.