

CAREFUL BECOMINGS: FOUCAULT, DELEUZE, AND BERGSON¹

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... I am referring to what might be called “the arts of existence.” What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.

Foucault, *The Use of Pleasures* (1985/1984, pp. 10-11).²

Criticism and the Clinic: life and *oeuvre* are the same thing, when they have adapted the line of flight which makes them components of the same war-machine. In these conditions life has for a long time ceased to be personal and the *oeuvre* has ceased to be literary or textual.

Deleuze & Parnet, *Dialogues* (1987/1977, p. 141).

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² *Oeuvre* has been in Foucault’s vocabulary since almost the beginning, but it did not always have a purely positive valence. In the 1961 *History of Madness* we can read: “Madness is the absolute rupture of the *oeuvre*: it is the constitutive moment of abolition, which founds the truth of the *oeuvre* in time; it delineates the outer limit, the line of collapse, its outline against the void. Artaud’s *oeuvre* experiences in madness its own absence ... that is the *oeuvre* itself -- a cliff-face over the abyss of the *oeuvre*’s absence” (2006/1961, p. 536). In 1964, Foucault published a paper called “Madness, the absence of an *oeuvre*” (2006/1964). In lectures from 1984, he described his late work on the care of the self as tracing the interaction between truth-telling and “the principle of existence as an *oeuvre* to be fashioned in all its possible perfection” (Foucault, 2011, p. 163).

Abstract: This essay argues for a convergence between, on the one side, Foucault's characterization of the care of the self as a way of overcoming the traps of anthropological sleep, and on the other side, Deleuze's characterization of initiating becomings as a way of fleeing the traps of organization, a line of flight, becoming becoming. This convergence is defended on the basis of a Bergsonian ontology of becoming, and in particular, Bergson's opposition to what he calls the retrograde motion of truth. One result of this convergence is that a Wittgensteinian approach to the sense of life floats to the surface. A kind of mysticism.

Key words: Foucault; Deleuze; Bergson; Wittgenstein; aesthetics of existence.

In November 1980, when an interviewer asked him whether it was true that he was a nihilist who refused morality, Foucault answered abruptly "No" (2016, p. 128). Skipping, for a moment, Foucault's brief elaboration of what he called "my morality" (p. 128), I want first of all to remind us how common it was, and is, to be disappointed by the bounty of Foucault's writings. When sympathetic readers turn to his work expecting suggestions for how to oppose or to reform some matrix of what feels like domination, he never gives them what they want. To read Foucault is to court disappointment. And I imagine it was from that place of blank disappointment that the interviewer's question about Foucault's supposed nihilism surfaced.

It is quite otherwise with Deleuze. It is not that he cannot be disappointing, it is rather that his sympathetic readers always felt that although there seemed to be dangers, it looked like it would be glorious to make yourself a body without organs, or to take off on a line of flight, becoming-music. Deleuze and Guattari count so much on this excited response, that they more or less end the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with a warning, a warning not to get too excited too soon, writing: "Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us" (1987/1980, p. 509). Early in her career, reviewing Deleuze and Parnet's *Dialogues*, Judith Butler even turns the heady excitement Deleuze incites into a criticism. Here is Butler:

Throughout the text, there appears a kind of ontological utopianism which makes me wonder what kind of mystified redescription of the world this text turns out to be ... Deleuze ends up promoting an improbable utopia in the name of ontology (1988, p. 165).

So while Foucault has been criticized for leaving readers feeling trapped and disappointed, Deleuze has been criticized for luring readers into some naive utopianism, smelling dangerously of mystical ontology.

In this essay, I will attempt to weaken the strength of both of these reactions at the same time: to suggest that the reasons Foucault should *not* be so disappointing are, also, precisely the reasons why we *should* welcome the attraction of Deleuze and Guattari's strange inventions, bodies without organs, lines of flight, becoming-music. Finally I will try to bring home the Wittgensteinian idea we can see him considering in this parenthesis from the *Tractatus*:

(Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?) There is indeed the inexpressible [*Unaussprechliches*]. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical. (1961/1921, §§ 6.521-6.522)

The Wittgensteinian idea that the sense of life is inexpressible.

It's a tall order, so let's start. Perhaps I was not the only one to have been surprised when Deleuze told us: "In truth, one thing haunts Foucault -- thought" (1988/1986, p. 116). Madness, we knew he was concerned with, Prisons, Sexuality, Medicine, even Spiritual Practices, these we knew he was interested in, but thought? Thinking, itself? And yet introducing the second volume of the history of sexuality Foucault appeared to be agreeing with Deleuze, when he wrote:

But, then, what is philosophy today -- philosophical activity, I mean -- if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think otherwise [*autrement*], instead of legitimating what is already known? (1985/1984, p. 9)³.

This passage is the first of two keys to my interpretation of Foucault. It is worth repeating. Philosophy today is the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself, but it is not the critical work that legitimizes our habits of thought, it is rather the critical work that uncovers a possibility, the possibility of thinking otherwise. In the end, just to understand these sentences, we will have to come to an understanding of possibility, itself. However, this first key passage speaks more obviously of criticism, the criticism that thought brings to bear on itself.

Mostly we think of criticism as *de-legitimizing* by holding thought or knowledge to a standard external to itself, like truth: for example, you say the traffic's improved by the new signage, and I critique your claim by showing that in reality the traffic flows are unchanged. That is still how most of us use critique, for most of us, even most of Foucault's sympathetic readers, are not hoping for anything deeper than simply using practical pragmatic considerations to criticize or improve the institutions, relationships, and theories that keep us up at night. It is not nothing, and it is often, as with sexism and racism, extraordinarily difficult, but mostly that is all the *thinking otherwise* we ever hope for. Nevertheless, and although you would never know it from the names they call him, Foucault did hope for more.

Unlike this familiar form of critique, Kant's critique was not external. Kant invented a second form of critique which by discovering the necessary internal limiting requirements of any knowledge at all, attempted to legitimate thought from the inside⁴: if you keep thought within these necessary limits you might be right or you might be wrong, but you will never fall into nonsense or absurdity. Beyond those limits, thought is not possible, at all. It is in this sense that this internal form of critique *legitimizes* how we already think, and it immediately sets this legitimating Kantian critique against Foucault's hopes for an other critique.

Foucault practiced a third form of critique which neither legitimizes nor de-legitimizes, but which tries to crack open the door to thinking otherwise. Foucault practiced a critique

³ The importance of *thought* to Foucault does not begin with this passage from 1984. For instance, already in 1961, he had essayed the idea that "Nietzsche's madness, i.e., the collapse of his thought, is the way in which that thought opens onto the modern world" (2006/1961, p. 537). Moreover, in 1966 he published a paper on Blanchot called "The Thought of the Outside" (1998).

⁴ Clement Greenberg is famous for the suggestion that this form of Kantian criticism is the beginning of modernism (1960), and Foucault almost says the same at (1970/1966, p. 242).

by genealogy in the lineage of Nietzsche. In the preface to the *Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche had italicized his demand that "... we need a *critique* of moral values, *for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*----and for this we need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted..." (1998/1887, p. 5). Foucault's books work to make it obvious that what we naively take to be the essential nature of the mad or the criminal or the perverse is not essential at all, but in each case a pattern of thinking that has a contingent historical genealogy specific to itself. At times he framed his project in terms of trying to break free from the constraints of the philosophy of the subject which dominated the first 50 years of the 20th century, and in these moods he characterizes his work, as a whole, as providing what he called a "genealogy of the subject" (2016, p. 22).

Now, supposing his genealogies were persuasive, then if the task of philosophical activity were "to know how and to what extent it is possible to think otherwise," well then you might have thought Foucault's project would be completed (1985/1984, p. 9). But it is not. Showing that our modes of thought are not necessary, that therefore there *are* other modes of thinking, does not, all by itself, show us *how* to think differently. It does not show us what to do. And precisely that is why reading Foucault has so often disappointed his readers. They want to know what to do about some matrix of what seems like domination, and since Foucault doesn't tell them, they start thinking he must be some kind of nihilist who doesn't believe in morality at all. Some even feel that Foucault has successfully shown us how awful the world is and that there is nothing that can be done about it. Trapped. Frozen in place. A bad place. Trapped.

Nevertheless, this feeling of being trapped is an illusion, an illusion which Foucault's work helps us both to understand and to flee, escaping on a line of flight. What brings Foucault and Deleuze together is that both of them answer the call of becoming. Although this will be obvious in the case of Deleuze, it may not be so obvious with Foucault. But remember that interviewer who asked whether Foucault was a nihilist? Foucault's answer to that question releases what will be the second key to my interpretation of Foucault. The first was thinking otherwise the second is restoring mobility, or as we might say, becoming becoming. In answering the charge of nihilism, Foucault insists that "what we have to rise up against is all forms of power," and he explained that for him power includes "everything that actually aims to immobilize and render sacrosanct what is given to us as real, true, and good" (2016, p. 127). And this already shows that what was drawing Foucault forward was the call of becoming, what he describes on that same page as "an effort to restore to things their mobility, the possibility of being modified or of changing" (p. 127). And that further specifies my task as that of understanding, both in what way power immobilizes the real, the true, and the good, and also in what ways we might get them moving again, restoring them to life, to becoming. Becoming will turn out to be the ontological condition of thinking otherwise, but let's take the illusion of being immobilized first, our illusion of being trapped.

One consequence of Foucault's reconception of power is that we should not think of ourselves as trapped by forces outside of us but rather as—in some way—trapping ourselves. After all, he told us that philosophical work today consists in the critical activity that "thought brings to bear on itself" (1985/1984, p. 7). And that is why he could characterize each of the aspects of the genealogy of the subject he had already undertaken in *reflexive*

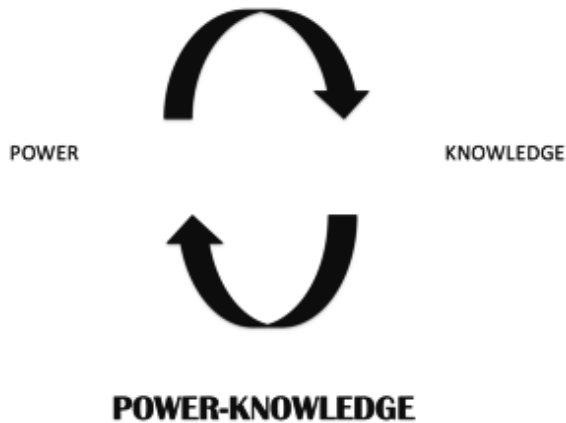


Fig 1. Power-Knowledge

terms. Here is a late listing, in his own terms, of the questions he had been addressing since the 1961 *History of Madness*:

What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives *himself* as mad; when he considers *himself* to be ill; when he conceives of *himself* as a living, speaking, laboring being; when he judges and punishes *himself* as a criminal? What were the games of truth by which human beings came to see *themselves* as desiring individuals? (1985/1984, pp. 6-7, my italics).

We experience ourselves in terms of games of truth—an expression to which I will return—we experience ourselves in terms of games of truth which apply to ourselves and so we come to find it impossible to experience ourselves in any other way. That is how we trap ourselves, that is how we immobilize ourselves in terms of “what is given to us as real, true, and good” (Foucault, 2016, p. 127). What we learn about ourselves loops or cycles back into who we think we are. What we learn about ourselves restrains the possibilities that we can imagine for ourselves.

It is a general problem, familiar in philosophy of science. Ian Hacking for instance, drew our attention to the avalanche of population statistics in the 1800s which incited new categorizations of people, and he notes that “defining new classes of people for the purposes of statistics has consequences for the ways in which we conceive of others and think of our possibilities and potentialities” (1990, p. 6). The new categories come to limit what we conceive of as our possibilities. It is no less true that when the procedures of microphysics demand the use of huge Swiss accelerators, our understanding of microphysics will be restricted by the possibilities of those gigantic instruments. If this doesn’t seem as urgent as Foucault’s discussion of the production of various species of delinquents by practices of discipline, or the production of various species of pervert by practices of control, this is not because panoptical and cyclotronic architectures don’t participate in the same *self-sealing epistemological circles*, but rather because we are not, ourselves, quarks or large hadrons,

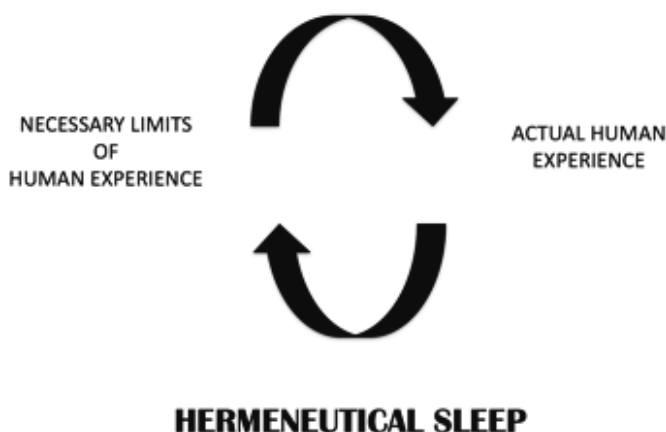


Fig. 2. Hermeneutical sleep

while we are ourselves the products of discipline and control. There is an epistemic loop here that was Foucault's central target, from the beginning to the end. When he observed in *Discipline and Punish* that "the carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible," he was using the famous expression power-knowledge as a way of characterizing that loop (1977/1975, p. 305).

I know of one passage, perhaps there are more, in which while introducing the loop in other terms, he almost even calls it a loop. This passage from 1980:

And I have a feeling that there is a kind of *appui réciproque*, a mutual support: the way we are governed tries to justify itself by reference to a hermeneutics of the self, the human sciences, and so on, and these hermeneutics of the self are referred eventually to a good political functioning and institutions and so on (2016, p. 107).

This is the epistemic loop of mutual support that traps us. I think of it as the dictatorship of the social sciences which makes creative thought impossible, but he spoke of it more specifically in terms of anthropology, and for a while, enjoying the dig at Kant, he spoke of being trapped in this anthropological loop as being adrift in an anthropological sleep.⁵ Toward the end of his career he began to substitute hermeneutics for anthropology.⁶ And

⁵ Here is Foucault in *The Order of Things* from 1966: The anthropological configuration of modern philosophy consists in doubling over dogmatism, in dividing it into two different levels each lending support and limiting the other: the precritical analysis of what man is in his essence becomes the analytic of everything that can, in general, be presented to man's experience (1970/1966, p. 341).

⁶ Hermeneutics became a general name for this anthropologism in this passage from a 1980 interview with Hubert Dreyfus: This movement of anthropology, of anthropologism, or of humanism, this inversion, this constant tendency and what I would call hermeneutics, consists in discovering, in searching for, [FIRST] on the basis of the self and its experience insofar as it is a subjective experience,

although he never quite managed to say that being trapped in this loop was becoming lost in an hermeneutical sleep, I like to imagine he did (Foucault, 2016, pp. 90-91).

In every case, the *techniques* of investigation and the *results* of investigation are reciprocally supporting (Foucault, 2016, p. 107). Thus the structure of any investigation will serve, epistemologically no less than psychologically, to trap us in the plane of our present thinking. Nevertheless, practical and theoretical reform will still be possible, because the loop of our current thinking does not limit what is in fact true or false, but what is *able* to be true or false. We can of course use plain truths about childhood to improve education, for example, but as important as that is, this will not show us how to *think otherwise* (Foucault, 2016, p. 108). When Foucault's sympathetic readers want to be told what to do about the surveillance state, they too remain in the plane of current thinking. The importance of such ordinary critique, the first of the three kinds I distinguished, is undeniable, but Foucault is heading elsewhere—toward thinking otherwise. I suspect that is why he began speaking of games of truth, to escape the privilege of what is true.

The lesson of Foucault's loop, put in blunt ontological terms is that there is no being there is only becoming, a becoming which gets turned into what we take to be being by our techniques of investigation. There are no unbreakable nuggets of truth, and although we often think of inquiry as gradually putting more and more nuggets of truth on the shelf, there are no such nuggets. Here is how Foucault characterizes the history of truth:

Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of "games of truth," the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought (1985/1984, pp. 6-7).

A lot of philosophy crowds in on us here. It seems that there is something, *being*, which is constituted as *experience* by the our inhabiting historically variable *games of truth*. Games of truth are procedures that we use at any period to determine what to count as true, perhaps they constitute experience because those procedures set the organization of what we can see, what we can feel, and what we can say. Moreover, this sentence names what games of truth work on as being, and this is where I will be wanting to put becoming, but it might be better, for now, to say that one game of truth works not on being or becoming, but on the products of another game of truth.

Of course it is also true that this expression "games of truth" rhymes, intentionally or not, with Wittgenstein's late notion of language games and also with the 19th Century algebraic tradition of logic which could speak of logic itself as a calculating game.⁷ Wittgenstein was convinced that "the general concept of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible," and the notion of a language

something that [SECOND] can have universal validity as objective knowledge of the human being. [And he concludes simply] *That is what I want to criticize* (2016, p. 90, my italics). Ironically it was Dreyfus who, at that very moment, carried the torch for hermeneutics in his (1980).

⁷ A related use of "game" can be found in the late 19th Century formalist philosophers of logic and mathematics who spoke of logic as a "calculating game," but as Foucault knew, the entire algebraic tradition from at least Boole on is relevant here, see Bearn (2016).

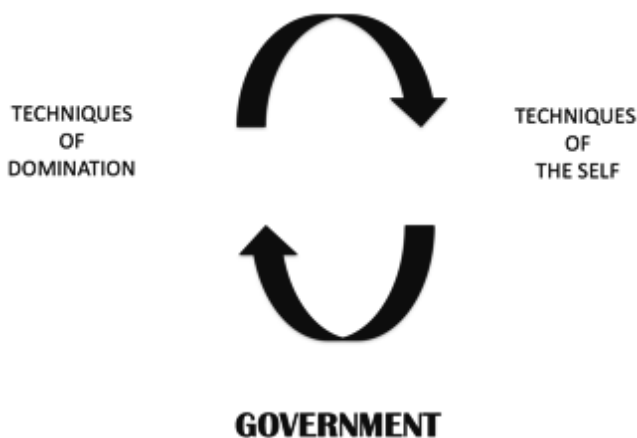


Fig. 3. Government

game was part of his effort to blow the haze away (2009/1953, §6). When Wittgenstein spoke of language games he was trying to escape meaning, the third thing between the words we say and the things we are talking about, or taking Wittgenstein's *Investigations* as audiovisual, we might say between what we say and what we see. When Foucault spoke of games of truth he was, like Wittgenstein, trying to escape a general notion, not the general notion of meaning but the general notion of truth. The increasingly dominant notion of technique in Foucault's writings accomplishes something very similar to the invocation of games. Rather than considering the general nature of power, Foucault comes to write of techniques of domination⁸, and rather than considering the essential nature of subjectivity, Foucault comes to write of techniques of the self. And once again he conceives of these two in a mutually supporting loop, cycling between the way we are conducted by others and the way we conduct ourselves, a circle of mutual support he sometimes called government (2016, pp. 25-26; 1982, p. 789).

What is the force of this notion of technique? In 1981, he defined techniques this way: "they are regulated procedures, thought out ways of doing things that are intended to carry out a certain number of transformations on a determinate object ... organized by reference to certain ends to be attained through these transformations" (2016, p. 15).⁹ Like language games, techniques are formally characterized ways of doing things organized to reach a certain end. To underline the connection to formal thought in general, I will speak of them as algebras. But I also want to call attention the explicitly algebraic method of Foucault's

⁸ In "The subject and power," Foucault writes: The exercise of power...is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (1982, p. 789).

⁹ This passage in Foucault (2016) is cited from Foucault's (2014, p. 253).



Fig. 4. Algebraic sleep

writing, well anyway, the algebraic way he once presented it on the 25 of March 1981. Here he is:

... it was not a matter of starting from a universal that says: this is madness. It did not involve starting from a humanist position saying: this is human nature the human essence, human freedom. Madness had to be taken as an *x* and the practice alone grasped, as if one did not know, and proceeding without knowing, what madness is (2014/2012, pp. 79-80).

An algebraic method used to uncover algebras of the seen and the said without the intervention of essences or meanings.¹⁰ Once you are on the lookout for Foucault's algebraic method, it becomes significant that in discussing Velasquez painting, *The Order of Things* tells us that we must "erase those proper names" that pretend to tell us who the painting is about, as if he were suggesting that we try to uncover the power of the painting in terms of an algebra of the visible employing only variables (1970/1966, pp. 9-10).

It is Deleuze who italicizes that Foucault's archaeological method has two sides, the said and the seen, the discursive and non-discursive, words and things, the sayable and the seeable. Deleuze calls it "an audiovisual archive" (1988/1986, p. 50). The asylum and the prison are both *ways of seeing* and displaying the insane and the delinquent, but separate from what is seen, having its own separate genealogy, are *ways of speaking* in regulations, in medicine, in literature, and so on, about the insane and about the criminal (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 48). There is an algebra of the visible which gives us what can be seen and an algebra of the sayable which gives us what can be said. It's another loop, an instantiation

¹⁰ Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can be read as adopting a similar algebraic method: making no assumptions about the content of logic, it works out the essential non-representational algebra of any possible thought from within, by tracing patterns of true and false representations. Wittgenstein thought the algebra he discovered was part of what is higher, outside of time. Foucault thought the algebras he discovered, for example in *The Order of Things* (1970/1966), had histories.

of the most general form of any algebraic sleep, which Deleuze can call “the vicious circle which makes the condition refer to the conditioned as it reproduces its image” (Deleuze, 1990/1969, pp. 105 & 18-19). The most general form of any algebraic sleep takes us from an algebra of the conditioned to an algebra of its conditions, and back around the loop, again.

Foucault further insists that the two sides of a looping archaeological formation are not reducible to each other. Some lines from *The Order of Things*, which put one in mind of Magritte, already insist on the irreducibility of the seen and the said:

It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate.¹¹ Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying: the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax (1970/1966, p. 9).

The sequential elements of an algebra. And in the space between these two algebras—the seen and the said—we may perhaps escape on a courageous line of flight to thinking otherwise. (Parrhesia.)¹²

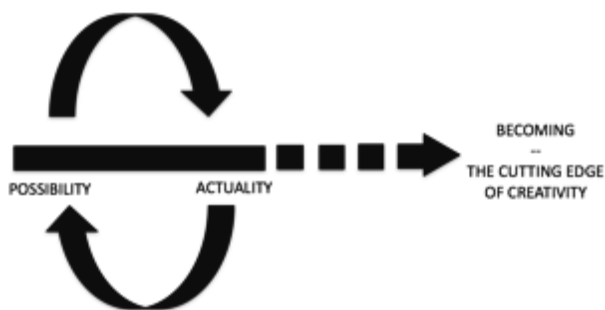
Unfortunately it is easy to think of these two algebras as fitting together perfectly, like the two shells of a clam, as though the Foucauldian loop sealed itself off, outside of time. Immobilized. It is easy to think that what we say and what we see are so close that we can study the world by studying language but this is a mistake that Deleuze, in his lectures, with a dig at the English, calls the philosophy of language.¹³ The very idea of the meaning of a word materializes this mistake, one it is easy to make. Who doesn't think that when you describe the table your words stick as tightly to the table you are describing as the two shells of clam. Immobilized. Actions too. Who doesn't think that when they pour hot chocolate, their pouring and those words are so tightly bound they could never be pried apart. Who doesn't confront mass incarceration unable to imagine any other way of dealing with crime and criminals, perhaps decreasing the numbers by de-criminalizing drugs, but still unable to imagine how to **think otherwise**. It is rare indeed to find those, such as Angela Davis, who dare to think of the abolition of the prison, itself (Davis, 2003). And who today doesn't confront the various species of sexuality unable to imagine any way beyond oppression except to invent even more species of sexuality.

The self-sealing Foucauldian loop, the classical episteme, the modern episteme, seem to take us out of time, to immobilize thinking on a given plane, unable to think otherwise. Our only possibilities, the ones we already knew. In bringing to a conclusion my sketch of the illusion of being trapped, the illusion of being immobilized outside of time, we need to confront the deepest reason, the ontological reason for this illusion of immobilization,

¹¹ So it is not a question of vagueness.

¹² Thinking otherwise thus shows itself to be equally cousin to *parrhesia*, the courage of truth, and to Foucault's refrain that what he most opposes is “all those who speak for others and above others” (1991/1981, p. 159).

¹³ Deleuze 1985, Lecture October 22, 1985 (Part 3): [https://cla.purdue.edu/research/deleuze/Course Transcriptions.html](https://cla.purdue.edu/research/deleuze/Course%20Transcriptions.html) (Accessed 26 Sept 2017).



RETROGRADE MOVEMENT OF TRUTH

Fig. 5. Retrograde movement of truth

what Bergson calls the retrograde movement of truth (1992/1934, p. 22). So before I come to sketching how Foucault might show us how to think otherwise, I need to take a brief Bergsonian stroll.

Bergson uses the retrograde movement of truth to explain the genesis of the easy thought that possibility precedes actuality, that essence precedes fact, it is an easy thought perhaps, but one in distinct conflict with the feeling of novelty, feeling new, feeling *otherwise*. Bergson is convinced, he says he feels it constantly, that the universe manifests the “continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty” (1992/1934, p. 91). He feels it constantly, and yet it can be difficult even to admit that unforeseeable novelty makes sense. The reason is that it is so easy, too easy, to think that there could be no actual sounds of cicadas in the hot summer unless those cicada sounds, in every singular detail, were already possible even before they were actual. If they weren’t possible, we reason, how could they ever become actual. But it is precisely the logic of this reasoning that Bergson resists, our “habitual” “logic of retrospection” (1992/1934, pp. 25-26). Although the absolutely new creates at once both “the thing and the idea of the thing, its reality and its possibility,” our habitual logic makes this impossible to see (1992/1934, p. 22). It will help us understand what Foucault calls “literature,” so it is worth repeating. According to Bergson, the actual thing and the possibility of that thing are “created at one stroke” both at once (Bergson, 1992/1934, p. 22). We don’t notice this both at once because our habitual logic steers truth in a retrograde direction. The retrograde movement of truth reduces the absolutely new to the mere instance of a possibility, thus making the idea of possibility’s priority to actuality inevitable and the radically novel impossible.

The epistemological loop has its roots in the retrograde movement of truth from an actual fact to its very possibility, its essence. This habitual logic abstracts from the singularity of the radically new, treating each nail not as a singular creation but merely as another instance of the type: nail. This is the Foucauldian loop, from what is actual to what is possible and then back again. Like mathematics, it is useful because it is abstract (Whitehead, 1967/1925, p.

31). It abstracts from the singular, the different, the new, making it the same, the repetition of the same. Algebraic thinking, because it is abstract, is therefore useful, but it blinds us to the wonder of singular becomings. The key moment for us is that the cutting edge of creativity produces the actual and the possible at the very same time.

I will let Foucault's answer to the charge of nihilism, his characterization of what he calls "my morality" abbreviate my concluding remarks. Here is Foucault:

... the three elements of my morality are: [first,] the refusal to accept what is proposed to us as self-evident; second, the need to analyze and to know (*savoir*), because we can do nothing without reflection as well as knowledge (*connaissance*), this is the principle curiosity; and third, the principle of innovation, that is to say, not being inspired by a preexisting program, but looking for what has not yet been thought, imagined, or known in elements of our reflection and the way we act. So refusal, curiosity, innovation (2016, p. 128).

Refusal and curiosity characterize one side of his work, the books and essays he wrote, but here at the point of thinking otherwise we are concerned with what he calls innovation. An aesthetics of existence. These ideas came out more in his interviews than in books and essays, and this is why Deleuze is convinced that Foucault's "interviews are an integral part of his work" (1995/1990, p. 106).

I suspect there was a time when Foucault did indeed think thought was trapped in the loops he described, and so there was no way to thought's outside, to thinking otherwise, except through madness. This was the period when each of his books ended with a cadenza of crazies: Nietzsche, Artaud, Goya, and others (for instance, 2006/1961, p. 532). At this time, he thought there was no way to speak about the outside of thought except by innuendo and irony. But by the time he was working on the practices of the self his style had lost its romantic gesturing, "taking on an ever more austere, even purer linearity, almost calm" (Deleuze, 1995/1990, p. 105). His new task was no longer to discover the hidden abstract form of thinking characterizing one or another period. His new task was quite the opposite, it was the "refusal of ... abstractions" by creating an other algebra, an algebra of the new, aimed at waking us up from our algebraic sleep (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). This is just what Roussel's method of writing his books accomplished, an algebra of the new to wake up our words.¹⁴ Foucault spoke of this algebra of the new as an "art of life" (1996, p. 382). Here he is:

Sexuality is something that we ourselves create -- it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life... We don't have to discover that we are homosexuals . . . we have to create a gay life. To *become*. (1996, p. 382).

Creation and becoming. We are moving closer to Bergson and to Deleuze. The idea that we discover our sexuality goes with there being a prior possibility or essence which our sexual actions will *express*. The idea that our actions express the deeper essence of who we are and take their meaning from being thus expressive is another way of characterizing the

¹⁴ Deleuze describes Foucault's version of the process, as breaking open words and breaking open things (1988/1986, p. 52).

Foucauldian loop, anthropological, or more generally, algebraic sleep. At the cutting edge of creativity there is no prior code which gives the meaning of our actions. It is in these terms that Foucault talks about S/M, which he thinks it is just stupid to associate with liberating violence, rather he tells us that S/M is

the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure which people had no idea about previously... It's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure ... we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual positions and so on (1996, p. 384).

The algebra of the new which he had once admired in literature, he has now brought to life as a technique of the self, an art of existence. New pleasures and new possibilities of pleasure created at once.

He had once been excited by a version of the self-referentiality that in Russell's hands made trouble for logic and set theory, he had been excited by "a speech that inscribed in itself the principle of its own decoding" (2006/1964, p. 547). This is the linguistic version of Bergson's idea that the absolutely new creates, at once, both "the thing and the idea of the thing, its reality and its possibility" (1992/1934, p. 22). These were the years when it was by means of linguistic innovation that Foucault felt he could sense that "in language ... an experience is coming into being where our *thinking* is at stake; its immanence, visible already but absolutely empty, cannot yet be named" (2006/1964, 549, my italics). This eschatological moment disappears when these same ideas surface in Foucault's late characterization of the art of living, what remains is that the radically new creates, at one stroke, both the expression and what the expression expresses. It is one way people have thought about expression in music.

In music it is difficult without succumbing to the trite or the kitsch to **say what** is being expressed in a particular powerful passage, here in music, it is as if the expression and the expressed are created at one stroke (Bouwsma, 1965). We might think of language as being different for we can often say what is expressed by sentences of language, but in that case aren't we just abstracting from the singular saying, submitting it to an algebra of communication. It was in such moments that Wittgenstein wondered whether understanding in language ought really to be modeled on understanding in music (2009/1953, §§527-531). So when Wittgenstein observes about art that "You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey *something else*, just itself" (1977/1980, p. 58), he can be construed as joining forces with those who have said that all art aspires to the condition of music, and an art of existence, could that perhaps be an art of becoming-music. And for Foucault, the art of life, the art of thinking otherwise, could this perhaps be reached by making life a work of art in just this Wittgensteinian sense that life—like music—comes to convey nothing but itself. The cutting edge of creativity creating both actuality and possibility at once.

I am encouraged in this thought by what Foucault tells us about passion. He tells us that passion is something that "falls on you out of the blue, that takes hold of you that grips you for no reason, that has no origin. One doesn't know where it comes from. Passion arrives like that, a state that is always mobile but never moves toward a given point" (1996, p. 313). With passion we have found that very mobility which is what Foucault's opposition to the immobilizing effects of power was meant to deliver. And more, we have found that this

mobility is not heading in one direction rather than another, and in that way it is like what Deleuze means by becoming, it is not a matter of what you are becoming but simply that you are becoming. He and Guattari insist: "Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions" (1987/1980, p. 25). And this comes out also when Foucault reminds us that "being without a program can be very useful and very original and very creative" so long as we are careful (1996, p. 390). So long as we take care of the singular bloc of becoming mostly misconstrued as an identifiable self. Becoming, carefully becoming.

It is important to initiate becomings carefully. Our lives are at stake. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that even Artaud "knows about the dangers of too-sudden, careless destratification" (1987/1980, p. 63). They tell us that the worst that can happen is not, as you might have thought, that we remain *organized*, the worst that can happen is that we "throw the strata into a demented or suicidal collapse which brings them down on us heavier than ever" (1987/1980, p. 161). So initiating becomings must be approached with caution, we have to approach carefully. Here they are warning us to be cautious:

What does it mean to disarticulate, to cease to be an organism? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day? And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor (1987/1980, pp. 159-160).

This is a careful algebra of the new, becoming a body without organs by means of "gently" tipping the assemblage of our habitual lives (1987/1980, p. 161). Is it also a spiritual practice?

In his 1982 lectures Foucault isolates three features of a spiritual practice: (i) "the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth," (ii) "there can be no truth without a conversion or transformation of the subject," and (iii) the truth has ricochet "effects on the subject," bringing "enlightenment," "beatitude," and "tranquility of the soul" (Foucault, 2005/2001, pp. 15-16). Carefully becoming is a spiritual practice in just this sense. The subject, just as it is, has no access to becoming, to passion, access is possible only if there is a change in the subject, the subject must wake from their algebraic sleep by means of a cautious algebra of the new, an algebra of becoming becoming. After this transformation, becoming begins with passion, as if from nowhere, putting us in an "intense state of communication" with all that is around us (Foucault, 1996, p. 316). This intense state of communication does not communicate this or that, it doesn't convey *something else*, it conveys just itself, a philosophical awakening beyond representational truth and falsity. Is there also a ricochet effect? Is this joy? Is this salvation? What is the art of living? Sometimes Foucault can be quiet straight forward with his readers. What is the art of careful becoming, the art of living?

The problem is to create something that happens between ideas, and to which one can't give a name. At every instant, therefore, it's trying to give a coloration, a form and intensity to

something that never says what it is. That's the art of living. The art of living is to eliminate psychology, to create, with oneself and others, individualities, beings, relations, unnamable qualities. If one fails to do that in one's life it isn't worth living (1996, p. 317).

And isn't this why, when those who have been seeking the sense of life for years, finally find allostasis becoming clear to them, also find that they are then unable to say in what the sense of life consists. It doesn't consist in, or express, anything other than the becoming it enjoys. A mysticism not of the depths nor the heights, but of the moving surfaces of existence as an *oeuvre*: (Foucault, 2011, p. 163). Careful becomings.

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