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Foucault's Outside: Contingency, May-Being, and Revolt

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I argue for an alternative reading of Michel Foucault as an anti-correlationist thinker. Specifically, I position him as aligned with what philosopher Quentin Meillassoux calls speculative materialism (an offshoot of speculative realism). Given the resurgent and exciting prioritization of speculative ontology over concrete politics among these thinkers, coupled with the need for a revolutionary anti-capitalist political movement, my approach aims to take speculative materialists' claims regarding access to the in-itself seriously while also devoting attention to their (underdeveloped) political dimension. It is in this latter realm Foucault proves particularly helpful to think alongside. Though Foucault has often and convincingly been portrayed as an anti-universalist, postmodern, and epistemologically-oriented figure, I present him as concerned with the subject's access to the Outside (the great outdoors, things-in-themselves) as well as the politics of such access. I do so through a study of a wide selection of his works (books, essays, interviews, articles), a comparison between his philosophical position and that of Meillassoux's, and an expansion upon Foucault's analysis of Diego Velázquez's "Las Meninas" in *The Order of Things*, positing the artwork as a speculative object. I suggest, in short, that Foucault's concepts of thought, force, and the subject have surprisingly striking similarities to Meillassoux's absolute contingency and his political subject (the 'vectoral militant'). We can, then, begin to see a revolutionary politics arising out of what I understand as Foucault's speculative stance—hopefully providing an opportunity to both (re)consider Foucault and highlight the politics incipient in contemporary explorations into the Outside.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Quentin Meillassoux, Las Meninas, speculative materialism, correlationism, the Outside, politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault's relatively early essay on Maurice Blanchot, "Thought of/from the Outside" (1966), elaborates on three important concepts that appear throughout his writings:

thought, force, and the Outside.¹ Framed by his later writing on friendship, the self, and ethics, the relation between these concepts may offer a more overarching theory of being generally absent, or at least not explicit, in his oeuvre.

A particular mode of thought, which we will analyze by way of "Thought of/from the Outside" coupled with Foucault's analysis of Diego Velázquez's painting "Las Meninas" in *The Order of Things*, can be positioned as a means of realizing the subject beyond finitude, of hacking into the absolute. Force, our second key term, operates as a kind of universal medium for thought-bridges to the absolute and, somewhat surprisingly, finds strong resonance in speculative materialist Quentin Meillassoux's ontological thesis of *may-being* deduced from his argument for absolute contingency, in which being is divested of vitalist tendencies and sutured instead to the materialist property of contingency. At its core, force is a *peut-être*, being [être] subsumed by a perhaps [peut-être], the quavering result of a 'dice throw' emitted (voiced) anew with each thought. The Outside, our final term, contains that which is absolute and anonymous, the real uncorrelated to thought, an indifferent exteriority which floods and suffuses the so-called finite.

In sum, thought, contingently activated, facilitates a subjective apprehension of a field of force, a field of the 'perhaps' or may-being, in which the presence of the Outside becomes dangerously and seductively knowable and sensible, while also indistinguishable from the rapidly dissolving subject. The ethical consequence of this conceptual arrangement is a way of life in which the self or subject opens its-self—shifting from identity to an uncertain diffusion of identity—to the Outside. Though Foucault is commonly (and justifiably) thought of as the thinker of various 'insides,' that is, de-absolutization, epistemes, grids of intelligibility, and ever-shifting regimes of truth, his interest in the Outside—that which is universal and eternal, referred to interchangeably by him as non- or un-thought, the absolute void, the being of language or nondialectical language, the placeless place of transgression—serves as a hidden foundation to his rigorous analyses of *how* structures emerge in history.² It points toward a speculative trajectory harbored, and often ignored, in his work.

¹ Foucault is not always clear on the distinction between force and power. Drawing from Deleuze's *Foucault*—and for reasons that will be evident later in the paper—what Foucault often refers to generally as power, I will distinguish as force.

² Two initial clarifications, which will be expanded upon throughout the paper. First, I say 'universal and eternal' because, in contrast to the typical (and again, justifiable) relegation of Foucault to a thinker of local irruptions and resistances, his references to the Outside consistently and additionally point toward these two designations. For instance, in "A Preface to Transgression" [1963], in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (1977): an "essential emptiness and incessant fracture," "transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses," a "profane *Absence*," "this opening where its *being* surges forth," "the *void* into which the die is cast" (48, 34, 31, 43, 44, my emphases). There is a necessity or essential nature to this Outside, void, or doubling. He, moreover, claims philosophy has lost sight of this fact, i.e., "the profound silence of a philosophical language that has been chased from its *natural* element" (41, my emphasis). The task is how to link back up with *Absence* (note the capital letter and the fact it is not a dialectical 'negative' but rather something more permanent). Foucault is careful, meticulous, slow, and critical in his work—however, this does not mean his sights remain within the (necessarily non-transgressive) finitudes of the Inside; instead, they are self-consciously oriented *elsewhere*. Second, for references to the 'interchangeable' terms above, see this incomplete list:

By way of this schema, I posit that Foucault distinguishes himself from the ‘correlationist bunch’ which occupies most of Kantian and post-Kantian thought and, moreover, can be allied with Meillassoux’s particular anti-correlationist position. Correlationism, a term coined (and attacked) by Meillassoux in *After Finitude* (2006/2008), rejects the Outside either as non-existent or inaccessible to us. Correlationist thought, which Meillassoux claims has imprisoned Western philosophy since Berkeley (subjective idealism), securing its chains with Kant (critical philosophy), holds that thought cannot think outside itself, that any attempt to think is auto-mediated by its own processes, history, and circumstance, entrapping thought forever with access only to the correlation between thought and being (the ‘for-us’) and never either term separately. Simply put, for the correlationist thought cannot access being. Meillassoux’s argument against correlationism forms the basis for his proposal of a knowable absolute, that is, the necessity of contingency, reviving the “pre-critical” (pre-Kantian) project of thinking what is ‘without-us.’ Ever-elusive (is he a postmodernist, anti-realist, structuralist, poststructuralist, activist, anti-Marxist, anarchist, Kantian, anti-Kantian, Nietzschean?³), though in nearly all cases assumed to be a correlationist, it appears, as I hope to demonstrate, that Foucault can be securely positioned as a comrade to this recent speculative materialist and anti-correlationist thought.⁴

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1. “A Preface to Transgression”: “an absolute void—an opening which is communication” (43); the being of language as “this continuous language, so obstinately the same,” and again as “another language that also speaks and that he [a subject] is unable to dominate,” and even more convincingly a “language” which “arises from...absence” (42, 41); transgression, again, as “a void...a multiplicity” (42); “our task for today is...this nondiscursive language” (39).
 2. Michel Foucault, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside” [1966], in *Foucault/Blanchot* (1987): “placeless places” (24); a placeless place that is outside all speech and writing” (52); un-thought as a “thought that stands outside subjectivity” (15); un/non-thought as “what in a word we might call ‘the thought from the outside’” (16); “the being of language is the visible effacement of the one who speaks” (54).
 3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* [1966] (2005): see the section on “The Cogito and the Unthought” (351-358); also, “the unthought is not lodged in man like a shriveled-up nature or a stratified history...the inexhaustible double...as the blurred projection of what man is in his truth...a preliminary ground” (356); it is by way of this absolute and Outside double-zone “man would be erased” (422) and along with this formation of man “historicism,” “positivity,” “finitude,” and “knowledge” (406).

³ The confusion with his positions comes at various moments in his interviews and writings. For instance: “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” [1971], in *The Foucault Reader* (1984) (Nietzsche); “What is Enlightenment,” in *The Foucault Reader* (1984) and “What is Critique” [1978], in *The Politics of Truth* (1997) (Kant); “The Subject and Power” in *Critical Inquiry* (1982) (Kant / anti-structuralism); “Truth and Power” [1977], in *The Essential Works of Foucault: Power* (2001) and “Considerations on Marxism, Phenomenology, and Power” [1978], in *Foucault Studies* (2012) (Marxism); *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (2005) and “Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview” [1972], in *Social Justice* (1991) (anarchism). He is even associated with the neoliberals, drawing in part on his lectures on biopolitics and *The History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self* [1978] (1986) (this, to me, seems off-base, but has gained traction).

⁴ C. J. Davies’ article “Nietzsche Beyond Correlationism: Meillassoux’s History of Modern Philosophy,” in *Contemporary Philosophy Review* (2018), has a similar claim regarding Nietzsche, though critiquing Meillassoux’s anti-correlationist argument by demonstrating an example of someone prior who was neither correlationist nor anti-correlationist. His main stake is that Meillassoux’s philosophical history is incorrect in *After Finitude*. This, supposedly, causes the collapse of Meillassoux’s ontological and epistemological claims. This seems unconvincing to me and, in addition, misinterprets several elements of Meillassoux’s argument

As such, he would offer a wealth of analysis and thought for the fraught and as-yet underdeveloped ethics and politics of these positions.

Of course, speculative materialism (a cousin of the more well-known Speculative Realism) is a complex and expanding field with significantly diverging positions. It is held loosely together by the so-called originary 2007 conference with Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Ray Brassier—its four grounding thinkers—as well as their general agreement that correlationism must go. My argument focuses solely on the Meillassouxian direction (which is very different than, for instance, Harman's pseudo-vitalist position). I am primarily interested in how Foucault finds himself, in his pursuit of the Outside, aligned with Meillassoux's primary and distinct thesis of absolute contingency—as well as how he ought to be part of any discussion of Meillassoux's deductively connected ethical project hypothesizing the inexistence (and coming birth of) God along with the 'Fourth World' of justice and immortal beings. My aim is to take Foucault seriously as someone laboring not for thought's inescapable entrapment in various historical epistemes and discourses but rather thought's apparent entrapment *and yet* unrealized ability to access what lies beyond its discursive spheres.⁵ I pursue this chimera in Foucault's work through the topics of friendship, Blanchot, "Las Meninas" (*The Order of Things*), homosexuality, and the Iranian revolution, all of which are tied together by his particular (anti-Hegelian and anti-Kantian) understanding of 'transgression.'⁶

(Davies hedges in footnotes; 'Meillassoux would of course disagree with X...'), but nonetheless is an opposing take on a related project. My focus is, instead, on a re-reading of Foucault, not a critique of Meillassoux.

⁵ A parallel project has been recently published with Graham Harman's Speculative Realism series on Edinburgh University Press, regarding Foucault's friend and comrade Gilles Deleuze's alignment with speculative realism (more closely to Harman's system, which is very different than Meillassoux's system): Arjen Kleinherenbrink, *Against Continuity: Gilles Deleuze's Speculative Realism* (2019).

⁶ To note: Meillassoux makes only two references to Foucault in his work published in English (to my knowledge), both in interviews (2012, 2021). Both are quite similar in content and dismissive of Foucault—I would say they are reductive (though by no means unusual)—as a correlationist.

First, in "Interview with Quentin Meillassoux," in *New Materialisms: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. Rick Dophijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012): "[Foucault] can bring us nothing in regards to the disqualification of strong correlationism...Foucault does not say anything that would embarrass a correlationist, as all his comments can easily be considered as a discourse-correlated-to-the-point-of-view-of-our-time, and rigorously dependent on it. This is a typical thesis of some correlationist relativism: we are trapped in our time, not in Hegelian terms, but rather in a Heideggerian fashion—that is to say in the modality of knowledge-power that always already dominates us."

Second, in "Founded on Nothing: Interview," in *Urbanomic Documents* (2021), and in response to a comparison made by the interviewer of his thought to Foucault's (and *apropos* of this paper): "I won't talk about Foucault here, because his fundamental problematic, it seems to me, is an analysis of knowledge-power, not the constitution of an ontology. A Foucauldian ontology, if such a thing were to exist—which in itself is already a problematic thesis—would require a reconstruction that would be entirely hypothetical, in order to 'compare' it to my own approach."

It should be said that Meillassoux's presentation of Foucault (as with thinkers like Nietzsche and Deleuze; see "The Immanence of the World Beyond," in *The Grandeur of Reason* (2010), ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter Chandler, and "Subtraction and Contraction: Deleuze, Immanence, and Matter and Memory," in *Collapse III* (2007)) follows their more generally accepted understandings. This is precisely what my argument (and Meillassoux is correct, it *must*) pushes against. It is important to also note that Meillassoux positions Foucault as a 'strong correlationist' (noumena may exist but they are unknowable, unthinkable, and meaningless) by aligning him with Heidegger—and this is the very position, as opposed to Kant's weak

In Foucault's late essay on Kant, "What is Enlightenment" (1984), he proposes developing a "philosophical ethos" of transgression: a critique of and through a "historical ontology of ourselves," seeking to give a "new impetus...to the undefined work of freedom."⁷ Foucault's aim is to, ironically, re-focus on (Kantian) 'limits' as a means to move beyond the finitude of the typically resultant "outside-inside alternative." His 'work of freedom,' again aiming to turn Kant inside-out, is not deconstructive but speculative, oriented toward apprehending ourselves as linked up to an Outside.⁸ What he calls a "new" form of critique (Kant's is the "old" critique) refuses to set as its goal the identification of boundaries of thought (what is "impossible for us to do and know," regulative and legislative apparatuses), while simultaneously refusing to jump naïvely into that so-called impossible space. Transgression requires strategy and historical awareness.

Like Kant, Foucault engages critique as a defense against dogmatism, but in contrast he does not want to be imprisoned by limits. At the same time, overcoming limits--teleological or mystical progress—cannot be the answer. In the latter sense, he rejects the Hegelian dialectical process, in which any Outside or Other is sublated and synthesized along a path of interior progress. Instead of being moralistically duped into loving one's prison, as with Kant, this would make the prison transparent, erasing its visibility (and the apprehension of the Outside) altogether. As opposed to both well-worn strategies, Foucault hopes to locate "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."⁹

It is experimental: Foucault wants to see what happens when you cast Kant adrift on the sea and steal away his compass and map, while simultaneously sabotaging Hegel's runaway train of history. His question, ultimately, is how can we know what is either before or after the human and thought itself, as an emancipatory praxis: how can we access the 'without-us?' His method, aiming to disentangle being from thought as a mode of becoming-free, is immanent (archeological and genealogical) and centered on the act of transgression:

But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, [and] obligatory, *what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?* The

correlationism (noumena exist and are thinkable not knowable), which Meillassoux 'flips' into absolute contingency. This is to say, it is closer to Meillassoux's thought than it may seem. My project of course, however heretical, is to argue that Foucault is not a correlationist at all.

⁷ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 11.

⁸ By speculative, I mean thought has the capacity to apprehend the absolute. Colin McQuillan's article "Beyond the Analytic of Finitude: Kant, Heidegger, Foucault," *Foucault Studies* (2016), makes a similar connection between Foucault, finitude, and Kant (not Meillassoux): "that Foucault discovered a different way to read Kant during the late 1970s and early 1980s suggests that he was making progress in his attempt to overcome the analytic of finitude" (15).

⁹ "What is Enlightenment," 11.

point in brief is to transform the critique conducted *in the form of necessary limitation* into a practical critique that *takes the form of a possible transgression*.¹⁰

The question becomes one of experimenting with a practice of transgression, an emancipatory (and perhaps artistic, following Nietzsche) act of thinking and speaking: “nothing can limit” the “moment” of “I speak.”¹¹ The search aims at the “contingent,” which exists in the very space of “transgression” (speaking, action): not one nor the other, not a thesis nor antithesis, but a diagonal and unpredictable upsurge of unthought (unthinkable) space cast like a constellation into and from the Outside. In the “Thought of/from the Outside,” for instance, transgression “obstinately advances into the opening of an invisibility” and “insanely endeavors to make the law appear in order to be able to venerate it and dazzle it with its own luminous face.” It is a punk-ish, unhinged, and impossibly unpredictable strategy which hopes to transform the subject into “something unnamable, an absent absence, the amorphous presence of the void and the mute horror of that presence.”¹² Kantian limits are dictums of finitude and the moralistic policing of that which transgresses. Transgression is a claim beyond finitude by way of the contingent and diagonal. Tugging on this red thread throughout Foucault’s writing will, I hope, justify our repositioning of him as a speculative thinker.

II. FRIENDSHIP, A CONSTELLATION

Foucault’s writing on friendship offers an arrangement of thought, force, and the Outside which I would like to position as a kind of ‘constellation’ guiding our exploration: an accessible practice of co-transgression. While Foucault generally describes friendship as “a mutual, egalitarian, and lasting [relationship]...a life in common, reciprocal attention, [and] kindness to one another,” it persists in his thought due to its power to initiate or activate an ontological field of transformation.¹³ Friendship is a relation developed with someone ‘outside’ of oneself in which a subject must grapple with an abyss between the self and the world (the other) which becomes folded, doubled back, and cast toward an unknown interior space in a non-dialectical fashion. Genuine friendship—which we will trace through Foucault’s treatments of so-called self-care, Greek and Roman ethics, and homosexuality—is always transgressive. It does not result in compromise, synthesis, sameness, nor separation and difference, but rather a kind of fundamental hesitation or uncertainty.

This line of thought has been obscured in part due to the misleading translation, which we will rectify here, of “le souci de soi-même” into English as “care of the self.” First, “le souci” is more accurately “concern,” which is distinct from “care:” to have concern is, following the Latin, to perceive, to distinguish, to touch; to care is more ambiguous and does not carry with it the ‘perceiving’ capacity of concern. Second, “soi” is not well-

¹⁰ Ibid. (my emphasis).

¹¹ Foucault, “The Thought from Outside,” 25.

¹² Ibid., 35, 39.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 2: The Use of Pleasure* [1976] (1985), 234.

represented by “self:” whereas “self” indicates identity, *soi*, like *on*, is exactly the opposite, that is, a non-identity, an anonymity, a diffusion of self as self. “Le souci de soi-même” is, in fact, a project to perceive the diffused-self, to diffuse the self, which is always, too, a project of perceiving that which hesitates between being and non-being (as dissolved sugar in water hesitates between liquid and solid). This is distinct, as Marie-Christine Leps also points out, from ‘care of the self’ as well as from the neoliberal distortions of the concept into ‘self-care’ or ‘self-help.’¹⁴ Our translation distinguishes itself by indicating a project of perceiving another as absolutely independent of oneself *and* non-self-identical, realizing and allowing them their richness of being while paradoxically retaining a communal connection. To see another absolutely and as a *soi*, and to labor together in that manner, is a mode of being (a practice) beyond limits and progress. Moreover, it rejects understandings of friendship as an economic relationship, a means to an end, a non-essential aspect of life, or a way to further isolate, individualize, and define the self.

Following what Foucault delineates as the Epicurean model, a friendship is something one has, a possession, an initializing “utility” (‘I have a friend...’), while simultaneously “something other” than utility.¹⁵ The model situates itself squarely in the paradox of (non)possession, an unlocatability between definability and indefinability that is nonetheless relational. It finds itself as force, the feeling of becoming friends: that which is both non-existent and purely relational. To practice friendship is to gain a deeper understanding of force and its operation in the world. A friend is possessed and used while also possessive and using; friends develop trust in the face of what can be felt so strongly, that is, the contingent rearrangements of the relational field. This kind of perception or trusting is developed by “parrhesia,” speaking the truth to power. While on one level, “parrhesia” means speaking out against “rhetoricians and flatterers,” on another level it means that, through friendship, a person prepares themselves such that they can speak *as force*, or rather so that force speaks through them (*per-sonare*, a sounding-through). This form of truth is something deeper than what appears in Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth.’ Speaking in such a way—which is to say, speaking in the contingencies of force, apprehending the absolute and Outside—is a revolutionary mode of speech central to Foucault. A friendship exists in the folds of force and is a practice of knowing and speaking this truth by way of the absolute. In the Roman model, Foucault ties this to a kind of divine relation. He emphasizes their understanding of friendship as a “soul service” and as integral to one’s concern for the diffused-self (‘concern for the soul’). That is, friendship is at base the act of taking care of beings within a field of force. An everyday practice of soul-care (not self-care), the Romans thought of friendship as a means to “see more clearly” such that they could “see God.”¹⁶ It conditions the (speculative) self to erupt—to contingently become otherwise—from an interior void connected to an exterior abyss. Friendship for

¹⁴ Marie-Christine Leps, “Thought of the Outside: Foucault Contra Agamben,” *Radical Philosophy* 175 (2012), 32.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lecture Series 1981-1982*, (2005), 194.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

Foucault is an alien love, care among the mad, diseased, criminal, and forgotten: a social-ity of the Outside(rs).

In *Care of the Self*, too, friendship follows this extreme dual movement outward/inward as a paradoxically “cosmic and individual force.”¹⁷ As cosmic, friendship links with the inexplicable, massive, and infinite; it provides access to a pure exteriority, the possibility of reality independent of thought, of what *is* before and after humanity. As individual, it links with the finite subject, the self, and the present; it is a cut, an immediacy. In both it is (significantly) described as force, something anonymous which slides everything toward its own anonymity.¹⁸ This friendship, and its anonymous force, allows “man to escape from immediate necessity,” offering a condition for the “acquisition and transmission of knowledge.”¹⁹ Friendship is therefore a way out, an “escape” beyond the “necessity” of the Kantian, Hegelian, and correlative and into the contingent and non-necessary. It is a literal “knowledge” of this oscillatory cosmic-individual movement, which is to say, (to make an imprudent leap) to know God and the self precisely *as* diffused and non-necessary.

Finally, Foucault gave a short interview late in his life (1981) concerning homosexuality and friendship, again promoting an ethics of friendship as a means toward the anonymous Outside. Following Deleuze and Spinoza in their descriptions of bodies as speeds and assemblages, he describes friendship as an opportunity to “reopen affective and relational virtualities [force],” specifically referring to the “diagonal lines” of homosexuality as friendship which can “allow these virtualities to come to light.”²⁰ Friendship opens the subject to virtual reconfiguration which, in his terminology, could be recast as opening oneself to the Outside. Homosexuality, in the historical configuration of the 1970s and 1980s, was therefore a possible vector of transgression which we ought to take seriously because of its *positionality*, not (necessarily) its form, that is, “it is not a form of desire but something desirable.” It is this specific anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian mode of transgression itself which is desirable, an act that contorts the subject such that “they have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is [more generally] friendship.”²¹ Friendship here takes on an ontological valence in that we must not be distracted by how it may appear but rather apprehend its being. Foucault’s central question in the interview is, “what relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?” – which is to say, with friendship actualized through the contingent vector of homosexuality we have, as a relation, a pathway through which the self can realize its capacity to be transformed into something outside of correlative thought.

¹⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self*, 218.

¹⁸ See free jazz and experimental saxophonist Joe McPhee’s piece “Cosmic Love” (1970), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCmo30r3OXI>.

¹⁹ *The Care of the Self*, 218.

²⁰ See: Gilles Deleuze, “Spinoza and Us,” *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* [1970] (1988). And, Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life” [1981], in *Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth, Vol 1*, ed. Paul Rainbow (1997), 138.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

Again, this is not an unusual or late concern of Foucault's. In point of fact, this interview echoes a key passage in "A Preface to Transgression" (1963), perhaps the clearest expression of Foucault's interest in the Outside. Describing a kind of perpetual dance—a light, affirmative, and active dancing, following Nietzsche—between the limit and its transgression, Foucault points toward the key space of an absent-absence. That is, he identifies the fissure of the limit itself *as it is* transgressed as a space of vibratory inhabitation unfolded not on the other side of transgression but in the very act: "the limit opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and fulfilled by this alien plentitude which invades it to the core of its being...to experience its positive truth."²² To trace this, Foucault calls for a "nondialectical form of philosophical language" which arises from the "void into which the die is cast."²³ This is a speculative language of the void and the die and in pursuit of that "plenitude" of the Outside—a dialectic suspended between self and other, a mode of being grounded absolutely in the contingency that embodies the fusion of the void and chance.

By way of this small aperture, a curious 'friendship' between writers—Foucault and Meillassoux—can come into view, along with three axioms inspired by this resonance. 1) There is a radical exteriority, an Outside, the real distinct from thought (i.e., the materialist hypothesis); 2) the Outside is accessible and knowable by rational thought as an absolute (i.e., principle of unreason); 3) this absolute or Outside is solely defined as contingent and non-totalizable (i.e., absolute contingency and proof of the transfinite).²⁴ These statements are rigorously argued in Meillassoux's work and offer a basis for understanding Foucault's Outside.²⁵

Briefly, as it has been extensively covered in the secondary literature on his work, I will highlight areas of Meillassoux's basic argument—laid out centrally in *After Finitude*—as it pertains to these points.²⁶ First, he is concerned that we have lost 'the great outdoors' of pre-critical philosophers. While by this he means 'speculative' philosophy has been cast

²² "A Preface to Transgression," 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 48, 44.

²⁴ On point 2: while the knowledge of the nature of friendship by way of 'unreason'—and then its praxis through 'unreason-able' care—could be considered a rational form of access, this point will be more clearly supported in other areas of the paper.

²⁵ For instance (all texts by Meillassoux): *After Finitude* [2006] (2008), *Time Without Becoming* [2008] (2014), and many articles, including "Potentiality and Virtuality" [2006], in *Collapse II*, ed. Robin Mackay (2007); "The Contingency of the Laws of Nature" [2004], in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2012); "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," in *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity Since Structuralism*, ed. Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik (2016); and "Immanence of the World Beyond" (2010).

²⁶ Nearly every article engaging Meillassoux's thought has some form of a summary of his arguments, with a small number also explaining his post *After Finitude* writing, one of the most concise and helpful being Cat Moir's "Beyond the Turn: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Speculative Materialism," in *Poetics Today* (2016). Ray Brassier's chapter "The Enigma of Realism" on Meillassoux in his book *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007) is, I have found, nearly unparalleled in its detailed analysis, critique, and breakdown of *After Finitude*. The most comprehensive source, however, is Graham Harman's book *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (2015) in which he expertly summarizes Meillassoux's arguments, each article (up to 2015) post *After Finitude*, and the ethical-theological direction Meillassoux takes absolute contingency in the unpublished *Divine Inexistence*.

out by critical philosophy and its permutations (e.g., the linguistic turn), or at worst become illegitimate, he does not want to return to either the naivete of dogmatic empiricists (Kant's enemy number one) nor dogmatic metaphysicians (Kant's enemy number two). We are, as he says, the heirs of Kantianism, whether we like it or not. For Meillassoux, the Outside must be non-dogmatically maintained as an accessible real exterior to thought. This means speculation (the absolute) must not be denied, the mode of speculation must position the absolute as exterior not interior (materialist not idealist), and it must reject the principle of sufficient reason (anti-dogmatic, anti-metaphysical). As with Foucault, we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater: Kant did us a great service in his banishment of various dogmatisms. Unfortunately, to do so he also imprisoned us in finitude by outlawing (regulating) speculative thought. To lead us out of this aporia, and to his speculative materialist position, Meillassoux offers an argument via 'ancestrality.' The ancestral is any reality that existed prior to the emergence of the human; this is marked by an 'arche-fossil,' that is, a material that, today, indicates such an existence. Or, more abstractly, science clearly indicates thought's ability to think that which is outside of it (e.g., the date of the origin of the universe), and yet philosophy responds with either a strong skepticism ('strong correlationism') in that such facts must only be 'for-us' and are in reality unthinkable simply because they pass through the medium of thought, or an agnostic skepticism ('weak correlationism') in that it is true things exist outside of thought but we cannot know such things. In all cases, speculation appears laughable, and any materialism (any Outside) is lost; we are left only with comfortable solipsistic variants of idealism. Resisting this at its root requires positing the materialist hypothesis of the uncorrelated Outside.

Second, Meillassoux aims to revive materialism (anti-metaphysics) with his 'principle of unreason.' In this he happens to follow, too, Foucault's path between Kant (critical philosophy, weak correlationist) and Hegel (absolute idealist, strong correlationist). For the former, the Outside is thinkable but not knowable; Meillassoux claims it is thinkable and knowable while retaining Kant's critiques of metaphysics. For the latter, the Outside is unknowable, unthinkable, meaningless, and therefore impossible, making any supposed Outside always already subsumable as an Inside (-to be); Meillassoux refuses to absolutize this (human-world) correlate which sees our incapacity to *not* subsume the Outside within our own thought as a mark of our finitude. It is from here he proposes 'unreason,' "whereby everything in the world *is* without reason, and is thereby capable of actually becoming otherwise without reason."²⁷ Our supposed incapacity to discover an ultimate truth outside of the correlate without being dogmatic—the principle of sufficient reason—is our very capacity to think and know that the ultimate truth is, ironically, contingency itself. This is the anti-metaphysical principle of unreason. The correlationist must admit, to maintain their position, they cannot know why things *are*; and Meillassoux flips this non-knowledge into absolute knowledge: things are or are not for no reason at all (i.e., unreason). The answer has been in front of us all along. It is not about Kantian critical limits, nor Hegelian sublation and progress, but about what happens within the space,

²⁷ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 53.

following Foucault, of transgressing both paths; a third hidden stream which opens onto the unthought, spilling out of the dazzling vibrancy of non-necessity.

Third, this absolutized contingency is distinct from common understandings which equate it with chance. Contingency holds that any totality, even an infinite totality, is subject to non-totality. Unlike chance, it does not operate according to any laws of probability; anything (possible or impossible) can happen without cause. Meillassoux proves the distinction between chance and contingency, like Badiou, via Cantor's mathematical theory of the transfinite. This holds that given an infinite set, you can always combine its elements such that a larger infinite set results, and then you can do the same to that larger infinite set, and so on. Probability, the consideration of pre-determined possibilities, becomes an illogical proposition. Choosing among transfinite objects, I can never say what statistical 'chance' I have of picking X item because there is never a static denominator. In other words, "there is no totality of all conceivable numbers...the Cantorian transfinite means that for every infinite that exists there is an even greater infinite, with no limit to this ultimate series of infinitudes."²⁸ Thus the placeless place of transgression, the Outside, and the absolute is, fittingly, transfinite. This is something altogether, and excitingly, different from Kantian and Hegelian methods. Meillassoux spins these arguments out, in a rigorously deductive fashion, in his later work toward the contingent (non-dogmatic) and pure possibility of the birth of God—something quite easy to imagine given the transfinite—as well as the advent of a 'new shift' of reality after what he calls the first three Worlds of Matter, Life, and Thought. Each shift indicates an irreducible change in which some advent occurred that would be impossible to both conceive of and happen emergently without the principle of unreason and the absolute. The final World, as we will see later, is that of Justice, in which the human subject attains a "forgotten" *materialist* divinity: they "find [their] verticality without religion or metaphysics. It does not separate [them] from gods, but...gives [them] access to the true god, one that is material and born of chance...[a] materialism [that] saturates the space of thought with the absolute."²⁹ The birth of God, subordinated to the absolute ('born of chance'), inaugurates this world of Justice because justice, like God, has yet to exist in history (both are impossible due to the infinitely horrific atrocities that have occurred throughout time, a line of thinking explicated in detail in Meillassoux's article, "Spectral Dilemma").³⁰

Instead of a pure rejection, Foucault and Meillassoux move beyond Hegel and Kant toward what Foucault calls a nondialectical language and what Meillassoux calls in his more recent writing an apprehension of the "meaningless sign."³¹ It should be noted that

²⁸ "Immanence of the World Beyond," 448-9.

²⁹ Quentin Meillassoux, "The Coup de Dés, or the Materialist Divinization of the Hypothesis" [2012], in *Col-lapse VIII*, ed. Robin Mackay (2014), 815-6.

³⁰ In response to the frequently made claims that Meillassoux practices metaphysics (even though his system is premised on its explicit anti-metaphysical position)—and my goal is not to spend time arguing otherwise beyond this final note—it would be appropriate to refer to the beginning of "Immanence of the World Beyond" as well as the first half of "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition."

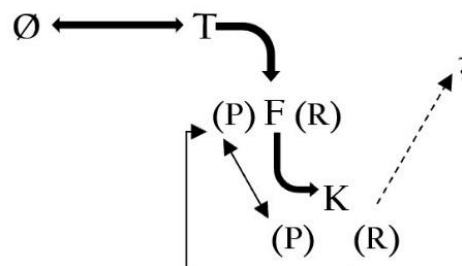
³¹ Meillassoux is often misinterpreted in the secondary literature as being purely anti-Kantian and/or anti-Hegelian. Any reading of *After Finitude* will prove the great respect (if critical) Meillassoux has for Kant via

both are after a form of language and relationality which is anti-correlationist, existing regardless of what we think about it ('without-us'). Meillassoux provides beautifully hazy outlines sufficient for both thinkers in his study of Mallarmé, *Number and the Siren*, with language uncannily reminiscent of Foucault's in "A Preface to Transgression:"

What is required is to capture a sudden modification, a transfiguration, a fulguration that abolishes in an instant the immobility of place, but also any possibility of change taking hold. A speed that interrupts the immutable, but also movement: a passed movement, annulled as soon as it is initiated. Thus a movement of which one could doubt whether it ever took place. An identity of contraries: a movement that is (perhaps) not a movement, an immobility that is (perhaps) not immobile. *A dialectical infinite, then, that includes its other, but without invoking any dynamism—in this sense a non-Hegelian dialectic, without progress, without any surpassing of one step by the next.* A treading water that would not be an extinguishing, but the pulsation of the eternal—a hesitation of being. A flickering of the fan, unknotting of hair, whirlwind of muslin, white clothes on the edge of the water that seem fleetingly to be a bird on the wave. *So many signs recalling to us, more or less the structure of Chance: to remain in itself alongside its contrary, to contain virtually the absurd, to be the two sides of its own limit.*³²

Thus I would like to propose the following diagram or constellation as central to Foucault's thought, especially as it intersects with Meillassoux:

- ∅ = Outside
- T = Thought
- F = Force
- K = Knowledge
- P = Power
- R = Resistance



Thought opens a channel to the Outside, through which anonymous Force flows (an impossible distance toward an impossible intimacy); the Outside takes on contingent, particular points, empty 'diagrams' in a (social) field of Force. Force operates in the relational non-space of these anonymous diagrams—a kind of map-making—and splits into Power (anonymous intentional force) and Resistance (anonymous unintentional force). Power enters into feedback loops with Knowledge, while Resistance, also through Knowledge, offers the sparkling *may-be* of new realities and relationships. The contingent-Outside

the great respect he has, as repeatedly brought up by Graham Harman, for correlationist thought. Of course, correlationism forms part of the bedrock of his turn toward (the 'inside job' argument) absolute contingency. Regarding Hegel, Meillassoux mentions in an interview (see *Philosophy in the Making*) that Hegel is a significant inspiration and, in fact, he has an unpublished manuscript on him. Nathan Brown's work on Meillassoux, too, picks up this Hegelian thread (see Nathan Brown, *Rationalist Empiricism: A Theory of Speculative Critique*, 2021).

³² Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, (2012), 140-141 (my emphasis).

nearly imperceptibly flows from, back, and between Thought, Force, and Knowledge, as a kind of lost, forgotten, and separated immanence.

III. THOUGHT (I): THE PRE-POSITIONAL AND THE DOUBLE

In this arrangement, thought opens a portal between finitude and infinitude.³³ Though it might appear to be the case, finitude and infinitude are not two separate realms and do not imply a metaphysics or theory of transcendence; and yet, they cannot be naively traversed. Following the Meillassouxian axioms above, absolute contingency (marking infinitude) is the single truth in the universe which inheres materially in all beings, that is, as an immanent property. Most thinking beings are, however, tethered to logics of finitude found primarily in representative modes of thought. Every representation is a finitization of presence; 're-' pre-fixes, qualifies, frames, and annihilates 'presentation,' an actual experience of infinitude, those 'signs calling us to chance.' Thinking beings, following Meillassoux, have access to this presentation beyond finitude. How does one, then, shed the tethers of representation and, with it, correlationist thought? Not necessarily into non-representation, which is simply a modality of representation, but into a dance with contingency, as contingency—into the concern for the soul one finds in Foucault's friendship and the fractured space of transgression?

Access to the absolute is not through a naïve realism (simple affirmation) nor dialectical sublation (affirmation-negation) but what *may* take place—always uncertain—between the two. Every thought opens a gateway; more precisely, every thought conjures forth a host of teeming beyond-thoughts, diffused shadow-thoughts—and thought's result, surrounded and swirled by these ghosts, is borne by uncertainty, casting into doubt the original act of thinking itself. Though rarely apprehended as such, thought is a throw of dice. This was Mallarmé's project in *Coup de dés*, of which Foucault was certainly aware: the infinitization of the Master's hesitation to throw the dice as he sunk under the sea, the seemingly null result of his throw realized and transfigured. *A cosmic and individual force*: a Constellation of Chance splashing across the night sky (cosmic), a Siren smashing the impeding rock (individual, the Master transfigured), a mist descending (uncertainty). There remains only what is so beautifully and devastatingly evoked by any shipwreck—a calm sea, which appears afterward as if nothing happened (did anything happen at all?). It is not a re-presencing, nor presencing, but rather an absence-in-presence, or Foucault's absent-absence. In other words, from Mallarmé we can grasp thought's capacity to be a eucharistic diffusion of a perhaps; an impossible to identify suffusion of contingency within the self. In this we may be reminded of Foucault's desire to outline a 'historical

³³ Though a well-worn question, there are several issues inherent in giving thought—or the thinking being—such a superior role. This may be a challenge for Meillassoux's project, perhaps most evident in the presupposed humanism that comes along with it (Christopher Watkin considers this in *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human*, 2016). The closest he comes to doing so, which is satisfactory to counter any humanism (not thought), is saying that the thinking being is the human *contingently*.

ontology of ourselves' by way of the space—now understood as the absolute contingency of the Outside—of transgression.

Foucault elaborates his own 'coup de dés' in the beginning of *Order of Things*, where he analyzes the painting "Las Meninas." He claims, ultimately, that Velázquez's work contains "an essential void" and is "representation, freed," that is, not unlike Mallarmé's constellation, "representation in its pure form."³⁴ It seems, though, that this conclusion warrants further investigation: what does Foucault really mean (he does not explain in full) by pure representation? Does the painting offer anything further? Could this, like his later writing on Kant, the Greeks, friendship, and the self, be a kind of speculative move? To further substantiate the connection between thought and the Outside in diagram above, we will take "Las Meninas" as a kind of case study of a thought-portal to the teeming Outside and possible diffusion of contingency (à la Mallarmé) in the real. This requires three steps. First, an analysis of the major text in Foucault's oeuvre explicitly addressing thought and the Outside ("Thought of/from the Outside"); second, a demonstration of how the painting operates along these lines; and third, an expansion on Foucault's analysis of the painting which would integrate an act of transgression. The latter would fulfill the trajectory of Foucault's analysis, bringing "Las Meninas" past the ambiguous 'pure representation' and securely into the realm of the absolute.

Foucault wrote "Thought of/from the Outside" around the same time as *Order of Things* and, in it, he specifically focused on the essential void space also identified in "Las Meninas." As with *Care of the Self*, our way in is through a key slippage in (mis)translation of the title itself, "Thought of/from (the) Outside."³⁵ Foucault's topic (aside from his use of Blanchot as an object of analysis) is the yet to be coined 'correlationism': he is to grapple with the (non)relation between thought and being (the Outside). It is published with two translations: "The Thought of the Outside"³⁶ and "The Thought from Outside."³⁷ In the case of 'of,' the Outside is positioned as an object of thought, measurable and definable. It could also be seen, albeit more awkwardly, as the Outside's thought (i.e., the cat of Foucault equals Foucault's cat), thus making the essay an elegy for a perhaps ungraspable form of thought which does not move toward us but belongs solely to an absolute. On the other hand, 'from' implies a movement of the Outside, by way of thought, into an indeterminate inside. In this case both thought and the Outside take on anonymous, indifferent, and confused positionalities, weakening the correlationism of being and thought—the 'for-us'—by an influx of the absolute (what was seemingly never for-us). Between these two translations, one exclusive and the other inclusive, is a non-place and double-movement toward and through which 'of' and 'from' orient themselves: inside-out (thought of the Outside) and outside-in (thought from the Outside). This paradoxical contortion refuses the Kantian critique (of so-called speculative arrogance) while

³⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, 18.

³⁵ Étienne Balibar brings this up in his lecture on the book, "A Thought from/of the Outside: Foucault's Uses of Blanchot," at Kingston University (2013). The French title is "La pensée du dehors."

³⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Thought of the Outside" [1966], in *Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, Vol. 2, ed. James Faubion (1998), 147-170.

³⁷ Foucault, "The Thought from Outside" [1966] (1987).

simultaneously upholding the necessity of critique as the inhabitation and vibration of the limit, namely, where things reveal themselves as functioning, changing, perishing, and persisting without reason (this is what results from Foucault's, as above, 'new critique'). Of/From enact a hidden and (dis)locating gap, an abyss or void, across which—or rather, on both sides of which—there is a self gazing at a blurrily reflected form of itself, which gazes back at it. Both are suffused with that which pours forth from the uncertain *prepositional* (we might say *a priori*) space of 'of/from.'

This strange relational space is prepositional, yes, but *as a space* it is a preposition 'cut loose' (where 'of' and 'from' have lost their referents), uncorrelated with noun, adjective, or verb, simply *apositional*, an unfixing position. This is the locus, for instance, of a 'spectral encounter,' where, by happenstance, the very distinctions of life and death are called into question and implicated, specifically, as contingent divisions: nouns shorn like corpses and cast as dice. The grammatical transgression of 'of/from' makes 'thought' and 'Outside' (again, being) *apositional* as opposed to a sprawling *apositionality*—the unfixingness of the prepositions offers up the new ante-grammatical and diagonal place of sutured nouns, in what can only be described, following Foucault, as a 'placeless place' in which the dead and living are indistinct: "thought outside / outside thought." The figures, outside and thought, now directly modify and position themselves without needing to be correlated, both wavering in their nounness made uncertain (is outside an adjective now?). Too, they resonate with the sovereignty of Foucault's introductory object of analysis in his essay: the phrase 'I speak.' 'Thought outside / outside thought' is ambiguous *and* definitive, existing without object or discourse (outside of what? thought about what?) not only because it is missing, as in 'I speak,' but also because it is unknown (what is an outside? what is thought in relation to it?). Here the pure exteriority and rawness of language may come into view—to note, this is not the correlationist's language, which Meillassoux attacks as a self-fashioned prison of mediation, but rather the being of language itself, the language of the Outside. The forces from such an Outside-language agrammatically seep forth from within the title's claim, holding together in a field of may-being both a pure exteriority and pure interiority.

This brings us to the other half of the essay's title and its object of analysis, Maurice Blanchot. Foucault argues, following what I understand as an intentional ambiguity in the French title (*du, of/from*), that Blanchot's narratives open a self-constituting discourse of/from the Outside. This is precisely why Foucault is interested in Blanchot: he offers "a meticulous narration of experiences, encounters, and improbably signs—*language about the outside of all language*, speech about the invisible side of words." This necessitates a "listening less to what is articulated in language than to the void circulating between its words, to the murmur that is forever taking it apart...the fiction of invisible space in which *it* appears."³⁸ 'It,' that 'improbable sign,' heralds the apprehension of the unnamable or meaningless sign, the transgressive experience of absolute contingency as and in an object occupying both sides of its own limit, at once having no reason to be as well as no reason not to become anything at all. Foucault even goes as far as to list a genealogy of thinkers

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

vectoring in this manner and rebelling against “the age of Kant and Hegel,” including those such as Dionysus, Marquis de Sade, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Artaud, Bataille, Klossowski, and finally Blanchot, who is “perhaps more than just another witness to this thought [of the Outside]...he is that thought itself.” His writing on Blanchot is clearly intended to be part of the unveiling of such a genealogy: “it will one day be necessary to try and retrace its [the Outside’s] path, to find out where it comes to us from and in what direction it is moving.”³⁹

Foucault develops his argument for Blanchot’s connection to the Outside most explicitly in the last two short chapters, focusing on Blanchot’s frequent deployment of the ‘companion,’ a concept he later translates in his own work as the shadow and double. In Blanchot’s stories, the narrator’s companion is distinct from operating simply as an “interlocutor” and “subject.” Instead “he is the nameless limit language reaches” and, like a cosmic and individual force (external-internal), “the companion is also indissociably what is closest and farthest away.”⁴⁰ He is the ‘I that speaks’ and yet brings forth the “void” and “immeasurable distance” within language, that is, the shadowy and pre-positional meaninglessness of each utterance, the of/from which serve as contagions or vectors of uncertainty—utterances at once sovereign and meaningless. This is what Foucault identifies as the drive of Blanchot’s writing and why it conjures forth the Outside: it is an artistic act which conditions possible transgression, “plung[ing]” the reader into “a placeless place that is outside all speech and writing, that brings them forth and dispossesses them...that manifests through its infinite unraveling their momentary gleaming and sparkling disappearance.”⁴¹ Being becomes hazy and contingent, coming forth just as easily and unreasonably as it disappears, and this turns upon language’s dislocation from meaning (its limit); not into skepticism or untruth, nor truth in meaning (constructivism), but into a sovereign space between meaning and the total loss of meaning. For Foucault, this is a possible portal for legitimate truth (from the Outside), and it must be re-discovered at all costs: “language...is neither truth nor time, neither eternity nor man; it is instead the always undone form [not content] of the outside. It places the origin in contact with death, or rather brings them both to light in the flash of their infinite oscillation—a momentary contact in a boundless space.”⁴² Language, by way of Blanchot’s artistic work, may offer a vehicle for the Outside. In a sentence resonant with Meillassoux’s more poetic passages about ‘may-being,’ Foucault concludes “what language is in its being is that softest of voices, that nearly imperceptible retreat, that weakness deep inside and surrounding every thing and every face”—a fog pulsing from each being, quietly insisting on the shadowy possibilities of chance.⁴³

Foucault examines this shadowy space in his introductory chapter on “Las Meninas” in terms of ‘doubles,’ most clearly summarizing his argument toward the end of *Order of*

³⁹ Ibid., 16, 19.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

⁴² Ibid., 57.

⁴³ Ibid.

Things in the chapter “Man and his Doubles.” The double, based upon Blanchot’s companion-figure, shakes the certitude of being and is constantly murmuring, babbling, and beseeching the subject to reach beyond itself. In fact, it must—to survive—compose itself on the quavering foundation of non-being, which is to say, on “[that] inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of what man is in truth, but that also [is the] preliminary ground upon which man must...attain his truth.” The “unthought,” for Foucault, has always shadowed thought, “mutely and uninterruptedly.”⁴⁴ More explicitly:

Though this double may be close, *it is alien*, and the role, the true undertaking, of thought will be to bring it as close to itself as possible; the whole of modern thought is imbued with *the necessity of thinking the unthought*—of reflecting the contents of the *in-itself* in the form of the *for-itself*, of ending man’s alienation by reconciling him with his own essence, of making explicit the horizon that provides experience with its background of immediate and disarmed proof, of lifting the veil of the Unconscious, of becoming absorbed in its silence, or of straining to catch its endless murmur.⁴⁵

Foucault then asks, presaging his central question in “What is Enlightenment” (above): “what must I be, I who think and who am my thought, in order to be what I do not think, in order for my thought to be what I am not? What is this being, then, that shimmers...in the opening of the *cogito*, yet not sovereignly given in it or by it?” He is—*speculatively*—searching for where thought “addresses the unthought and articulates itself upon it.”⁴⁶ The figure of the double, of Blanchot’s companion, casts itself—via thought—across the void, doubled, doubling itself, and folding itself in infinite repetition, a vibratory reflection, the realization of a ground which is also unground, imbued with the pre-positional, and on which, anarchically, new formations may emerge.

⁴⁴ *The Order of Things* 356.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 354. This is further elaborated on by this long, beautiful quote (that resonates strongly with Meillassoux’s project): “...[the] existence—mute, yet ready to speak, and secretly impregnated with a potential discourse—of that *not-known* from which man is perpetually summoned towards self-knowledge. The question is...How can man think what he does not think, inhabit as though by a mute occupation something that eludes him, animate with a kind of frozen movement that figure of himself that takes the form of a stubborn exteriority? How can man be that life whose web, pulsations, and buried energy constantly exceed the experience that he is immediately given of them? How can he be that labour whose laws and demands are imposed upon him like some alien system? How can he be the subject of a language that for thousands of years has been formed without him, a language whose organization escapes him, whose meaning sleeps an almost invincible sleep in the words he momentarily activates by means of discourse, and within which he is obliged, from the very outset, to lodge his speech and thought, as though they were doing no more than animate, for a brief period, one segment of that web of innumerable possibilities?—There has been a fourfold displacement in relation to the Kantian position, for it is now a question not of truth, but of being; not of nature, but of man; not of the possibility of understanding, but of the possibility of a primary misunderstanding; not of the unaccountable nature of philosophical theories as opposed to science, but of the resumption in a clear philosophical awareness of that whole realm of unaccounted-for experiences in which man does not recognize himself” (*Ibid.*, 352).

IV. THOUGHT (II): THE DOUBLES OF "LAS MENINAS"

Moving from one form of artistic work to another—and we shall see this transform again via politics and the Iranian revolution—Foucault opens *The Order of Things* with an interpretation of Velázquez's painting "Las Meninas" (see appendix).⁴⁷ Its connection to the Outside is only revealed disjunctively at the end of the book, shown briefly above by way of his 'Doubles' chapter; however, I posit a possible extension of his interpretation of the artwork such that it might be more precisely connected to his adjacent writing on Blanchot, transgression, and the Outside (not to mention on friendship). There are three central doublings in "Las Meninas:" the Artist, the Sovereigns, and the Visitor. Each is a 'cast of the dice,' or the casting of thought, across an abyss that appears uncrossable.⁴⁸ The frightening claim is that each cast is successful. It is not a gamble on a particular result but instead an affirmation of the contingency of the cast itself. Successful doubling is not simply a representation of something but a diffusion of the Outside via its (non)result. Essential is that the (non)result—this diffusion and affirmation of contingency—is anonymous and infinitely dispersed; it retroactively throws into question its own occurrence. The double made-visible, in this case, is a kind of unconcealing of a shadow, a presence both uncertain and undeniable.

The doubles in "Las Meninas" operate on three levels. First, the artist is represented as the Artist in the painting. The real Velázquez casts himself into the fictive realm by painting himself in the midst of painting. Though containing the infinite slippage of the double, it is a basic act of representation: I see myself, I paint myself. Second, the Sovereigns are represented, hauntingly, in the luminous mirror at the center back of the painting. As Foucault argues, they occupy a non-position, the reflection of a frontal absence that turns the painting inside-out and on which nearly everyone in the painting appears to fix their gaze. This is a representation of a representation, a fiction of an absent fiction, a double of a (basic) double. It is complex: I cannot see a person, and yet I paint that person. The mirror 'captures' only a wisp of a double, its atmosphere. Thus we feel a sort of veiled threat in their appearance: where do they come from? is there a hidden depth to the mirror through which they have floated? who is capturing who? Their silent, impassive, and as Foucault also says "pale" distanced-distance carries with it the force of a brutal noise that spreads (from) within the Spectator's mind. The ultimate derivation of that noise is uncertain—a hesitation between inside and outside—leaving us with the feeling of being dis-eased. Third, placed directly to the right of the mirror, and on the opposite side of the central bifurcation of the painting itself, is the Visitor: somewhat indistinct but present. He is suspended on the stairs in a prolonged hesitation, "the ambiguous visitor is coming in and going out at the same time, like a pendulum caught at the bottom of its swing...repeat[ing] on the spot." The Sovereigns are "challenged by the [Visitor's] tall, solid

⁴⁷ See Appendix for various versions of "Las Meninas" related to this section and the next: painting right-side-up; painting upside-down; Princess Infanta's gaze; the Beaker/Keyhole right-side-up; the Beaker/Keyhole upside-down.

⁴⁸ This comes from Mallarmé's final line in *Coup de Dés*: "Every Thought Emits A Throw Of Dice." In other words, every thought voices (emits) the Chance/Contingency of the Outside.

stature," his relative oppositional positioning, and sheer uncertainty embodied by his "appear[ance] in the doorway."⁴⁹ As Joel Snyder also points out in his critique of Foucault's "Las Meninas" chapter, the "orthogonals" of the painting do not converge at the aptly titled "vanishing point" of the mirror, but instead at that which is just beside it: "Las Meninas is projected from a point distinctly to the right of the mirror...we could not see ourselves in the mirror." In other words, the ambiguous Visitor is the true vanishing point of the painting, "not...the point of view taken by the absent king or queen."⁵⁰ The Visitor is the impossible representation of the *unknown and anonymous* Spectator—the uncorrelated sovereign, being thought separately from the subject—who comes and goes. Foucault hints at this but seems to hold his follow through in abeyance. The Spectator invoked by the Sovereigns is, contrastingly, a *known* Spectator, constituted, positioned, and defined in reaction to the *representation* of absence (also aspiring to a certain power and necessity), as opposed to being the uncertain action presented by this suspended Visitor. Thus in its impossibility, the Visitor most accurately 'doubles' the (true) Spectator, catching them as they come and go; a real cast across the abyss—"that isn't me. ...or, wait, is it?" The Spectator, in this affirmative and active mode—not reactive—must reveal themselves, spurred by accident, as doubled by the Visitor ('It is me!'), and yet effaced ('perhaps...').

Even with all this, we must admit the Spectator, unlike the Visitor, ends their hesitation because they accomplish a (finite) coming and going. Thought identifies the represented Artist, brings forth the haunting uncertainty of the Sovereigns in the mirror, and then reveals the true sovereigns finally made flesh, if represented flesh, by the hesitating Visitor—the double moves degrees closer to the reality of the (unknown, uncorrelated) Spectator and the accomplishment of a true, that is, unthinkable, doubling (a literal melding of fictive and real doubles). This 'vanishing point' is, of course, also the point of contact (contagion) with the Outside; or as Foucault says when writing about Blanchot, the "power of dissimulation that effaces every determinate meaning and even the existence of the speaker [Spectator], in the gray neutrality that constitutes the essential hiding place [or vanishing point] of all being and thereby frees the space of the image [i.e., Outside incursion]."⁵¹

This brings us basically to the limit of Foucault's analysis. And yet, there is something even more dramatic at play; we are poised for something 'to happen' which does not, a leap into the vanishing point unriskened. What would literally de-correlate the Spectator? There remains, unconsidered, all the other characters in the painting. For the most part, they look outside of the painting, directly at a supposed Spectator. What if these characters were not looking at the contingent Spectator who strolls before them, pausing to think and look, but instead *behind* the Spectator? The figures do, after all, continue to look, their undead eyes forever fixed, before and after the 'Spectator' visits the painting. They are entranced by what lies beyond (their) representation, that 'great outdoors' prior to or after

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰ Joel Snyder, "Las Meninas and the Mirror of the Prince," *Critical Inquiry* 11:4 (1985), 548.

⁵¹"Thought from the Outside," 57.

the extinction of a witness. In other words, they are entranced by the transgressive possibility of what is up the stairs and through the door, what is made luminous by the Visitor's—and thus, in reality, the Spectator's—hesitation, what is outside the room they are frozen into, the room doubled in the world of the Spectator who gazes back. Most importantly, their eyes are fixed on the contingent possibility of a literal open door appearing behind the Spectator. Our admission becomes obvious and necessary: of course they do not look at the subject-Spectator, an assumption which can only, in the end, be the result of a kind of arrogance or narcissism on our/the Spectator's part (analogous to the anthropocentrism speculative materialism challenges). Their essential and overlooked post/pre-Spectator and post/pre-human gaze—also the teeming double of the Spectator's gaze—strikes in the heart of the certitude of the real world, transgressing their representational finitude by unveiling the fissure within that very limit. There is a kind of threat in what we might call their proletariat (non)presence, something much more frightening (and hopeful) than the Sovereign's threat: the shadows (the doubles) might invade. They call us toward an access beyond correlative logics and toward revolution and truth, beyond Foucault's all-too-humble 'pure' representation; they await the absolute's contingent revelation, allusively gazing with (its) force. Thus it is not just, as Foucault says, the mirrored sovereigns that sneak into the situation ("that reflection which has slipped into the room behind them all, silently occupying its unsuspected space...they stand outside the picture...withdrawn from it in an essential invisibility").⁵² Rather, what Foucault misses is that the open door next to the mirror is what most strikingly slips behind the Spectator. Exerting a kind of gravitational energy, it is diffused, not represented, in real space as the Spectators slip toward an Outside suddenly transported into an intimate interiority. The door uncovers a hole that leads to a 'placeless place' "in which the speaking subject disappears" and the being of contingency appears.⁵³

"Las Meninas," then, is an answer to the central and, what we would call today, staunchly anti-correlationist question articulated in his study of Blanchot: "how can we gain access to this strange relation [to the Outside]?"⁵⁴ It requires a certain kind of thought, "a form of thought...that stands outside subjectivity."⁵⁵ One must become complicit with anonymous forces and thought.⁵⁶

V. THOUGHT (III): THE HIDDEN ACT

With this accumulation of thought and its teeming uncertainties, there remains the question of a physical-act, that is, an action itself. Foucault does not explore this in his analysis of the painting, likely because it would require answering an absurd question: what single, literal act must the Spectator (the person existing the real) do to bring the anonymous

⁵² *The Order of Things*, 15.

⁵³ "Thought from the Outside," 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ This phrase comes from Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), a book that haunts this paper and my thinking.

forces potentialized by the painting into reality — what is a transgressive (hidden) act in the particular situation of looking at this painting? In other words, how must the Spectator prepare themselves and the situation for the contingent event, in order for it to be realized? If a contingent event occurs without subjective preparation, then the subject is not transfigured (only the situation is); if a subject prepares, but the event does not occur, then the subject is not transfigured — the subject must dislocate or de-correlate themselves in order to (possibly) take in that which is absolutely Outside as a change in itself.⁵⁷ This is also the question of representation: how can someone elide representation, non-representation, and even Foucault's "pure representation?"⁵⁸ The open door doubled behind the Spectator comes close to doing so but has one foot bound to metaphor. There needs to be a material consideration, a presentation; transgression requires a *space* to be opened. The answer is as simple as it is absurd: *the painting must be flipped upside-down*.

Before tracing out some consequences of this act, there are several clues that lead to its thought. First, there is the proliferation of doubles, understood in a broad sense that includes apparent oppositions, which range far past the Artist, Sovereign, and Visitor outlined above. The simple emphasis on doubling is, itself, a basic clue — what is the double of right-side-up? Upside-down. Furthermore, what is the double of the primary space filled by people and light? The absent space above, the truly ignored space (not the mirrored-Sovereigns), a desert of shadows and blurs without people (à la Blanchot's companion-figure). If flipped, this absent space floods forth, paradoxically, from the primary position. There are, too, the living doubles: 1) Painter-Painter, 2) Sovereigns-Mirrored Sovereigns, 3) Visitor-Spectator, 4) Right attendant-Left attendant, 5) Princess Infanta-Queen (as Foucault also identifies, she models herself after the Queen via the angle of her profile), 6) Dwarf-Dwarf, and 7) Bodyguard-Chaperone (back right). It must be remembered that the role of the double for Foucault is not dialectical but rather an arrangement or movement that reveals a hidden fissure within the movement itself, that vibratory 'perhaps' which unfolds as a field or space of its own — the siren's call to the Outside, Meillassoux's 'may-being.' There remains only the dog without a double, which Foucault dismisses as the "only element in the picture that is neither looking at anything nor moving, because it is not intended...to be anything but an object to be seen."⁵⁹

The dog is unique because it does not have an obvious role nor double. Foucault's conclusion that it is intended as an object may not be wrong, but his devaluation of the dog, and thus dismissal of its possible doubling, proves to be a key error. The dog as 'dog'

⁵⁷ This is analogous to the question of Meillassoux's 'vectoral militant' who prepares for his 'Fourth World of Justice.' How should such a figure act when the moment of transfiguration (mortal to immortal) is absolutely uncertain? Until it happens they are 'spectator' to a 'spectacle' (something not yet real) and nonetheless must ethically position themselves as a non-spectator (an actor) in a de-spectacularized (current, Third) world.

⁵⁸ This is sought not in order to bring *presence* (e.g., Christ's appearance) as that follows a transcendent model, and not one in which contingency is alone necessary, but instead to bring diffusion (e.g., the Eucharist divorced from Christ) which follows an immanent model. See the chapter in Meillassoux's *The Number and the Siren*, "Representation, Presentation, Diffusion." Also, in relation to subjective preparation, Meillassoux makes congruent claims in "Immanence of the World Beyond."

⁵⁹ *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, 15.

implies physical action: it is an animal, a being (understood at that time as) not endowed with thought nor speech but with impressive physical abilities. Moreover, it is the only thing in the room not gazing (its eyes are closed), it is nameless (the other figures can be traced to names, people; even the chaperone), and traditionally it exists between human and object, a living thing outside the discourse of portrait painting. Still, what could be the dog's double? It should exist in an in-between state (like the dog), be nameless and non-seeing, and its discovery must evoke the contingency foundational to the act of doubling. Perhaps it is an apparition, like the mirrored sovereigns, or a pure opposite, like the ceiling and ground? It cannot be any of the 'taken' doubles, and there are no other animals. Foucault, unknowingly, provides us with a hint: the dog has *no importance* to the picture. Thus, its double might have the *most importance* (Being shadowed by the void).⁶⁰

The first place to look, in terms of positioning of importance, is in the bottom-third center. As expected, there stands Princess Infanta, gazing straight at us—as if daring us to make a (the) connection. While she is already doubled (it cannot be her), her head is precisely positioned between the mirror and the open door, a liminal space between the Spectator made finite and known (seen in the mirror, the Sovereigns) and the Spectator made infinite and unknown (seen in the door, the Visitor). What is her significance? She gazes, somehow knowingly, toward the real Spectator caught *between* the finite and infinite, correlate and uncorrelated; the Spectator who hears the call of the divine, who feels its pull, and yet is held back by a subjectivity tethered to a metaphysics of sufficient reason, a subjectivity that can only ever understand 'divinity' as something transcendent as opposed to immanent. Upon closer inspection, what appears to be an odd red blotch is placed where her right hand should be. The blotch is, in actuality, a red beaker, held out by the attendant, likely offering water to the Princess. And yet, after the initial moment of noticing, it now stands out as if on the surface of the painting, refusing to be ignored, magnetizing the eye with a weird, almost alien force—could this be it? It is in a central location, offered to the most important person in the painting, and a child no less, a symbol of hope, renewal, innocence, and even speculation. The beaker is non-human and, as an object, it cannot see. It is held up by the attendant, while the dog is held down by the foot of the dwarf. Like the dog, it is hard to ascertain a specific purpose to the object, in an otherwise meticulously composed painting. Looked at more closely, it also appears to be held up by a blur (a plate, in reality), an odd purely horizontal brushstroke in an otherwise heterogeneously brushed painting. There is something 'off' about the placement of such an unimportant object near the center of the painting and, moreso, obscuring a part of Infanta—an encroachment of the purity of the Princess. The object, vibrating with uncertainty, appears to be held forth with a sort of reverence. It is almost as if she is offering the Princess her crown—or rather, offering the Spectator the 'crowning' moment of the painting, the hidden double and its hidden force.

It must be the dog's double, a transfigured dog—a kind of double within the fissure of other doublings. But what is so important about this unseeing beaker? Why is it the *most*

⁶⁰ Coincidentally, DOG reversed is GOD. Also: 0/1 & 1/0; zero intensity as an undefined infinity; death as that which surpasses limits of finitude.

important thing, even more than the child? It contains another secret double in its depths, that placeless place conditioned by a transgressive double: it looks like a *keyhole*, only positioned upside-down. The position of the Princess between the mirror and the open door is a marker, but not the thing itself; the Princess is no metaphysical being guarding some sort of gate to the Outside. She simply holds the contingent material access to such a thing: a keyhole requiring no key save a subjectivity that realizes its (non-unique) ability to access the uncorrelated infinite. Thus, in a central location, the odd nagging anonymous red blotch becomes a potential opening that requires a worthy subject to activate. *The painting itself must be turned, by way of an immanent discovery along a path of uncertainty, as the key that flips the keyhole right-side-up, orienting the painting such that it can make its final statement.*

As the Spectator flips the painting, transgressing the sovereign line between Spectacle and Spectator (making the institution housing it admit its presence as complicit with the cops they will call), the ground becomes ungrounded, filled with shadows and blurry paintings. The light and figures are cast aside and the void takes hold. The only remaining light sources in focus are the edges of the mirror and open door—still essential doubles, paths to the Outside. Everyone's positions, real and fictional, are revealed as contingent. The Spectator, inspecting and thinking about the painting right-side-up, has been fragmented by the onslaught of doubles and made uncertain, furtively glancing over their shoulder for a contingently opening door, feeling the 'pull' of the Outside, its force. Flipping the painting, they are overcome by the absence and shadow which doubles their very being; they find themselves physically, not metaphorically, *absented* in their action, their 'self' made non-dialectically diffuse. Until then, all could be brushed away, in the last instance, as nothing but unsettling representations. The physical act, though, irrevocably alters the situation. This act, furthermore, needs to be absurd and *unreasonable*. It must fill the Spectator with laughable uncertainty. Why would anyone ever do this? And yet the thought of it, followed by the act, opens one to the Outside: they are no longer spectating a piece of art as 'spectacle' but activating a hidden pathway within it (it is the flip that matters, not the resultant content which can only be markers or signs). Thus the act of absurdity/uncertainty that Foucault set the groundwork for—the act of transgression—diffuses into the Spectator beyond the finitude of representation. They are melded, momentarily, with Contingency. This is the true 'key' of "Las Meninas."

VI. FORCE: RESISTANCE AND MAY-BEING

Thought can thus become aware of the deserts that surround it, perceiving and feeling the presence of non-thought in (the absent-absence of) being, the absolute Outside. This absolute unfolds onto a social field as *force*.⁶¹ Force, which operates as a kind of virtuality (in Deleuze's immanent sense), always bifurcates simultaneously into power and resistance, the former shadowed by the latter.

⁶¹ In terms of the humanist issues with thought, Foucault's (and Deleuze's) conception of force has a democratizing effect, spanning across environments, things, animals, and humans. Still, we must remain suspicious of vitalist (correlationist) tendencies with regard to force.

Foucault's force is relational. It is not a vital flow or thing: "power [force] in a substantive sense does not exist."⁶² It is "omnipresent," and not a metaphysical "omnipotent" cause; it is "not built up of wills (individual or collective), nor is it derivable from interests."⁶³ Force is the smooth non-agential space on which the Outside scatters in contingent maps and diagrams, constellations with innumerable points. It unfolds as the field of the virtual real and may-being, a shadowy non-space that continually beckons the finite toward knowing the truth of its infinitude. It is, to put it in other words, that which is apprehended within the affect of genuine friendship, flipping "Las Meninas," or, more broadly, transgression.

Force can be most easily contrasted with Knowledge, which is its stratification and finitization: "the relations between forces, which are mobile, faint, and diffuse, do not lie outside strata [knowledge] but form the outside of strata."⁶⁴ Knowledge is the actualization and then institutionalization of power, which is force sutured to intentionality. Power-Knowledge is the framing and manipulating of force such that it appears necessary (ideology, cathedral-ization, correlationism), delegitimizing the Outside and absolute. This is not to say knowledge necessarily results in negative (transcendental) institutionalization, as it can also reveal aspects of force as (immanent) resistance. This form of knowledge, which we call Resistance-Knowledge as opposed to Power-Knowledge, follows from the instantiation of Force as Resistance—that is, a transgressive act, like flipping "Las Meninas," which follows rationally from the Outside, i.e., absolute contingency. It is resistant not because it is oppositional to Power, nor chaotic, but *anarchic*, that is, sutured to the non-intentional and transfinite. Each Foucauldian analysis of an episteme is tied back to a plane of forces, and thus to the Outside, from which contingent power-knowledge regimes come to being. It is doubtless that these epistemes exist, but we are by no means bounded by them; they are, in the end, contingently made and, like force, subject to a universal contingency. The plane of forces is a history shadowing that of Power-Knowledge, revealing the illusions of historicism and causality.

Force, therefore, exists non-dialectically in suspended contradiction between these poles. On the one hand, power becomes stratified into knowledge, correlated, always-already together; knowledge supports this vicious circle, adding certainty to power, hastening its accumulation, and fracturing its original nature as uncertain. On the other hand, resistance flows into and frees knowledge to think toward the absolute; a kind of anti-power. The contingency of everything does not necessarily hinder any power-stratification, though; just as anything can change for no reason at all, everything could also remain the same, become increasingly concretized, or function according to an intra-worldly correlative logic. In this way, power and knowledge are *contingently correlative*, always together but never leading to a metaphysics of power-knowledge.

⁶² Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh (Interview)" [1977], in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (1980), 198.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, "The History of Sexuality (Interview)" [1977], in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (1980), 188.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* [1986] (1988), 85.

This limit is expressed in the nature of force itself: it continues to operate, infinitely spawning new diagrams, new constellatory points—and, thus, along with the advent of power is the advent of resistance in contingent forms. Deleuze describes this clearly:

The power to affect or be affected is carried out in a variable way, depending on the forces involved in the relation. The diagram, as the fixed form of a set of relations between forces, never exhausts force, *which can enter into other compositions*. The diagram stems from the outside and *the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to 'draw' new ones*. In this way the outside is always an opening onto a future: nothing ends since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed. In this sense force displays potentiality with respect to the diagram containing it, *or possesses a third power which presents itself as the possibility of 'resistance.'*⁶⁵

Deleuze implicates, here, a theory of eternal becoming, which is distinct from Meillassoux's (and our) theory of contingency. His description of power, resistance, and the Outside is perfectly applicable but not as governed by an eternal and necessary transformation. With absolute contingency, things, laws, people, and so on can be annihilated or appear *ex nihilo*. In that sense—and not 'in this sense' that Deleuze describes with regard to his claim that 'nothing ends since nothing has begun'—force, and thus the Outside, is even more significant. It does not "open onto a future," but makes uncertain the very possibility of a future and of time itself. Deleuze is correct—and especially so when he says (along with Étienne Balibar) that "the appeal to the outside is a constant theme in Foucault"—but he does not take it far enough. Resistance is not the realization of a positive hope, but the very marker by which we can know and be filled with the absolute. To be suffused with such hesitation, such uncertainty, such vibrancy, is to reject any necessary being or cause. Grounding and transforming hope in that non-progressive space is akin to absolute resistance, which is to say (following Deleuze), "a liberation of forces which come from the outside."⁶⁶

In the final analysis, force is the omnipresent instantiation of the Outside as that which shadows and haunts being. Finding oneself in the folds of force is akin to, following Meillassoux now, shifting one's position from (illusory) being to (real) may-being. May-being unites an ontology of absolute uncertainty with an ethics of absolute possibility.⁶⁷ In it, one must base their existence upon a wager—or, as Meillassoux argues by way of Mallarmé, who we must recall is counted by Foucault as among those thinkers who have "experienced the Outside," one must base their existence upon a *peut-être* [perhaps].⁶⁸ It is this same quavering of the *peut-être* (potentialized-being, uncertain-being, a being of force) that spreads from thinking the open door and keyhole of "Las Meninas" and that sustains our Foucauldian diagram of the Outside, thought, force, and knowledge.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 89 (my emphasis).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁷ Meillassoux discusses this in "Immanence of the World Beyond" and *The Number and the Siren*.

⁶⁸ Meillassoux, *Number and the Siren*. See the chapter "At a Stroke."

Foucault's invocation of Mallarmé in "Thought of/from the Outside" highlights the resonance between may-being as *peut-être* and force:

...what precedes all speech, what underlies all silence: the continuous streaming of language. A language spoken by no one: any subject it may have is no more than a grammatical fold...It opens a neutral space in which no existence can take root. *Mallarmé taught us that the word [i.e., peut-être is the word par excellence] is the manifest non-existence of what it designates; we now know that the being of language is the visible effacement of the one who speaks: 'saying that I hear these words would not explain for me the dangerous strangeness of my relations with them...They do not speak, they are not inside; on the contrary, they lack all intimacy and lie entirely outside...this anonymity of language [...]* It is only a formless rumbling, a streaming.⁶⁹

It must be emphasized that Foucault, by way of Mallarmé and Blanchot, is talking about the *being* of language, that is, language uncorrelated to us, or again, an absolute language, the language of the Outside. It is a 'neutral space' of 'no existence' — the flooding forth of blurs and shadows in the flipped "Las Meninas." This is the space of may-being, in which (the language of) force is precisely understood as *peut-être*: an emancipatory movement transgressing speech and non-speech and ushering in the contingent Outside.

VII. CONCLUSION: THE OUTSIDE AND REVOLT

The organization diagrammed at the start is clear and yet quavers at every point. To recapitulate our arrangement before proceeding toward its conclusion: each thought is (emits, voices) a 'dice throw.' That act is founded upon a perpetual hesitation and *peut-être*, a 'may-ifying' of being called forth by the desert of non-thought surrounding it. The Outside, heralded by doubles and shadows, flows forth and arranges contingent diagrams of force in a social field. Force splits into power and resistance; power stratifies into knowledge (but can contingently be transmuted) and resistance evokes an irreducible virtuality shot through from the Outside. There may be an ethics of the Outside, perhaps even realized by a particular kind of friendship, but it is a challenging thing to conceive of, much less engage with in practice. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny Foucault's Outside is akin to Meillassoux's absolute contingency, and even more difficult to deny Foucault is, throughout all his work, grappling with (and toward) this subterranean speculative trajectory.

What is especially interesting, though, is that for Foucault the drive of such an obscure and unfixable speculative diagram remains emancipation: as in our introduction, we must recall he claims the path of transgression (the Outside) is created by the laborious and "undefined work of freedom." How does the quavering inherent in the Outside allow for or hinder emancipation from our finitized subjectivities? Emancipation is an intentional struggle, and yet we have been entirely focused on the unintentional and non-necessary. Taken in a broad sense, this point can be reconfigured as a more fundamental

⁶⁹ "Thought from the Outside," 54-55 (my emphasis).

philosophical question: how, or even whether, do we engage with something indifferent and exterior? If, as we may assume, this engagement, this subjectivity of absolute resistance, holds a key to freedom, but refuses intentional action ('undefined'), operating only in anonymity — what is to be done? How does a materialism grounded in ontological contingency link up with revolutionary politics? Flipping paintings is both not enough (what about militant actions?) and cannot exhaust the possibilities of action. More brutally: in the face of sheer infinitude, is action useless?⁷⁰

What could be required is a transgression of the self as finite, that is, the transmutation of the subject into a being worthy of their own infinitude. A subject's infinitization — or, per Meillassoux, *divinization* — must paradoxically be recognized (known) as contingent as well as prepared for: a subject founded on nothing. This quite specific form of 'worthiness' — one linked to, and only to, absolute contingency — is, in fact, the key act toward agential resistance. It is a labor undertaken with conviction divested of dogmatic and moralistic superiority. Without such a worthiness, a contingent transformation of life by the Outside — the work of freedom — would simply result in a superficial change, a chance which refuses to grasp its own non-necessity and sustains itself within feedbacks of Power and institutionalization instead of the flows of Resistance grounding change in itself. In this way, friendship, concern for the soul, and the perception of the double as the Outside all appear again as possible practices oriented toward justice and emancipation, which is to say, toward becoming worthy.

Foucault addresses a similar question during his engagement in the Iranian revolution, in his 1979 article "Useless to Revolt?" Responding to the claim, which parallels that of nihilism in the face of absolute contingency, "'it is useless to revolt; it is always going to be the same thing,'" he offers hope deriving from a pure refusal of authority and power: "'I will not obey.'"⁷¹ There are three elements of this ethic of refusal that, taken in the context of our discussion, channel the Outside: 1) death, or the risking of life; 2) an "outside [of] history;" and 3) the role of religion and spirituality. The project of Foucault's refusal is to look askance at negation to unveil the possibility of genuine transgression beyond simple opposition. It is through revolt — militant resistance — that a subject (positively) short circuits our diagrams of thought, power, resistance, and knowledge, activating force as a direct mode of tearing through to the Outside and as a worthiness conditioning emancipation.

⁷⁰ Meillassoux formulates this question across much of his work. It is clear here: "I would like to indicate what is opened up by these reflections on the contingency of laws. The general perspective is that of a redefinition of reason, once the latter has been entirely extirpated of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. I seek to redefine a rational necessity subtended by the impossibility of real necessity (physical necessity). I seek, that is, to establish that one can reason in the absence of reason. For I believe the most precious result of the preceding analysis is the following: if what is has no reason to be as it is, certain consequences follow for what is, consequences that are neither trivial nor negligible. [...] I seek to develop a style of argumentation that establishes the nontrivial consequences of the absence of reason. In other words, I seek to prove that there do indeed exist necessary properties of being but that these properties are the very consequences of the contingency of being. Everything is contingent, but its being contingent implies that not everything is possible" (Meillassoux, "Contingency of the Laws of Nature," 333).

⁷¹ Foucault, *The Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, 452, 449.

First, to revolt may involve (and does in the Iranian case) the “impulse” to “throw the risk of life in the face of an authority” which is “unjust.” It is an “irreducible” act.⁷² The militant revolutionary is, by this action Foucault describes, the condition for what Meillassoux separately terms the “spectral dilemma,” in which he also considers the role of and desire for emancipatory action in the face of an indifferent contingency/Outside.⁷³ Meillassoux argues that all those who died unjust, horrendous, inexplicable deaths will forever haunt the world, drowning it and the living in despair, depression, and death.⁷⁴ The only possible mourning for these impossible deaths is an impossible mourning; to accomplish this, to satisfy the infinite “essential spectre” (i.e., Foucault’s martyred militant), one must engage an infinite “essential grief,” that is, an unending linkage with the dead. To condition the resolution of the spectral dilemma, one must practice going beyond finitude by developing a subjectivity worthy of immortality. In his delineation of the Fourth World to come, all subjects become contingently immortal. Only the worthy subjects, though, are considered Just (those who can grieve infinitely, exacting a genuine connection to the dead beyond the finitude of the life/death divide). It requires, as above, a simultaneous preparation for the contingent advent of immortality while realizing the non-necessity of its occurrence: superficial change is the unworthy subject becoming immortal (eternal injustice, denial of the absolute, rejection of the dead); change in itself is the worthy subject becoming immortal (eternal justice, integration of the absolute, embrace—and in doing so resurrection—of the dead). Becoming worthy, then, is both a stretching toward a world-to-come as well as what will enact change in the present. Analogously, Foucault’s revolutionary figure risks death as a dual-resistance to power/authority exercised in the here-and-now (the dictator, the capitalist, the police) as well as that of finitude, as death, itself. The refusal to be oppressed is singularized in the figure’s ultimate wager. They cast their self between here and there, between life and death, the non-place of transgression where “authorities can no longer do anything” and where the stratification of power is overcome by the contingency released in their resistance (this bridging figure is what Meillassoux calls the “metaxu,” who is “already between here and there,” referring to the Third and Fourth Worlds).⁷⁵ The revolutionary figure, in an act of ontological hacking, reaches toward an impossible (a Just) world, creating a rapid influx of the Outside in the present; a moment of irreducible hope and tragedy. They manage to emit what we could call a ‘spectral cry:’ a scream of resistance that melds with the spectre’s haunting calls—*while still alive*—creating the conditions for the resolution of ‘essential spectre’ and bringing it, momentarily, into the world as an embodiment of resistance.

Second, these moments of revolt create a map of an “outside [of] history,” and yet are “in history.”⁷⁶ By this, Foucault means that the act of wagering one’s life occurs within a dominant, historical temporality, but also, because of its invocation of the infinite in death,

⁷² Ibid., 449.

⁷³ Meillassoux, “Immanence of the World Beyond”

⁷⁴ To be clear, Meillassoux ultimately argues against death *qua* death, as a kind of triumph of finitude; the spectral dilemma is an evocative and keystone example within his more universal struggle against death.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 478.

⁷⁶ *The Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, 450.

it necessarily (dis)locates itself beyond the finitizing movements of history. It offers a history “beneath” and “behind” history.⁷⁷ This is the history of the Outside as it reveals itself in formations of resistance, as a double and a shadow. It is a history that demands, in order to grapple with it, a wagering of the self, an internalization (or rather realization of the inherency) of contingency. In “Thought of/from the Outside,” Foucault, quite significantly, tasks us with bringing this to the surface: “it will one day be necessary to try to define the fundamental forms and categories of this ‘thought from the outside.’ It will be necessary to retrace its path to find out where it comes to us from and in what direction it is moving.”⁷⁸

Third, Foucault identifies a religious/spiritual dimension of revolt, which we might call, too, a speculative dimension: “one understands why uprisings have so easily found their expression and their drama in religious forms.”⁷⁹ It is telling that Meillassoux, also, arrives at the religious question in his nascent considerations of the ethics and politics resulting from contingency (e.g., in the only partially published *Divine Inexistence*). For Foucault, the Iranian revolt is founded in a politicized religiosity due to “years of censorship and persecution, a political class kept under tutelage, parties outlawed, revolutionary groups decimated.” This spirituality is not located in any institutionalization but rather in the revolutionaries who “went to their deaths,” thus conditioning the possibility of a visceral, speculative, connection between the living and dead as the grounding of resistance.⁸⁰ Martyrdom is a speculative act. Resistance is founded upon this “eschatological subject” who opens themselves directly to the Outside.⁸¹ It is through their action that “subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, breathing life into it. A convict risks his life to protest unjust punishments; a madman can no longer bear being confined and humiliated; a people refuses the regime that oppresses it.”⁸² This act is indistinguishable from the movement of the Outside; it offers the advent of an impossible, anonymous subjectivity of forces, bolstered, infinitized, and made immortal by its diffusion beyond finitude.

Moreover, it follows Meillassoux’s criteria of worthiness (derived from his spectral dilemma) in which the thought of the Fourth World (immortalized subjects, resurrected spectres, universal justice) motivates the genuinely just and worthy revolutionary, as opposed to the laudable but unworthy revolutionary who militates for the sake of militancy itself. Struggle must always be oriented toward its contingent overcoming, toward that which is Outside—and which, necessarily, engages a form of religiosity (historically a site which has embraced the invasions and epidemics of the Outside). That is, both the Foucauldian and Meillassouxian resistance fighter operate under the sign of the absolute (the Outside) which can *alone* bring about genuine change, as opposed to the idols of false

⁷⁷ Ibid., 455.

⁷⁸ “Thought from the Outside,” 16.

⁷⁹ *The Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, 450.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 451.

⁸¹ A term also used by Meillassoux to describe his ‘vectoral subject’ that follows a ‘divine ethics.’

⁸² Ibid., 452.

change erected by ongoing iterations of resistance disconnected from the Outside. The latter are, following our diagram of the Outside, in fact nothing but accumulations of power donning the righteous façades of resistance.

And, so, where do we begin? Perhaps in front of “Las Meninas;” perhaps among our closest friends and comrades; perhaps in the throes of revolt and rejection of capital. The worthy act of revolt—the sudden leap into the abyss and annihilation—is prepared by a practice forged in resistance to power, a practice of Foucauldian friendship-in-struggle (in *force*) and of the diffused-self which hopes, in its laborious movement, to found a just world. This is to say, finally, that it is only the transgressive subject, the unreasonable subject, who justifies nothing—and, in doing so, can leap into that very nothingness: the Absence, the Outside.

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Appendix⁸³

“Las Meninas” (right-side-up)



⁸³ Velázquez, Diego, “Las Meninas,” Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1656. Public Domain.

"Las Meninas" Focus: Princess Infanta 'Daring Look' and the 'Beaker/Keyhole'



"Las Meninas" Upside-Down

