

RESPONSE

## Hypnotic Inductions: On the Persistence of the Subject

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In “On Being Agnostic”<sup>1</sup> James Marshall opens by arguing that his work has been placed on a plateau of agnosticism in my own article “Normalizing Foucault?” He compares Sartre and Foucault on the political necessity of the subject and concludes that in other of his works and at different times he might well be placed on different plateaus. He also notes the importance of the question mark in the title “Normalizing Foucault?” The response here to the response focuses not so much on locations on plateaus as much as how encampments and seepage help constitute the temporariness and instability of plateau-formations, including those plateaus referred to as the subject.

My article “Normalizing Foucault?” draws on a wide survey of humanities-based and social science deployments of Foucault in anglophone literature. In surveying how Foucault has been taken up across disciplines, the peculiarities of an educational field become apparent. Specific and temporary patterns are discernible, indebted to historical propensities that mark more broadly the parameters of anglophone educational research – research that travels transnationally and that simultaneously carries yet blurs what can be recognized as local histories. In “Normalizing Foucault?”<sup>2</sup> such field-specific propensities were enumerated as tendencies to: a) scientize and template theoretical frameworks, b) normalize-govern particular approaches as standardized methodology amid swirling and recombinatorial tendencies, and c) carve out moralistic dualisms around their utility. As a never-settled list of noticeabilities, they are subject to reinterpenetration by the varied contributions that a Foucault corpus makes toward recognizing the conditions of possibility for such propensities.<sup>3</sup>

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1 James Marshall, “On Being Agnostic: A Response to Bernadette Baker”, *Foucault Studies*, no. 4 (2007): 120-126.

2 Bernadette Baker, “Normalizing Foucault? A Rhizomatic Approach to Plateaus in Anglophone Educational Research”, *Foucault Studies*, no.4, (2007): 78-119.

3 As for “Normalizing Foucault?” I draw upon of the problematization of the possessive, where such grammatical forms are to be understood through a reading strategy that places them beyond the individual and outside discourses of ownership.

In a field often described as conservative, the reception of almost anything considered new is launched quite rapidly into a mode of camp-formation. "Normalizing Foucault?" through its rhizomatic orientation to educational research, does not simply trace and follow some specific ways in which such historical propensities shape temporary plateaus around the name Foucault. Through a close and rigorous reading, it offers, in motion, insight into such synergistic reinterpenetrations, analyzing how plateau-formation occurs, how the processes of formation simultaneously foreclose and seep, showing how further and potential recombinations become (im)possible, not despite such often-dualistic plateaus, but because of them: "The determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions of scholarship in education would here be put into connectivity with each other, shifting images of 'an authentic Foucault' into a multiplicity that changes rather than resolves what is seen as Foucaultian."<sup>4</sup>

The impossibility and nonnecessity of reconciling such readings of Foucault in the educational field is key. The analysis does not, on the one hand, act in a mode of denial about the formation of particular preferences. It does not, on the other hand, have at its back imperialist or stewardship tendencies. The rhizomatic reading demonstrates linkage and unhinging between and within different plateaus. "On Being Agnostic"<sup>5</sup> asks broadly what has happened to the subject in such an approach, characterizing the plateau analysis as bringing texts and ideas into alignment, thereby avoiding determinism and the subject-as-author as Foucault had. Through separating text from ideas and arguing that the two are brought into a technical relationship that permits the rhizomatic and de-authored reading, the grounds are set for an apparently more politicized and pre-existing subject to make a bolder return. Thus, questions about the political necessity of the subject, whether the subject has or even can be gotten rid of completely, can arise and are automatically associated not just with the question of authorship, but with activities in practical, political, or protest domains such as the necessity of retaining a notion of the subject as an owner of rights.

While the initial article was not dedicated to a discussion of the subject, Sartre, or Sartre's relationship to Foucault this response takes up the invitation to think differently about what constitutes a site of the political and what circulates as a necessity. Specifically, it first lays out shifting analytics of the subject across the Foucault corpus. It then moves from these more familiar debates via the tensions that inhere both within and beyond them to an examination an entification problematic and the strategy of performative apophasis in addressing it. The philosophical problems entailed in placing "contemporary" classifications in "historical" perspective is something that as

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4 Baker, "Normalizing Foucault",

5 Marshall, "On Being Agnostic".

“On Being Agnostic” points out, is engaged early, overtly discussed in the second book, *Histoire de la Folie* (translated as *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*).<sup>6</sup> An analysis of the apophatic poetics in *Madness and Civilization* is then offered. Here, a reframing of the concerns in “On Being Agnostic” is provided, by examining how the tendency to reduce performative apophasis, in this case around the subject, to single-proposition statements devalues the tensions between saying and unsaying and diffuses the *dynamis* of a new mode of discourse. The habit of converting double-proposition apophatic modes of discourse into single-proposition statements – such as those surrounding what constitutes the political, necessity, responsibility, and reflexivity – is understood as one of at least three possible responses to engaging an entification problematic – a process that is problematized and historicized through Foucault’s work. The paper concludes by questioning what kinds of onto-theo-philosophical scaffolding induces belief in the necessity of the subject, in the distinction of a realm or activity as (non)political, and what literatures/events might help rethink such questions anew.

### **Foucault and the Subject, Again**

There are multiple analytics of the subject across the Foucault corpus that shift from an early rejection of the subject of phenomenology *as a guide for history-writing* (archaeology) to an outright discarding of such a subject altogether (genealogy). For instance, in the Foreword to the English language edition of *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* resides a “directions for use”: “This work should be read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer either to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun. But I should like to mention three problems.”<sup>7</sup> These are the problem of change, the problem of causality, and the problem of the subject. Which version of the subject?

The problem of the subject. In distinguishing between the epistemological level of knowledge (or scientific consciousness) and the archaeological level of knowledge, I am aware that I am advancing in a direction that is fraught with difficulty. Can one speak of science and its history...without reference to the scientist himself – and I am speaking not merely of the concrete individual represented by a proper name, but of his work and the particular form of his thought?

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6 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1988).

7 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970/1994), xii

Can a valid history of science be attempted that would retrace from beginning to end the whole spontaneous movement of an anonymous body of knowledge? Is it legitimate; is it even useful, to replace the traditional "X thought that..." by a "it was known that..." But this is not what I set out to do.<sup>8</sup>

Readers are then further prepared for the details of the reorientation to come. There is the anticipation of backlash: "I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts, or themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive role in the history of the sciences."

The reorientation is recognition of the inadequacy of what Luhmann calls the subject/environment scission, which has been so pivotal to the formation of sociology and the philosophy of consciousness and their "tribal genealogies of the masters."<sup>9</sup> Even as this scission, appears on the horizon in eighteenth century writings in "Europe" with its compatriot, the future, it appears simultaneously as unworkable – it has not been possible to close "the subject" off from "environment," to completely psychologize or personalize "him" as either origin or pure producer of the product. Something about him always bleeds into something else – his mother, his country, his training, his peers or as in Foucault's case here "systems of regularities that have a decisive role" – evacuating the subject from its place of certainty and possession, threatening to link him energetically, mystically perhaps, to even those things that appear inanimate – the design of buildings, the feel of clothing, the rhythm of books. Where the line is drawn around the owner or the author becomes a question of "power relations," of the cluster and cleavage of terms whose spatiality gives over onto the analysis of power. As such, this seemingly simple technical and rhetorical move, the shift from "X thought that" to "it is known that" can be understood as political, even as counter-colonial.<sup>10</sup> The term *archaeology* is deployed in this text as a method of

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8 Ibid., xiii.

9 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr., with Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985/1995).

10 It is increasingly difficult to use the terms power and power relations as though the meanings are agreed upon and stable across writings or within a given one. This has been elaborated elsewhere: "when stuck as to explain why or how something appears the way it appears, why it moves, or from whence it springs, the term power or its equivalents have often been thrust into explanations to take up such slack" (Bernadette M. Baker, *In Perpetual Motion: Theories of Power, Educational History, and the Child* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 65) and "I am not writing here to support or deny the different analytics of power or the worldviews that inspired them, which is not to say that the argument is neutral. I am more concerned with how the term

describing events where events are transformations in the conditions via which statements could be made and accepted.<sup>11</sup> Change is thus not to be located simply in or as what someone did-said here compared to what someone did-said there, but in shifts in systems of regularities that might make such actions-beliefs possible.

I should like to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them. In short, I have tried to explore scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse.<sup>12</sup>

The examples that follow are: “What conditions did Linnaeus (or Petty, or Arnauld) have to fulfill, not to make his discourse coherent and true in general, but to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse.” Having given such directions for use for the chapters to come, a further caveat is inserted - just because an effort has been made in one direction, this should not be taken as rejection of any other possible approach. A line is drawn, though: “If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness.” The upshot of this rejection is a different way to write a history of scientific discourse: “It seems to me that the

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power functioned in different explanations for cosmology, how it mutated, and how it became available in a particular version as a common explanation for events by the late seventeenth century. This analytical priority, in turn, suggests a different way of thinking about the proliferation of education or child-rearing debate from the late 1600s to the early 1900s as less about the manifestation of new power relations and more about the theoretical conceivability of power as relational. To that end, the role, location, weight, and meaning that the term power has been given in different cosmologies, especially in regard to motion, is an important excavation of that which is sometimes presumed to hold homogeneous meaning in histories of the child and education today” (Ibid., 67–8).

11 The term archaeology first appears in *Histoire de la Folie* where the analysis undertaken is described as an “archaeology of that silence.” This does not suggest that the approach taken in *The Order of Things* can be neatly dovetailed into that taken in *Histoire de la Folie*. The difference between approaches is, for instance, overtly discussed in the opening to *The Archaeology of Knowledge, and the Discourse on Language*.

12 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xiii-iv.

historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice".<sup>13</sup> Which version of the subject is being contested here, then? The phenomenological subject, the subject that assumes a transcendental consciousness, the knowing subject. This subject is also frequently referred to as the a priori subject; the already known subject that places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity.

The subject in *The Order of Things* exists as a term in the Foreword, barely to appear again as a noun throughout the text. The reorientation of the subject described above underwrites, however, the expressions in the history as well as the manner of approaching its final analytical object—Man. By the time of *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*,<sup>14</sup> the reader is not simply being reoriented toward a different analytics of the subject from the phenomenological one, not just urged to *reject* it as a guide to *historical reasoning*, but to undertake a complete *discarding* of the subject in any phenomenological form. The subject that "runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history" is railed against via genealogy, where the process of genealogy is "a union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of its knowledge tactically today."<sup>15</sup> The subject of empty sameness must not just be opposed or rejected, but *completely discarded*.<sup>16</sup>

The imperative arises in regard to contestation of evolutionary and progressivist histories with their smooth, building schema of change and their a priori subjects.

I don't believe the problem [the constitution of the subject within a historical framework] can be solved by historicising the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within an historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc.,

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13 Ibid., xiv.

14 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

15 Foucault's sense of genealogy did not remain constant. His essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971/1977), 139–64 is the most commonly referenced, however, in regard to statements that appear to be about a method that is not a method.

16 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.<sup>17</sup>

The last genealogical works, the volumes of *The History of Sexuality*,<sup>18</sup> were not just a repositioning, but a discussion of a different kind of subject: “The question I asked myself was this: how is it that the human subject took itself as an object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price? This is my question: at what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?”<sup>19</sup>

The subject that is criticized in the Foreword to *The Order of Things* and in parts of *Power/Knowledge* (and its key referent, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*)<sup>20</sup> is the a priori phenomenological subject which should not guide history-writing. The subject that becomes an object and *that can speak the truth about itself* is something different. This is a human able to study Man and able to reflect on “self.” This is a *human* subject that one must presume is recognizable historically and yet is simultaneously not transcendental. One has to ignore the transcendentalism in the term “human,” in what it takes to identify one, and accept that “the human subject” and “subjects” in the quote above mean “people” generally...as well as something more specific.

The more specific: In *The Order of Things*, the subject that is indebted to conditions is a methodological springboard, an innovation and invitation to write a history of scientific discourse differently. In *The History of Sexuality* volumes the subject is a historically and culturally specific compartment (so far no difference) dependent on special techniques and procedures of “subjectification” (big difference). In *The History of Sexuality* volumes, the historical intensification of Christian pastoralism equipped the laity with the special practices through which they could problematize themselves, relate to themselves as human beings in need of ethical labor, and hence begin that “work of the self on the self” that signalled the emergence of the subject as one who was subjected via technologies of self. This version of the subject was comported to be reflective, had a transparent and visible self, had techniques of self, and was able to pivot back and glance at that self from other vantage points of the person. In this usage, the subject is not self-evident (though its

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17 Ibid., 117.

18 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol. II*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Vol. III*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

19 See Gerald Raulet, “Structuralism and post-structuralism: An interview with Michel Foucault,” *Telos*, 1983: 202.

20 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979);

self becomes evident) and therefore it is and is not automatically synonymous with “human,” “person,” “individual,” etc. There is a subject because a certain type of “relationship with self” comes into being in a culture. This subject for Foucault is an effect of the truth procedures by means of which it is made necessary. This subject can become its own object, but it is not the same subject inciting *The Order of Things*. This subject is subjected to, and is the bearer of, the specific effects of power. It is recognizably human, but in a unique way, and in a unique way it recognizes its own humanity that it surveys as an object.

Which version of the subject? To state the obvious, there are multiple analytics circulating through the Foucault corpus. The terms “the subject,” “human subject,” or “subjects” do not mean the same thing, nor should such be expected, every time they appear, are critiqued or deployed. They are “dealt with” because of their persistence and prevalence elsewhere. By *The History of Sexuality* volumes that “dealing with” takes the form, in part, of an historicization of this persistent dependence on “the subject” – how did it become possible? What were the specific techniques that produce “the subject” as speaker of truth about itself, about humanity, making “the individual” a vehicle rather than effect of such procedures by which “it” is made necessary and by which “the subject” becomes delimited to this repetitive cluster?: human-consciousness-self-monitoring-self?

The “theological turn” in these later volumes was an insightful one – what has been referred to in “La différance”<sup>21</sup> as onto-theo-philosophy was precisely the conflation being unpacked genealogically – the conflation, rather than secularisation, that supported the fabrication of belief in a (never-fully-closed) subject and perception of its necessity to a cosmos inscribed as finite, this-worldly, and administrable, built around social contracts and the apparent dilemma of multiple Wills. Thus, via the Foucault corpus among others “the subject” that was never fully born, never agreed-on, nor completely sealed has been contested, in different ways in different sites. Whether a seemingly new “it” has been offered in its place, or even whether it ought to be, is questionable and a question that can be pursued by examining the rhetorical strategies available for “dealing with” an entification problematic.

### **Performative Apophasis as Mode of Address**

In arguing in *The Order of Things* “I am aware that I am advancing...”, writing in terms of the first-person and of an awareness that is possible of oneself and of intentionality, the very necessity of an owning, volitional author appears

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21 Jacques A. Derrida, “La différance”, in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. (with additional notes) Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968/1982), 1-28.

embedded, only to be disclaimed in the next sentence and continuously in the “mood” of the analysis. This is neither contradiction, nor concession to necessity, nor a form of using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house. Rather, it arises as an instance of performative apophasis, a mode of address that had its most forceful early crystallization in Plotinus, being reformulated in the eleventh and twelfth century writings of religious mystics, re-emerging in post-Reformation rhetoric, and resurfacing noticeably in more recent philosophical discussions of the subject, language, space, time, etc.<sup>22</sup>

Performative apophasis as a mode of address is characterized by *patterns of saying and unsaying* that flow strategically around *aporia of transcendence* which are in turn linked overtly to the dilemma of naming-as-entification. Here, entification is different from essentialization. Entification refers to bringing into being, a sense of existence and being of a thing as opposed its quality, relation, or function. Essence, even for Sartre, refers to the intrinsic nature or character of something, that which makes it what it is. The distinction is productive in relation to *Madness and Civilization* especially as the concern was with, in part as “On Being Agnostic” notes, how madness could even be called *madness*, be a “thing,” inscribed now as mental illness. In the formalist sense, apophatic strategies can be recognized in any text that resorts to them - they erupt within view of a border that appears noncrossable and when limits of expression are engaged as part of the analysis.

Apophatic discourse in performative mode, i.e., as enacted throughout rather than simply referred to upfront, begins, then, with the irresolvable dilemma of naming. It is inspired by an intuition that there must be a transcendent, yet not a transcendent in the form of meta-, a spiritual outlet, a hidden god, or a universalizing gloss. Rather, in this case *aporia of transcendence* refer to how there is a sense of, an appeal to, a trading on, or an implicit hope that there is something “beyond” what is currently available, that “it” is ineffable and cannot be given attributes, that this “it” cannot be reduced to current classificatory systems and that something else, some other step to the side or perspective-giving move (transcendence) that forestalls current classifications and exceeds contemporary limits needs to be pursued. An instance of this would be a statement that “X is beyond names”, thus generating an *aporos* - the subject of the statement must be named as X in order to affirm that it is beyond names.<sup>23</sup> Each effort to state *aporia of transcendence* gets caught in a linguistic regress and each statement – positive or negative – reveals itself as in need of correction. The “authentic subject” of discourse slips continually back beyond attempts to name it or even to deny

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22 Michael Sells, *The Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

23 *Ibid.*, 2.

its nameability. As noted in *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, this is a productive move - the regress is harnessed and becomes the guiding semantic force, the *dynamis*, of a new kind of language.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas the constitution of the West in *Madness and Civilization* is posited in relation to a mad-reason nexus, i.e., it is in part a belief in that nexus that helps to define what and where the West is, the West in *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* arises in terms of "mystical traditions," defined in relation to the cross-fertilization of Abrahamic traditions in particular, as

the legacy of the encounter of Semitic prophetic traditions with the Graeco-Roman cultural world. These traditions shared both a highly developed Ptolemaic symbolic cosmology and a central assertion of one, transcendent principle of reality. Rather than focusing upon the textual borrowings of one tradition from another, it seems more profitable to see these traditions as competing within a partially shared intellectual and symbolic world, defining themselves in conversation with one another and against one another.<sup>25</sup>

The focus on writings of in monotheistic traditions does not mean that performative apophasis is a religious process or exclusive to organized religions: "Performative apophasis results from a particular intuition into the dilemma of transcendence and a particular response to it". As a strategy, it can be identified in the works of writers such as Jabés, Lacan, Bion, and

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 4-5. The entification of the West and the dependencies of discourse are obvious difficulties. The point is here how differently Foucault and Sells conceive the delimitation. Whether naming an entity is automatically to "presence" it (problematized, for instance, in Jacques A. Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)), whether naming is simply an entification or bounding, and whether it is a projection from an interior toward an exterior that that then comes back to the "observer" as though from the outside when it was inside all along is part of what Foucault railed against in the use of the phenomenological subject as a guide to writing history. A different historical trajectory for these debates – that which arose out of debates over the validity and legality of animal magnetism – are pointed to in the conclusion as a way of re-approaching the question of the subject, not through Sartre or Foucault, but through nineteenth century discussions of what to make of hypnotism and phenomena that appeared inexplicable, arising through psychical research, such as clairvoyance, remote viewing, mediumship, the diagnosis of medical problems by lay "psychics," and the "communication" of tremendous literary works to unsuspecting receivers whose utterances were recorded and novels published. The question "What is an Author?" takes on particularly fascinating dimensions when the medium claims to be simply recording the book sent to her or him from the spirit world. See Bernadette M. Baker, "Animal Magnetism and Curriculum History", *Curriculum Inquiry*, in press.

Derrida, as well as Plotinus, John the Scot Eriugena, Ibn Arabi, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart.<sup>26</sup>

Appeals to the decentered subject assume “its” recognizability at some level. “Its” discreteness in language appears to undermine its discussion as dispersed, diffused, exteriorized, and matrixed, inciting an aporetic reading and the resort to quotation marks signaling suspension, a common apophatic strategy developed around the intuiting of aporia. Aporia in ancient Greek refers to “difficulty,” literally a thing “that stops us in our tracks,” not “yet another altar of thought, not its origin or first principle, but its productive and reproductive ‘moment’”.<sup>27</sup> In modern Greek usage aporia (singular *aporos*) indicate a state of impasse, nonpassage, or logical contradiction which can never be permanently resolved, a state of constant shimmering around a borderline.<sup>28</sup> In drawing from such a “Derridean” reading, aporia of transcendence are not conceptualized negatively.<sup>29</sup> They are affirmative of the possibility of traversing an ultimate border that seems noncrossable. The affirmation announced through engaging with an edge is the precondition for experiencing aporia and thus is necessary for responsibility to be possible.

Engaging aporia of transcendence is not the same, then, as making an appeal to an obscure spirit or god, to negative theology, to metaphysics, or grand narratives. Rather, it refers to a perception of limits and the politics of effability, such as the limits of naming things as active or passive, with indication of some possibility of a “beyond.” *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* identifies at least three responses to such dilemmas in Western literature:

- (1) Silence;
- (2) An effort to distinguish between ways in which the transcendent is beyond names and ways in which it is not, and;
- (3) A refusal to resolve the dilemma posed by the attempt to refer to the transcendent through a distinction. Aporia are accepted as genuine and irresolvable, but instead of leading to silence lead to a new mode of discourse.

Apophysis refers more commonly to the Greek designation for speech that resembles number three above i.e., *apo phasis* = unsaying or speaking-away. In writings that deal with aporia of transcendence it is often paired with *kataphasis* = affirmation, saying, speaking-with. Every act of unsaying presupposes or demands a previous saying. *It is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful.* Apophatic intensity occurs in low and high forms. A high intensity is evident when a discourse turns back

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26 Sells, *The Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 5-6.

27 James D. Faubion, “Introduction”, in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984 vol II*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), xxiii.

28 Jacques A. Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

29 Sells, *The Mystical Languages of Unsayings*.

relentlessly upon its own propositions, generating distinctive paradoxes that include within themselves a large number of radical transformations, particularly in the area of temporal and spatial relationships.

These transformations are achieved through particular literary strategies. While reluctant to summarize such strategies outside of the literatures discussed *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* offers a précis nonetheless of key ones that are deployed repetitively within such a mode of address. As noted above, apophasis begins with aporia of transcendence, where X transcends all names and referential delimitation. This, being assumed as both true and false, leads to a dilemma that yields new modes of discourse in an open-ended process, where original assertions turn back critically upon themselves. Further principles include: a language of ephemeral, double propositions where statements cannot rest on their own and must be corrected by further statements; a dialectic of transcendence and immanence where the utterly transcendent is revealed as the utterly immanent or a beyond is seen as within; strategies of disontology and nonsubstantialist deity where the transcendent referred to is not a thing or entity; metaphors of emanation, procession, and return where the enfolding of a multitiered hierarchy back into itself toward a moment of equality is achieved; semantic transformations such as the undoing of self-other, here-there, and before-after distinctions; and finally, the meaning event which is constituted by the above formal principles and is a reenactment within grammar, syntax, and metaphor of the temporary fusion of self and other within "mystical union".<sup>30</sup>

The paradoxes, aporia, and coincidence of opposites within apophatic discourse are not merely apparent contradictions, then. Contradictions occur when language engages the ineffable transcendent, but these contradictions are not illogical. Instead, they lead to a new mode of discourse, one that is modified and devalued when paraphrased. For example, the abstraction of single propositions and the judgment of them as heretical or orthodox has been a common procedure used to realign the discomfort that apophatic modes of address have generated. In the commentaries and extensions of a Foucault corpus the procedure of rephrasing apophatic intensity into single-proposition assertions reorients the way in which the discourse generates meaning. Performative apophasis as a whole includes both the kataphatic and apophatic statements. Any single proposition is acknowledged as inadequate, as reifying. It is a discourse of *double propositions*, in which meaning is generated through the tension between the saying and unsaying.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Ibid., 208-9.

31 Ibid., 12.

## ***Madness and Civilization, Aporia of Transcendence, and Strategies of Disontology***

*Madness and Civilization* was one of the earliest notable twentieth-century deployments of a tradition of performative apophasis to rethink history-writing, using it to sort through the ways in which classifications that appear present in one episteme yet absent in another could be written about at all i.e., asking in effect “Does this presumed state [madness = mental illness] have a history beyond its earliest appearance in documents?” The effort to theorize the epistemic scission that made such a question possible relies heavily on apophatic strategies that attempt to unsay the sayable from the outset, that take this strategy seriously as one manner of dealing with the persistence of the subject.

In the opening to *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, two quotes from Pascal and Dostoievsky and a long first sentence greet the reader, launching the analysis immediately into a mode of performative apophasis that deploys three different techniques simultaneously: *strategies of disontology where the transcendent referred to is not a thing or entity; the enfolding of a multitiered hierarchy back into itself toward a moment of equality* (“Pascal: ‘Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness’”); and *semantic transformations that undo distinctions of self-other, here-there, and before-after*.<sup>32</sup> The three opening apophatic techniques are dedicated to aporia of transcendence that emerge when the requirements of traditional history-writing and the topic of a mad-reason nexus dovetail into “each” other.

### **Aporia of Transcendence**

Aporia of transcendence are signaled by reference to two “somethings” that appear in the Preface: “that ‘other form’” and “an uncomfortable region.” The former’s suspension in quotes, a common apophatic strategy, is crucial, for it suggests the perceived difficulty of naming, of pinning down that which seems to defy the categories of comprehension and of speech.

We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless

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32 The first apophatic technique is discussed here and the other two elaborated in Bernadette M. Baker (“Torsions within the Same Anxiety? Entification, Apophasis, History”, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (in press)), as well as the critique of *Madness and Civilization* in “Cogito and the History of Madness” (Jacques A. Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness”, in *Writing and Difference*, trans (with an introduction and additional notes) Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 31-63.

language of non-madness; to define the moment of this conspiracy before it was permanently established in the realm of truth, before it was revived by the lyricism of protest. We must try to return, in history, to the zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself. We must describe, from the start of its trajectory, *that "other form"* which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other of its action as things henceforth external, deaf to all exchange, and as though dead to one another.<sup>33</sup>

The history of madness in the classical age is projected as write-able, but also in a sense as impossible and irrecoverable. This tension incites the study's form and content, including the exploration of the methodological limits of history-writing. While we have "yet to write the history of that other form of madness" and in kataphatic terms to "define the moment of this conspiracy" in which reason and madness were separated as truth and falsity, an unsaying follows.

The unsaying points to how this history can only be "furtive," for the limits of language, of a culture, are brushed up against in the very effort to "try to return, in history, to the zero point" where madness was an undifferentiated experience. Madness has to be named, however, in order to argue that "it" was once undifferentiated. The "it" of madness is suspended, not in quotation marks but in argument, as indicative of the problem of entification, of placing "contemporary" markers into "historical" perspective. The tension between the two propositions - that this history is yet to be written, ought to be written, and that this history cannot be written - is thus the first aporos engaged. It drives the methodological approach that links language to madness and subsequently points to a second aporos of transcendence:

We have to speak of this scission, of the distance set, of this void instituted between reason and what is not reason, without ever relying upon the fulfillment of what it claims to be. Then, and only then, can we determine the realm in which the man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart are not yet disjunct; and in an incipient and very crude language, antedating that of science, begin the dialogue of their breach, testifying in a fugitive way that they still speak to each other. Here madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved; inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, ix, emphasis added.

34 *Ibid.*, x.

The tension, the saying and unsaying around a history of madness, points tentatively, temporarily, to “an uncomfortable region,” a second effort toward a “something.” Here, in the most crucial few pages of this text printed in italics rather than plain font, previous dependencies of discourse in history-writing are exposed. A key tendency that drives the methodological tension and therefore motors the effort (“*try to return, in history, to the zero point*”) is that the writing of history, conditioned by a language and logic of entities, moves inexorably toward delimitation, toward narcissism, toward self-replication. This is for Foucault a tendency that must be continually transformed by new acts of apophasis as long as the contemplative gaze remains. As such, the current scientific languages that delineate madness *as* mental illness cannot constitute the starting point.

This is doubtless *an uncomfortable region*. To explore it we must renounce the convenience of terminal truths, and never let ourselves be guided by what we may know of madness. None of the concepts of psychopathology, even and especially in the implicit process of retrospection, can play an organizing role. What is constitutive is the action that divides madness, and not the science elaborated once this division is made and calm restored. What is originative is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason’s subjugation of non-reason, wrestling from it its truth as madness, crime, or disease, derives explicitly from this point.<sup>35</sup>

### Strategies of Disontology

In moving between intuiting a new realm and not naming or entering it, Foucault relies heavily on strategies of disontology. Disontology concerns here a transcendent referred to, a “beyond” that is not above or meta-, that is not a thing or entity, that is nonsubstantialist, and thus cannot be given attributes. A strategy of disontology is how one achieves this impression; for instance, playing on reversals – how mad it is to reason and how reasonable it is to be mad.

Both “that ‘other form’” and “an uncomfortable region” are the “sites” in which aporia of transcendence come into view in/as the analytical project, but these oblique and significant references are not evidence of an appeal to transcendence in the form of metaphysics. They are instead indicative of how an irresolvable “beyond,” the aporia of transcendence, operate as or *are* the utterly immanent. To support this intuition, then, specialized strategies of disontology are relied upon that are sustained throughout. The analysis moves beyond simply asserting that there is a beyond-within dialectic at play by giving specific attention to the predicates at stake. The strategies of

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35 Ibid., ix, emphasis added.

disontology are thus shifted to a finer semantic level that demonstrates *the difficulty of writing historically about that which cannot be historicized*. This turns back upon itself, muddying efforts to distinguish a “beyond” from a “within” at all. What results is a “mystical union” that *is not a new entity, not a new subject, not a new analytics of the subject, but a reprieve from belief in the naturalness of entities*.

For instance, key in regard to this specialized aspect of disontology is that the *critique of predication* is tied to the *critique of ontology*. Both *ontology* (which is the placement of the unlimited--the unknowable space of madness in the pre-classical period--within the category of being) and *referential delimitation* (as suggested by predication) are momentarily set aside.

As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. I have not tried to write the history of that language but the archaeology of that silence.<sup>36</sup>

Madness borders on, inhabits even, revelation before the language of science can name it as something else such as illness. Madness in the time before Hieronymous Bosch is in dialogue with reason but not yet disjunct in the oppositional sense. It operates through a different grammar for truth-production and expression: madness and non-madness are the performatively constitutive means to knowledge-formation about “the secret powers of the world” and interrelate as part of a system of double-propositions--every profound insight is the play of madness with, not against, reason. The exchange occurs in a different (“crude,” “non-scientific”) language that posits since the Middle Ages madness, dementia, and insanity as real phenomena but not as divisions within illness nor as against reason; madness, dementia, insanity dialogue with reason in the formation of truths and the illustration of morals--but not really, because these “things” are being named as separate phenomena in a spatialization that had not yet occurred.

Nor had madness yet been allocated an independent position in an episteme where “it” is relegated to playing the role of *false* utterances. It is precisely this recognition that makes writing a history of madness impossible. The moment it is thought that *the method* for demonstrating the scission has

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36 Ibid., x-xi.

been found, or even a language for expressing that there was such a scission, the method reveals its unarrested implication in the topic:

In our era, the experience of madness remains silent in the composure of a knowledge which, knowing too much about madness, forgets it. But from one of these experiences to the other [the Middle Ages to our era], the shift has been made by a world without images, without positive character, in a kind of silent transparency which reveals - as mute institution, act without commentary, immediate knowledge - a great motionless structure; this structure is one of neither drama nor knowledge; it is the point where history is immobilized in the tragic category which both establishes and impugns it.<sup>37</sup>

In these final lines of the Preface, the dependencies of discourse in traditional approaches to history-writing are laid bare. The impossibility of writing a history of madness that is not already conjured in terms of *the subject, reason, knowledge, mastery, and institutional norms* for formal history-writing is exposed. The realm beyond such limits, with which Foucault wrestles (“I have not *tried* to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence”), is projected as an aporia of transcendence that prevents a final kataphatic description of such a realm. In the act of history-writing a “beyond” that operates “within” comes dangerously close to anticipating the 1968 nonconcept of *la différance*: “that ‘other form’” that governs the distinction between like and unlike, “which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other of its action as things henceforth external, deaf to all exchange, and as though dead to one another.”

The play in *Madness and Civilization* with such aporia of transcendence is thus not an effort toward a subtle and unacknowledged negative theology or a new grand narrative about madness as a special kind of disability or a new analytics of the subject that ultimately requires that which it dispenses with. But the critique of predication-ontology that inspires “the archaeology of that silence” does establish new methodological possibilities.

Significantly, the placement of seemingly “disabling methodology” at the heart of the project by drawing on inconsistencies, impossible-to-capture other forms, and limitations affirmed rather than corrected, does not point to a heavenly way out but points the reader back “in,” transformed by a destination-less journey. The borders that apparently cannot be crossed are also not resolved by describing them in ever more elaborate detail. Rather, what is described is the “motionless structure” that *sets up perception of ambiguity*, and that “does not resolve the ambiguity, but determines it”.<sup>38</sup> Key to this description are multiple strategies inherent to performative apophasis

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37 Ibid., xii.

38 Ibid., xii.

that move around the subject through a system of double-propositions, treating the subject not as political necessity but as legacy to overcome, a nontransgressable border that has to be crossed for responsibility to be possible, to bring into focus the limits of a culture.

This pattern of saying and unsaying around the subject is what "On Being Agnostic" subtly intuits in Sartre and the later Foucault especially, concluding that it underscores the political necessity of the subject. To this end, it diffuses if not devalues the patterns of saying and unsaying as the *dynamis* of a new mode of discourse in which abstraction of single-proposition statements reorients or reduces the difference attempted. In those sections of *Being and Nothingness* cited in "On Being Agnostic" it seems more the second response to aporia of transcendence that is delivered, that is, there is a resort, an effort, to distinguish ways in which the transcendent is beyond names and ways in which it is not. In *Madness and Civilization* apophatic intensity is at its peak, not necessarily in order to offer a new analytics of the subject but to suggest "its" (im)possibility, how writing history through the subject would not be to "speak of that initial dispute without assuming a victory, or the right to victory".<sup>39</sup> This, then, is the point where "history is immobilized in the tragic category which both establishes and impugns it." It is the grounded site where the synergistic relation between studying a mad-reason nexus and rethinking history overflows into new ways of considering the limits of expressibility, those alternative grammars without the fixed syntax that has now been attributed to "the madman". In this sense, the series of double-propositions suggests a new mode of discourse in history-writing: a history of madness-reason has yet to be written but "one" tries to write it knowing it cannot be written, and that such "knowing" is part of the "problem" and infuses the method. By the time of *The History of Sexuality* volumes of such apophatic turns appear fewer in number and intensity, perhaps underwriting comments from beginning students such as "Foucault gets easier as he gets older."

The Foucault corpus does not have to be approached as difficult or unclear in the first place, especially when attuned to how the monolocalization of Being is under contestation though apophatically intense prose. Sensitivity to traditions of performative apophasis thus changes the manner of reading and lends consideration to how and whether the subject is necessary at any level beyond having to deal with the legacy of systems of thought that have purported that "it" exists and that it needs to be accounted for in order for anything else to occur. Reading across the Foucault corpus brings to view how much the subject has been contested without ever having agreed upon what the "it" of it is, whether "it" was ever completely entified, closed, discrete, or so easily recognizable. Operating beneath the horizon of a

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39 Ibid., x.

finite, this-worldly oriented, and governable cosmos the “Derridean” claim that the subject is not always what it says it is reverberates for a different reason – not because the subject is an incontrovertible fact but because “it” still appears overdue, a long pregnancy with very little relief, persistent check-ups that point continuously to the pain to come, and the continuous effort of stroking a potentiality into fruition in case reproduction disappears altogether.

## Conclusion

The above indicates how rumors of the subject’s death have been greatly exaggerated, not because the subject persists out of pure necessity in everyday life in which case the distinction between the political/practical and theoretical/academic does not hold, but because perhaps “it” has not so much been born but chased. That is, if there has never been a discrete subject, even for the phenomenologists, then the contortions now attributed to debates over “analytics of the subject” become more an index of concern over non-closure than of the loss of a solid point of return and of responsibility.

The intensified efforts to seal and enclose, plug the dyke, name and territorialize, and stop the leakage in all manner of commodified forms, from copyright laws to populational censuses to nation-formation to new theories of subjectivity, emerge in part out of an entification problematic strongly indebted to Abrahamic traditions, as well as to what Niklas Luhmann refers to as “modernity’s shock at its own contingency”. Being able to recognize a subject or the subject, whether as centered or decentered, as alive, dead, volitional, determined, evacuated, dispersed, deferred, yet somehow as still politically necessary, remains a “torsion within the same anxiety” – an anxiety over seepage beyond a stated limit and that much “mystical” writing treats aporetically and apophatically.

Through the prism of such an entification problematic and performatively apophatic set of responses a different scaffolding and set of stakes come into view that reframe the question of whether having a subject matters or is mattered, how politics, responsibility and reflexivity are being construed in relation to onto-theo-philosophy, and what literature might help think anew the limits of persistent appeals. It raises to the threshold a different series of questions: Is the subject-human-consciousness-self quadratic required to notice “things”? Does it automatically tie to or tell “us” anything about Being? Is Being reducible to “earth-centrism”, a single life, the this-worldly? Are no other forms of expression permitted except those which insist, even minimally, on the necessity of the subject as a reflection of the way things (unfortunately) are? Arguing in support of no-self theories “Sartre, Phenomenology, and the Buddhist No-Self Theory” begins:

The ego is traditionally held to be synonymous with individual identity and autonomy, while the mind, which is closely associated therewith, is widely held to be a necessary basis of cognition and volition, and the responsibility following therefrom. However, Buddhist epistemology, Existential Phenomenology and Poststructuralism all hold the notion of an independently subsisting self-identical subject to be an illusion. This not only raises problems for our understanding of cognition (for if such a self is an illusion who does the perceiving and who is deluded), and volition (who initiates acts), but also therefore for the notion of responsibility (for in the absence of an independently subsisting subject there appears to be no autonomous agent), while for Buddhism it also raises an additional problem for the doctrine of reincarnation (for in the absence of such a self it is unclear who is supposed to be responsible for failing to overcome desires and attachments, and concomitantly gets reincarnated).<sup>40</sup>

The difficulties of generalizing Existential Phenomenology, of drawing lines around Poststructuralism, and of attributing an -ism to Buddhism at all are evident.<sup>41</sup> What the appeal to Buddhist epistemology opens by default and perhaps against the aims of the chapter is the significant difference that cosmology makes – reincarnation has never been a central or rigorously pursued thesis in a Sartre or Foucault corpus - and further highlights the subsequent dangers that inhere in wanting to see “the subject” everywhere. Even when responsibility is discussed in relation to such a thesis as reincarnation (“who is supposed to be responsible for failing to overcome desires and attachments”) the notion of responsibility is not reflexivity here, nor is ownership, including the ownership of rights, the litmus test. A precise understanding of the nature of self, mind, ego or consciousness is not the key to an understanding of existence, essence, or identity, or vice versa; truths are not simply those things that exist they way they appear; perception is not dependent upon induction into discursive regularities that make appearance possible. To think in terms of a centred or decentred subject is to still think in terms of *thought*, of an identifiable thing or “no thing” that appears, coagulates at and as something recognizable, that comes into noticeability, that is entified to explain something (else).

This circularity is what engaging with a Foucault corpus exposes and what makes continuous appeals to the subject appear fatiguing or repetitively

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40 Simon Glynn, “Sartre, Phenomenology, and the Buddhist No-Self Theory”, in *Buddhisms and Deconstruction*, ed. Jin Y. Park (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 197.

41 E.H. Jarow “Zen Flesh, Bones, and Blood: Deconstructing Inter-Religious Dialogue”, in *Buddhisms and Deconstruction*, ed. Jin Y. Park (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 223–234.

encompassed in a particular world, affectively resonating as an historically “Euro” concern even where the unsaying of such an entification immediately follows.<sup>42</sup> Theories of the subject, belief in “its” necessity, arose as an analytical crutch in certain onto-theo-philosophies, as a stopgap measure, in part amid the fear that boundaries between presumed entities were porous, including the newly fabricated and shifting boundary of “the nation” as figured competitively against a pluralized background and of “Man” in a speciesist chain of Being. Key exponents of the leakiness of Man were the nineteenth century animal magnetists and psychical researchers whose demonstrations, stage shows, and eventually laboratory and clinical studies forced to the fore the questions of influence and interpenetration and whether there was a distinction between animate and inanimate. In education, figures such as Alfred Binet and William James loom large in trying to discipline a spirit/matter distinction and sort out what was going on when a hypnotized “inmate” behaved as the magnetizer suggests as a monkey (Binet) or a medium insists that they are channeling a departed spirit (James). Was there a single, contained self, an extended self, multiple selves, or no self at all? Not even available theories of the decentered subject have centrally taken on the apparently nontransgressable borders here between species (“behaving as”) and the “other-worldly” – this work is left by and large to novels, attributed to ancient Greek mythology, or distanced and exoticized as magical realism. The procedures of mass education and modern nation-formation required, then, a peculiar analytics of the subject that would guard against such potential blurriness, morphing, or apparent excess, and required *belief* in the possibility and validity of such an enclosure as the earthly and privileged human, so that other kinds of “awareness” or “communities” would not form. The persistent appeal to the subject has become, then, a great recent feat both railing against the disunifying potentials of not-so-simple events such as mesmerism, while paradoxically indexing a mass hypnotic induction into associationist and suggestibility discourses that make “us” accept our (now sometimes “conscious”) selves - through whatever combination of mirrors and projections are claimed to form it - as the only worthy reality, as both rule-governed and yet unique.

Is which Foucault, Schrag, Fendler, Marshall, or Baker a question inherently tied to which analytics of the subject, then? What does it matter? Is the answer political regardless? Sensitive to the above intertwinings, the analytics of the subject that are not stable across a Foucault corpus do not attempt a geometrical substitution of one shape for another, nor do they offer a solution that ultimately falls down and requires a concession, nor are they “meant” to. The provocations embodied in the more apophatic moments

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42 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

especially, even if never radically explored in educational research, offer an audit trail for the persistent delimitation of the subject to the human, of the human to consciousness, and of consciousness to discourses now recognized as the fabrication of sexuality-race-ability-nationality (“I can”) - and of erasability. The audit trail operates as an incitement to further discourse that exceeds the “self”-orientation of “Western” philosophy and historiography, pushing at the limits of expressibility, so artfully problematized in *Histoire de la Folie* and so much more thoroughly and pointedly explored in postcolonial studies, parapsychology, and (the impossibility of) comparative theology. Is it such, then, that the subject can be claimed as a political necessity only on the basis of the circularity of belief that it is so, in those (never-shored-up) sites where the onto-theo-philosophical scaffolding has been most indebted to monotheism and the monolocalization of Being, those sites that support and yet fear a non-closure that is theorized as something missing or as problem? Or, “where can an interrogation lead us which does not follow reason in its horizontal course, but seeks to retrace in time that constant verticality which confronts European culture with what it is not, establishes its range by its own derangement?”<sup>43</sup>

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43 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xi.