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Curiosity: philosophy and the politics of difference

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CURIOSITY:

PHILOSOPHY AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

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BY

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To Holly Zurn
for teaching me to read the world

And to Sara Atlee
for inspiring me to live in it

Philosophy leaps ahead on tiny toeholds; hope and intuition lend wings to its feet. Calculating reason lumbers heavily behind, looking for better footholds, for reason too wants to reach that alluring goal which its divine comrade has long since reached. It is like seeing two mountain climbers standing before a wild mountain stream that is tossing boulders along its course: one of them light-footedly leaps over it, using the rocks to cross, even though behind and beneath him they hurtle into the depths. The other stands helpless; he must first build himself a fundament which will carry his heavy cautious steps. Occasionally this is not possible, and then there exists no one who can help him across. What then is it that brings philosophical thinking so quickly to its goal? Is it different from the thinking that calculates and measures, only by virtue of the greater rapidity with which it transcends all spaces? No, its feet are propelled by an alien, illogical power—the power of creative imagination. Lifted by it, it leaps from possibility to possibility, using each one as a temporary resting place.

—Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Introduction

This work is concerned with curiosity in relation to philosophical method and the politics of difference.[1] Philosophy and politics, however, are not the typical referents for the term curiosity. In the media today, curiosity usually appears rather in relation to science and pedagogy. Science, in this more colloquial context, appears to be the ultimate expression of a trained curiosity. From observation and hypothesis to experimentation and results, science is both driven by the need to know and directed by strategies for knowledge. Now, if science is the pinnacle of curiosity, pedagogy is its foundation. Through pedagogy, natural curiosity is identified, trained, developed, and matured. One might wonder, then, why take on curiosity under such unusual guises as philosophy and politics? Why not analyze it through a philosophy of science or education? Such a project is quite viable in its own right and could fruitfully be undertaken. Nevertheless, I propose that, within the contemporary scientific and pedagogical discourses, the questions of philosophical method and a politics of difference are surreptitiously raised. By addressing them head-on, perhaps we can assess what would otherwise have been missed. There is an insidious side to the figure of curiosity. It is not just some neutral drive or a positive impetus. It is a word bandied about to dismiss or valorize thoughts and persons, to critique or defend liminal thinking and being. As such, curiosity exists squarely at the heart of philosophy and politics.

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[1] I will refer, throughout, to a "politics of difference." Although I am informed by Luce Irigaray's "ethics of difference," as developed in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984; New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), I am relying in this work primarily on Iris Marion Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). For Irigaray, ethics paradigmatically concerns individual deeds, it happens between you and me. Whereas politics, for Young, relates to social or group deeds; it happens between us. How one understands and enacts a politics of difference is certainly an ethical question, but I will emphasize, nevertheless, the collectivity necessarily involved in that action.

Since November 2011, curiosity has been making headlines, not as some abstract human impetus to explore but as NASA's new Mars Rover: "Curiosity."[2] This rover, equipped not only to collect but to test data on site, will, with any luck, answer the now age-old question of whether or not Mars ever sustained life. In one sense, naming the Mars Rover "Curiosity" is hardly surprising: the rover, much like its namesake, is an expression of the human mind, catapulting simultaneously into the past and the future, intent on knowledge. In another sense, however, the name is strange. "Curiosity" is an oddly lifelike machine, with six legs, one arm, a head-like antenna, and a brain in its belly. Outside of its own organic structure, it serves as the eyes and ears of many scientists. It is a monstrous mechanical object. It bends and breaks our ideas of intelligence and organism. It acts formulaically, without any emotion or instinct of its own, and yet it is adaptive and experimental. "Curiosity" both tackles and reflects the strange, the unknown, and the otherworldly. One might even think that our curious drive mimics its own object, embodies its object in the process of understanding it, whether as a tactic or as a price.

But curiosity's appearance as the Mars Rover was not its only splash in 2011. In August, the Discovery Channel aired a new series called *Curiosity*, which then returned in 2012. The series aimed to raise and address the most fundamental and the most challenging of questions, like "Is there Life before Birth?" "How will the world end?" and "Did God create the universe?" These questions are, in many ways, patently philosophical: what is life, what is death, and why are we here? Supplementing its televised episodes, which develop and direct curiosity, *Curiosity's* website catalogs 130 experts weighing in on the concept of 'curiosity' itself. Taken together, they reiterate the most common characterizations attributed to curiosity across history: 1) curiosity is a mark of life, specifically of human life and even more specifically of the human

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[2] Its predecessors are aptly named Pathfinder, Spirit, and Opportunity.

child's life, and 2) curiosity is the desire to know, to experiment, and to invent. In one sense, these seem to compose the simplest of definitions. What is curiosity if not the vital need to know? In another sense, however, inner paradoxes open up on every front. First, consider curiosity as distinctive of expressly human vitality. If children are closer to animals, and curiosity is what most distinguishes us from animals, why is curiosity aligned especially with the child? Second, consider curiosity as a need to know. If curiosity wants to find and make new things, then curiosity equally accepts what exists so as to know it and refuses what exists so as to change it. Is curiosity animalistic and rebellious or mature and docile? These paradoxes raise an important question in and beyond philosophy. What bearing does curiosity's status have on the human/animal binary or on boundaries themselves?

Not only do "Curiosity" (the Mars Rover) and *Curiosity* (the Discovery Channel series) raise similar questions about curiosity and exteriority, but their chronological coincidence draws out an important conceptual connection: in both cases, curiosity is linked, perhaps above all else, to discovery. The conceptual link between curiosity and discovery is hardly recent or unique. Curiosity has over and over again provided the impetus to discover. While many of these discoveries are memorialized for ameliorating the human condition, many others are remembered for their violence, their greed, and their overall exercise of injustice. Consider, for instance, the 'discovery' of the Americas, of Saartjie Baartman, or of the atom bomb. Perhaps, through its connection to discovery, curiosity risks, if it does not already entail, a certain injustice. This injustice might mean the reduction and subjectivization of indigenous persons or the objectification and eroticization of others with liminal social status. Or it may join forces with hatred, greed, jealousy, insecurity, fear, or the like to equip us with finer instruments of combat.

With this brief journey through the Mars Rover, the *Curiosity* series, and the history of discovery, several suggestive implications appear: 1) curiosity is directed toward what is strange and unknown; 2) in its search, curiosity may well mimic the strange and the unknown as an epistemic strategy; 3) curiosity searches out the strange and the unknown on multiple fronts, both in animal instinct and human rationality, or within what exists and as what does not yet exist; 4) in its polyvalent search for and mimicking of what lies beyond a limit, curiosity may well transgress the boundaries of people, places, and things. It is in this volatile state—as an impetus that experiments and transgresses, that is subsumed in a vortex of the liminal—that curiosity is clearly at issue in any philosophical enterprise that makes strange and any politics of difference or of the strange. The objects, the subjects, and the methods of curiosity are entrenched in systems of othering. Throughout the history of philosophy, curiosity has perhaps always been an issue of method, but it is not until the 20th century, post-Heidegger, that it becomes, as I will argue, expressly an issue of a politics of difference. Allow me, then, a brief synopsis of that history.

Curiosity and Philosophy

Curiosity is by turns a practice, an affect, and a concept. As a concept, curiosity has garnered intense but sporadic interest across the history of philosophy. In one era, it has been cast as a spiritual vice, while in another it has been taken as a scientific virtue. It has been seen as unique to children and as constitutive of perverted power. It has marked our inner animal and distinguished our humanity. It has been blamed for the fall of humankind and touted as our one, signal hope. Passing between Eden and Olympus, life and death, the beast and the sovereign, collection and transgression, media frenzy and self-care, curiosity has, in each instance, landed squarely at the heart of philosophy's perhaps three most relevant questions: what is human

nature, what does it mean to know, and what is the difference between right and wrong? Strangely enough, though it has inspired definitions, aphorisms, sections, chapters, sermons, and passing reflections, this complex concept of curiosity has never sustained the philosophical attention of a full-length manuscript. In fact, it has not been the sole subject of a book of philosophy until quite recently.

In 2011, Ilhan Inan published a book entitled, *The Philosophy of Curiosity*, in the Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy series.[3] There, after briefly surveying the philosophical history of curiosity and its role in current analytic debates, Inan offers a full-fledged theory of curiosity as such. Inan argues that curiosity is *an intentional mental state expressible by an inostensible term*. An intentional state of mind, here, is a state of mind directed toward an object. And an inostensible term is one with an unknown referent. There are many examples of inostensible references. As a reader, consider the phrase "a continental philosophy of curiosity." This is an inostensible term; it refers to the unknown. There is no continental philosophy of curiosity in circulation today. As I develop one in this work, however, this inostensible term will become ostensible for the reader and their curiosity will be satisfied.

Inan's book is at once careful and innovative. It draws on the philosophy of language—a bastion of analytic philosophy—to give an account of what we must be accountable for: our curiosity. Nevertheless, I believe Inan's *Philosophy of Curiosity* demands a continental counterpart; that is, I believe his account raises follow-up questions that a continentalist is particularly well-prepared to address. First, when referring to the unknown, one is often called upon to gesticulate, to employ a poetic lens, or to perform rigor at the boundaries of reason. Second, when referring to the unknown, one often incorporates, whether consciously or no,

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[3] Ilhan Inan, *The Philosophy of Curiosity* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

prejudice, hatred, or merely a sense of strangeness that can be mobilized in a number of differently weighted ways. I want to bring two of continental philosophy's primary sensibilities to the now imminent task of accounting for curiosity; they are a) philosophical methods beyond mere argumentative analysis and b) concerns with social and political implications.

For the sake of enriching the broader discipline of philosophy, then, it makes sense to bring continental resources to bear on the question of curiosity. But what is in it for the sub-discipline of continental philosophy? Why bring curiosity into the discussion of philosophical method and socio-political concerns? As I will demonstrate, the concept of curiosity is uniquely capable of mobilizing not only the separate questions of method and politics but of throwing into relief the structural relationship between them. A careful analysis of curiosity thus provides a rich description of thinking curiously and being counted a curiosity, but it also repeatedly shows that the act of thinking curiously often leads to being counted a curiosity (and vice versa). The question, then, is this: what is the fulcrum or what constitutes this structural relationship between the two? In this project, I propose to analyze the relationship between philosophical method and a politics of difference, on the question of curiosity, by studying a specific juncture in history: the late 20th century. This historical moment in particular reveals, I argue, that method and politics, thinking and being counted, are connected within the human imaginary, such that the perceived distribution and motility of thinking correlates with that of living.

Curiosity, however, has not always been an expressly political issue. In the history of philosophy, it has been primarily a question of method and epistemic legitimacy. What follows is a short review of that history.

A Short History of Curiosity

Ancient Greece, the fabled wellspring of Western philosophy, offered two primary accounts of the origin of the philosophical enterprise. Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, called it *thaumazein*,[4] musing that human access to divine knowledge, as symbolized by the god Iris, must stem from wonder, Iris' father. For Plato, this wonder is not some peaceful reflection on the balance of the universe; instead, it is a vertigo-inducing madness that leaves you without a footing, suspended in aporia. For Plato, this wonder is nothing like the impetus of the curious *polypragmon* who, as he writes in *The Lovers*, "obsessively […] live[s] stooping down or seeking learning over a wide spread of fields."[5] As such, curiosity is antithetical to philosophy. Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, then called it *hē orexis eidenai*.[6] In this case, the root of philosophy lies in a desire to see, to see with one's own eyes, and thereby activate the mind. There is no madness, here, but rather a certain measured observation, commensurate with the sciences as a whole, whether philosophical or otherwise. For Aristotle, such a desire to know is quite different from what characterizes the *periergos* (later translated into Latin as *curiosus*), who engages in both trivial desire and the enjoyment of extravagance. As we see in the *Generation of Animals*, nature itself manifests a certain refinement and modesty in its beauty, which human knowers should reflect and curious men fail to honor.[7] For both Plato and Aristotle, curiosity does not quite rise to the level of knowledge production. Instead, it squanders our attention.

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[4] Plato, *Theatetus*, in *Theatetus and Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Loeb Classical Library, 1952), 155c-d.

[5] Plato, *The Lovers*, in *Charmides, Alcibiades 1 & 2, Hipparchus, The Lovers, Theages, Minos, Epinomis*, trans. by W. R. M. Lamb (Loeb Classical Library, 1927), 137b.

[6] Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Book I-IX*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Loeb Classical Library, 1933), 980a.

[7] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Loeb Classical Library, 1942), 739b19-20 and 744a36-38.

André Labhardt claims that the Latin *curiositas*, as a derivation of *curiosus*, only developed in the Roman period. He locates its first appearance in a letter from Cicero to Atticus, dating 59 AD,[8] wherein Cicero positively attributes curiosity to himself upon hearing news of a great feast. There is nothing inherently moralizing about the reference. Nevertheless, across writers of Roman antiquity, there is a marked divide over the ethics of curiosity. For Seneca, for instance, curiosity—in particular, the practice of being a "curious spectator [*curiosus spectator*]" of nature—is a means of developing an ethos, a transformative relationship with oneself, and thereby of becoming free.[9] For Plutarch, on the other hand, "curiosity [*polupragmosune*] […] is a desire to learn the troubles of others;" it is "a disease" and "a malady of the mind."[10] It reflects one's inability to take oneself seriously as an ethical project.

Augustine set a neo-Platonic and Christian tone for the medieval period, and much thereafter, when he catalogued curiosity not merely as an empty enterprise but as a vice. This account is still quite influential today. For Augustine, curiosity uses the eyes illicitly, leaving one both epistemically and spiritually set adrift and far from God. In *De Utilitate Credendi*, Augustine contrasts *curiositas* with *studiositas*.[11] Curiosity in this sense is the opposite of a keen application of oneself to intellectual work. Then, in *The City of God*, he roots his critique of curiosity in the Biblical intolerance for the forbidden arts.[12] Curiosity here manifests the hubris

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[8] André Labhardt, "Curiositas: Notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion," *Museum Helveticum* 17 (1960): 209.

[9] Seneca, *Naturales Questiones* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), I.pf12.

[10] Plutarch, "On Being a Busybody," *Moralia VI* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 515d.

[11] Augustine, St. "De Utilitate Credendi," *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

[12] Cp. Acts 19:18-20 (King James Version).

of wanting to know what is beyond one's station.[13] Boniface Ramsey describes it as "an

overweening interest in something inconsequential or even bad."[14] Although these are important

elements of his account of curiosity, Augustine's most sustained critique appears in the

Confessions. He begins in Book II by stating that "curiosity [only] appears to be a zeal for

knowledge."[15] In Book V, he continues by narrating how philosophers, fueled by curiosity, got

the better of the Manichees, yet without improving them. He thereby indicates that philosophy

may be itself a vacuous enterprise.[16] Finally, in Book X, he elaborates upon curiosity as a lust of

the eyes.

The passage in Book 10 begins with I John. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the

flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of this world."[17] What

is "of the Father" is moderate and purposeful, while what is "of this world" is immoderate in its

pleasures and disrespectful of divine purposes. This worldliness manifests itself in three forms.

First, the lust of the flesh, predicated as it is on the five senses, includes sexual activity outside of

marriage (whether to a person or to the church), eating and drinking without concern for

sustenance, reveling in perfumed scents or bright colors, and such an intense enjoyment of

musical sounds that one forgets to pay attention to the words.[18] Second, the lust of the eyes

capitalizes on the intimate link between sight and the mind, such that what seduces the eyes also

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[13] Augustine, *City of God*, Volume II and VII, trans. William M. Green (Loeb Classical Library, 1963 and 1972), IV.34, V.21, VII.34-35, and XXI.

[14] Boniface Ramsey, *The City of God, A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 2012), 77n24. In *The Path of St. Augustine* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), William Banner calls it "an appetite for knowledge of things, the satisfaction of which appetite informs but also distracts and corrupts" (36).

[15] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Carolyn J. B. Hammond (Loeb Classical Library, 2014), II.6.

[16] Ibid., V.3.

[17] I John 2:16 (King James Version).

[18] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.30-34.

distracts the mind from godly reflection. In this regard, Augustine mentions mangled corpses,[19] dreams, public shows, operations of nature, magical arts, signs and wonders, theatre, the transit of the stars, ghosts, sacrilegious rites, idle tales, coursing, hunting, sports, and a lizard or a spider catching flies.[20] Here, curiosity is an expression of this lust of the eyes. "Curiosity [*curiositas*]," he states, "pries into objects," "not to engage itself in the trouble [*molestia*] they bring, but merely out of an itch [*libido*] of gaining the knowledge and experience of them."[21] Driven by a superficial itch to see the world, the curious person is thus immoderate (i.e. bent on knowing what it is not their place to know), and dismissive of divine purpose (i.e. bent on experiencing things but not in order to know them). Finally, the pride of life involves the desire to be loved and to be feared, to be praised and to be esteemed, not in order to bring glory to the Father but only to revel in the pleasure thereof.[22] Within this larger context, then, Augustinian curiosity must be understood as the essential superficiality of those caught up in "this world."

While a number of variations to this account can be located across the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas provides an adequate summary in his *Summa Theologica*. Within the second volume, he addresses seven primary virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. It is within his discussion of temperance (and *stabilitas*) that Aquinas not only praises *studiositas* but criticizes its opposite: *curiositas*.[23] Its location indicates first and foremost that curiosity represents what is excessive, lacking in moderation, and ultimately expressive of human *superbia* or pride. Like Augustine, Aquinas grants both sensual and intellective registers

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[19] Cp. Plato, *The Republic*, *Book 1-5*, trans. Paul Shorey (Loeb Classical Library, 1930), IV.440a.

[20] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.35.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., X.36-40.

[23] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1274; New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947-1948), II.ii, q.167, art.1-2.

to curiosity. Unlike Augustine, however, Aquinas does not suspect philosophy itself of curiosity; rather, he insists that properly temperate thinking will produce reasonable arguments and concepts that are in no danger of drawing one away from proper spiritual attunement.[24]

In the Modern period, curiosity gained a new level of importance, especially in relation to science. Of course, there were still those who held the now traditional critique of curiosity. Blaise Pascal for instance asserted, "Curiosity [*curiosité*] is only vanity," indeed, "man's chief malady is restless curiosity about things he cannot know and it is not so bad for him to be wrong as so vainly curious."[25] Rene Descartes, moreover, reiterates the critique of curiosity in *The Search for Truth* and, following Plato, reprises wonder's role as the handmaiden of reason in *The Passions of the Soul*.[26] Nevertheless, a different spirit was being born.

As early as 1650, Thomas Hobbes asserted that, insofar as curiosity leads both to the development of names and the investigation of causes, it is the most basic thing that sets human beings apart from animals.[27] In fact, curiosity is so fundamental to language and science that "from the degrees of curiosity proceed also the degrees of knowledge amongst men."[28] No longer does curiosity only appear to afford knowledge. Now it is the bonafide root. This has important implications for education. As John Locke argued, "Curiosity in children is but an

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[24] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (1966; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), Part III, Chapter 6.

[25] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (1670; New York: Penguin Books, 1995), §152 and §18.

[26] René Descartes, "The Search for Truth" (1941), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes II*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, & Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 402; Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes I*, 350. Cp. Pascal, *Pensees*, §72: "I believe that with his curiosity changing into wonder he will be more disposed to contemplate them [i.e. the abysses of infinity and nothingness] in silence than investigate them in presumption."

[27] Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature* (1650), *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, Volume 4,* ed. Sir William Molesworth (Germany: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1966), ix.18; cp. *Leviathan* (1651; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1994), vi.35.

[28] Hobbes, *Human Nature*, ix.18.

appetite for knowledge, and therefore ought to be encouraged in them, not only as a good sign, but as the great instrument nature has provided to remove that ignorance they were born with, and which, without this busy inquisitiveness, will make them dull and useless creatures."[29] Even the business of curiosity, once so offensive, is now redeemed for the new generation. Hume is not so quick to embrace curiosity wholesale, but he does indicate our vacuous interest in other people's business and our legitimate love of truth both find their origin in this excitation we call curiosity.[30] Edmund Burke, likewise, will not deify curiosity, but he will see it as the germ of our aesthetic appreciation.[31] By the time we reach the close of the 1700's, we find Jean-Jacques Rousseau singing the praises of the solitary walker, who, as he "wanders about, passing freely from one object to another, he considers each plant in turn with interest and curiosity [*curiosité*], and as soon as he begins to grasp the laws of their structure he receives from his observations an effortless pleasure."[32] Here, the methods of science and philosophy, biology and speculation comingle. At this point, with the burgeoning of human prowess, discovery, and colonization, curiosity was crowned king.

Despite these advances in the endorsement of curiosity during the modern period, Immanuel Kant, who will dramatically affect the fate of philosophy thereafter, reiterates the old suspicion of curiosity, albeit somewhat moderated by the preceding praise. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, he reports: "The tendency to acquire knowledge merely for the sake of its novelty, rarity and secrecy is called *curiosity* [Kuriosität]. Although this inclination

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[29] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John William Adamson (1693; New York: Dover, 2007), §118.

[30] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II.3.X.

[31] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 79-80.

[32] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782; New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 116.

merely plays with ideas and has no further interest in their object, it is not to be censured, as long as it does not pry into other people's private affairs."[33] For Kant, curiosity should be censored not only when it fuels gossip and intrigue, but also when it instigates excessive speculation. Thus, in "Dreams of a Spirit-seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics," he writes, "speculative fantasies of a perversely ruminative reason" might "to a large extent be prevented by subjecting the powers of the mind to control by the will, and by exercising rather more restraint over an idle inquisitiveness [*Vorwitz*]."[34] Even when curiosity avoids both gossip and speculation, however, and therefore could be an acceptable activity, it is not in fact a good or a wise one. There are better ways to spend one's time. Kant then continues:

> To pursue curiosity [*Vorwitz*] and to allow no limits to the thirst for knowledge apart from that of impotence—such zealousness does not ill-become learning. But, from among the innumerable tasks which spontaneously offer themselves, to choose that task, the solution of which is of importance to man—such choice is the merit of wisdom.[35]

Without repeating the inherent moralization of the classical critique of curiosity, Kant nevertheless reprised that critique's alignment of curiosity with idle chatter, vacuous inquiry, and insignificant activities, all while again suggesting its correction by the will and the necessity of restraint. In a moment, then, the swiftly achieved heyday of curiosity had already drawn to a close.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, following the Industrial Revolution, curiosity became aligned with the repressive techno-global society. While Friedrich Nietzsche will endorse a critical "curiosity [*Neugier*]" that "peer[s] out and down through a crack in the chamber of

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[33] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1785), trans. Mary J. Gregor (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1974), §25b.

[34] Immanuel Kant, "Dreams of a Spirit-seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics," *Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, trans. David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 361.

[35] Ibid., 369.

consciousness,"[36] the sort of curiosity that might free us from the strictures of civilization and ideology, he will nevertheless also classically criticize the still active sort of curiosity that leads one to "experience" from a mere "desire to experience."[37] Building on this traditional assessment of the vacuity of curiosity, Soren Kierkegaard will critique what he calls "the present age" for its aesthetic submersion in everyday distractions.[38] As he puts it in his journal, in 1847, this results in a failure to advance into either a life of ethical commitments or religious passion: "Curiosity [*nysgerrighed*] surrounds me everywhere. I drive thirty-five miles to my beloved forest looking for simple solitude: Alas, curiosity everywhere. These tiresome people are like flies, living off others."[39] Karl Jaspers, in turn, claims that curiosity mimics the beginning of "man's quest for knowledge" but it is in fact not equal to the task.

> Plain curiosity [*Neugier*], the naïve desire to see the strange and unknown and to learn about them at second hand in the form of experience and results, comes closer to preserving the primary freshness of man's quest for knowledge. But curiosity only touches things without seizing them. Quickly aroused it quickly loses interest. Before it can become an element of knowledge, curiosity must be transformed.[40]

Capturing the spirit of the age, Martin Heidegger argues that, as an inauthentic form of care, curiosity is an everyday distraction in the surrounding world. He returns expressly to Augustine to define "curiosity [*Neugier*]" as that which "takes care to see not in order to understand what it

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[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" (1873), *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 142-143.

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1889; New York: Penguin Books, 1990), §7.

[38] Soren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (1846; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[39] Soren Kierkegaard, *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Part 1: 1829-1848*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 1847, #6013, pg. 386.

[40] Karl Jaspers, *The Idea of the University* (1923; Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 15.

sees, that is, to come to a being toward it, but *only* in order to see."[41] Finally, reprising the religious perspective, Gabriel Marcel asserts "curiosity [*curiosité*]" is not the mark of a saint but of a spectator, whose attention "is desertion, not only in thought but in act."[42]

Amidst this litany of European thinkers in the 19th and 20th centuries, only Freud will maintain the viability of curiosity. He will in fact trace our hallowed scientific curiosity back into our repressed sexual curiosity (*Neugier*), so robust and yet threatening in its infantile state.[43] This account will have varied reverberations in French feminism. Granting that boys and girls share "the same curiosity [*curiosité*],"[44] both sexual and epistemic, Simone de Beauvoir argues that the girl loses her capacity for curiosity as she develops into a woman. Through social construction, she is denied freedom and autonomy, thereby making her increasingly incapable of "the same vibrant exuberance, the same curiosity, the same spirit of initiative, and the same intrepidness" as the developing young man.[45] Luce Irigaray suspects that the purportedly same curiosity in boys and girls is fundamentally phallic curiosity, which the girl begins but ultimately fails to embody.[46] Irigaray later asserts, however, that wonder (*admiration*) between the sexes is the only

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[41] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927; New York: SUNY Press, 1996), §36, 161.

[42] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (1935), trans. Katharine Farrer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 20. The appropriate approach of the saint is contemplation, which transcends the divide between self and other, inside and outside. See Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I: Reflection and Mystery*, trans. G. S. Fraser (1951; South End: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 126.

[43] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (1905; New York: Basic Books, 2000), 22. Freud will in fact locate the origin of not only our scientific curiosity but our artistic sensibilities in this curiosity. See *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Alan Tyson (1910; New York: W. W. Norton, 1989).

[44] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (1949; New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.

[45] Ibid., 295; cp. 261 and 740.

[46] Luce Irigaray, "Woman, Science's Unknown" and "The Little Girl is (Only) a Little Boy," *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1974; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 13-33.

possible means to ensure their different ways of knowing in adulthood.[47] For Julia Kristeva, whatever differences there may be between the sexes and their curiosity (whether sexual or otherwise), the fact remains that Western culture as a whole is designed to squash curiosity in a series of mutually reinforcing ways: through rampant technologism, biologism, and behaviorism, the proliferation of images and pharmaceuticals, not to mention an overall enslavement to efficiency and a pattern of over-education.[48] So as not to have her own curiosity "extinguished,"[49] Kristeva confesses: "I keep my curiosity [*curiosité*] on call, expectant."[50]

In the United States, so-called American philosophy parted ways with the European tradition. The American pragmatist tradition in particular tended to understand curiosity—much like the modernists did—as evolutionary, developmental, and critical to education, science, and technology, not to mention philosophy. Working within a Darwinian heritage, John Dewey, Charles Sanders Pierce, and William James all commended curiosity.[51] For this reason, the concept has enjoyed greater play in analytic work to date and gained a special prominence in the fields of education, psychology, and cognitive science.[52] In the present project, I am interested in

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[47] Luce Irigaray, "Wonder: A Reading of Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*," *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (1984; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 72-82.

[48] Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (1993; New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 70; *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeanine Herman (1997; New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11, 128.

[49] Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 128.

[50] Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman (1996; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 11.

[51] See John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938; New York: Touchstone, 1997), *How We Think* (1910; Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997), *Democracy and Education* (1916; Hollywood: Simon & Brown, 2011); Charles Sanders Pierce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Pierce*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); and William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890; New York: Holt, 1950).

[52] For a helpful literature review, see George Lowenstein, "The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation," *Exotic Preferences: Behavioral Economics and Human Motivation* (New York: Oxford

curiosity's return to European thought in the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. For these thinkers, curiosity is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative. Instead, they find curiosity on both sides not of religious or scientific divides, but of political struggles. While Foucault locates curiosity in both power and resistance, Derrida analyzes it through the lens of both sovereignty and deconstruction. Because of this duality, I will argue that their reprisals do not only involve a fundamental critique of Heidegger but also that they manifest a real debt to Nietzsche. For this historical claim to make sense, I will now offer a brief sketch of Nietzsche and Heidegger's accounts of curiosity. This will provide the necessary backdrop for an assessment not only of Foucault and Derrida's accounts but of their contributions to a philosophy and politics of difference today.

Nietzsche's Account

Until recently, many commentators emphasized Nietzsche's critique of curiosity, so well-aligned with other existentialists, as a central element of the herd-mentality. From this perspective, the curious person rushes hither and thither to gather domesticated, nutrition-deficient bits of knowledge, all the while failing to interrogate that knowledge or to question their own existence. Heidegger is representative in this regard. Regretting how the masses read Nietzsche, he writes in his Nietzsche lectures, "The principal quality of the curious is reflected in the fact that whatever they are curious about ultimately and even from the outset means absolutely nothing to them. All curiosity thrives on this essential indifference."[53] Nietzsche himself expected such mis-readers or nonreaders, Heidegger explains. The very subtitle of *Zarathustra*, "For Everyone and No One," indicates it is "for none of the curiosity mongers who

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University Press, 1994), 121-181.

[53] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1937; New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 81.

wash in with the tide and imbibe freely of particular passages and striking aphorisms in the book. […] They do this instead of setting out on the way of thinking that is here searching for its word."[54] According to this tradition of interpretation, Nietzsche does indeed contribute to a chorus of voices dismissing *Das Man*, but he does not offer any particular insight into the concept. He is not a unique thinker of curiosity.

Mark Alfano and Bernard Reginster are uninterested in the previous interpretation. They offer, instead, a bold and admittedly controversial account of curiosity as a psychological disposition—or even a moral virtue—essential to this preacher, prophet, and creative spirit. Focusing almost exclusively on Nietzsche's positive self-attributions of curiosity, Alfano and Reginster illuminate curiosity's central role in Nietzsche's moral psychology and epistemology, respectively. For Alfano, Nietzschean curiosity is "the specification of the will to power in the domain of knowledge."[55] All specifications of the will to power are virtues. Nietzschean curiosity is a virtue "characterized by an insatiable desire to solve novel, difficult problems and puzzles, and to discover or invent them when none are ready to hand."[56] For Reginster, it is "a desire not for the state of knowing or being certain, but for the activity of inquiry, of seeking the truth."[57] This desire is inconsistent with the possession of knowledge, through propositional statements, and established truth. Instead, it is as committed to knowledge as it is to uncertainty. Both Alfano and Reginster briefly grant that there is a secondary, anti-Nietzschean form of curiosity. Alfano characterizes it as a vice, a specification of the will to know, practiced by non-

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[54] Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume II*, 211.

[55] Mark Alfano. "The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemologist," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21.4 (2013), 780.

[56] Alfano, "The Most Agreeable of All Vices," 779.

[57] Bernard Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51.3 (2013): 457.

Nietzschean types who are presumably uninterested in problems or problematizing.[58] Reginster, in turn, characterizes it as a "dissolute," unfocused curiosity and asserts that Nietzsche here follows "his Christian predecessors."[59]

Given these accounts, there is reason to believe that positive and negative forms of curiosity appear in Nietzsche's work. What is needed, however, is an interpretation that not only accounts for both forms equally, but that combines the collective sensibilities of the traditional perspective with the individualism of contemporary analyses. In particular, this more complete interpretation should follow Nietzsche's commitment to place "something like hatred, struggle, [and] power relations," as Foucault later puts it, "at the center, at the root of knowledge."[60] To that end, I turn to re-comb Nietzsche's references to curiosity.[61]

Alfano counts twenty-one self-attributions of curiosity, all of them meant as praise. Yet Nietzsche's affair with curiosity is more multi-dimensional. Recall that Nietzsche's ideal reader is "a monster of courage and curiosity,"[62] that *On the Genealogy of Morals* began with "my curiosity,"[63] and that he who says Yes to life harbors a "jubilant curiosity" about "the questionable character of things."[64] Nietzsche endorses a "dangerous curiosity,"[65] a "vehement

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[58] Alfano, "The Most Agreeable of All Vices," 774.

[59] Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," 460.

[60] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms" (1973), *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 12.

[61] In this section, I have relied exclusively on passages in which Nietzsche uses the term *Neugier*, a common German word for curiosity, which connotes one's lust or greed for what is new. If my analysis were expanded, however, to include the synonyms like *Wissbegier*, for instance, a similar case could be made.

[62] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Why I Write Such Good Books," *Ecce Homo* (1888), in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §3.

[63] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Preface §3.

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (1882; New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §375.

and dangerous curiosity,"[66] and a "more and more perilous curiosity;"[67] for, "a curiosity of my

type remains after all the most agreeable of all vices."[68] This curiosity is directed at many sorts

of things in many different ways, but let me choose just two here. First, it peers through cracks in

consciousness and, second, it searches out what is forbidden. Nietzsche says it thus:

> And woe to that fatal *curiosity* which might one day have the power to peer out and down through a crack in the chamber of consciousness and then suspect that man is sustained in the indifference of his ignorance by that which is pitiless, greedy, insatiable and murderous—as if hanging in dreams on the back of a tiger.[69]

> It is an act of willfulness, and pleasure in willfulness, if now he perhaps bestows his favor on that which has hitherto had a bad reputation—if, full of inquisitiveness and the desire to tempt and experiment, he creeps around the things most forbidden. Behind all his toiling and weaving—for he is restlessly and aimlessly on his way as if in a desert— stands the question mark of a more and more perilous *curiosity*.[70]

How is consciousness built? And what makes something forbidden? We know from texts like

Genealogy of Morals, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Will to Power* that both are the products of

civilization, with all the dissimulation, repression, and cruelty they presuppose. In fact,

knowledge and morality—as the costars of consciousness and prohibition—are born and bred in

a scene of struggle: the strong against the weak, the clever against the simple. It is upon a

landscape ravaged by this struggle that curiosity appears. And it is vibrant enough to slip beneath

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[65] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (1886; New York: Vintage Books, 1996), §214.

[66] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1878; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Preface §3.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §45.

[69] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," §1.

[70] Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, Preface §3.

what is forbidden and slip through what has become so keenly conscious. For this reason, Nietzsche attributes curiosity not only to the "free spirit," but to "the great liberation."[71]

There are a number of expressions of curiosity that appear to mimic but in fact dramatically oppose a properly Nietzschean curiosity. These may be a mere "artistic curiosity"[72] or the "curiosity" of the general populace,[73] but it is more likely to be a "hopeless curiosity,"[74] which is in turn a "sober, pragmatic curiosity" that busies itself with the "curious investigation of […] countless minutiae."[75] Speaking of the real rarity of the passion to know, or the curiosity of a free spirit, Nietzsche asserts the following:

> Often mere *amour-plaisir* of knowledge (*curiosity*) is felt to be quite sufficient, or *amour-vanité*, being accustomed to it with the ulterior motive of honors and sustenance; for many people it is actually quite enough that they have too much leisure and do not know what to do with it except to read, collect, arrange, observe, and recount—their 'scientific impulse' is their boredom.[76]

This secondary curiosity, a mere love of the pleasure knowledge brings, is indeed lacking in virtue and dissolute, as Alfano and Reginster would have it. And it is a mark of the bored, blasé person set adrift in a sea of vacuity, superficial inquiries, and cheap values, as Heidegger's more traditional account indicates. But this is not all. This anti-Nietzschean curiosity runs quickly to build and build on what has already been built: systems of consciousness, civilized societies, schemas of knowledge, and deep evaluative divisions. This is what everyday curiosity—or "normal science," to summon Kuhn—does. It contributes to and maintains, however

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[71] Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, Preface §4 and §3.

[72] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §25.

[73] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §7.

[74] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §374.

[75] Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §6.

[76] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §123.

indifferently, the products of struggle, the distributions and effects of power. The lyricism of curiosity plays on the field already set before it, surveyed and staked through long centuries of blood. It may seem empty, harmless, and certainly useless. But this curiosity is calculated, subjectivating, and, for Nietzsche, sick.

What Nietzsche provides is a unique account of this duo of curiosities. A properly Nietzschean curiosity fights against the anti-Nietzschean curiosity, so well ensconced in institutions like the academy and industry, law, media, and government. This is an account of epistemological and moral importance, yes, but deeply, and perhaps most importantly, one of intense political importance. Curiosity lies at the heart of knowledge and therefore of power, struggle and bloodshed, domination and freedom.

Heidegger and Curiosity

In contemporary Western philosophy, perhaps the single most influential account of curiosity, against which all other accounts are measured, is that offered by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. In Heidegger's account, key elements of Nietzsche's perspective are absent, including the duality of curiosity and its central location in the scene of struggle over knowledge and power. Heidegger reverts—no doubt in interesting ways—to the more traditional account of curiosity as a univocal force undergirding most instances of vacuous distraction and inauthentic existence. This does not, however, negate the possibility that Heideggerian curiosity has a political dimension, a dimension I will argue for in what follows.

Although Heidegger's account is highly innovative, his critique of curiosity is not without its precedents. As I mentioned above, he attributes some of his basic formulations in *Being and Time* to Augustine. When Heidegger characterizes curiosity as a desire to see "just to see," he is thinking of Augustine's work on the lust of the eyes. For both Heidegger and

Augustine, the significant characteristic of this everydayness—whatever mode it might take at the time—is a certain failure to go the distance, to fulfill one's purpose, or to exercise one's capacities to their fullest extent. For Heidegger this is phenomenological, while for Augustine this is expressly religious. While Heidegger will say that the everyday being is cut off from the surrounding world in which it finds itself, Augustine would say that, insofar as everyday existence is saturated in the world, it is cut off from God. For both, however, curiosity keeps us at the surface of our potential as human beings.

Augustine is not the only precursor to Heidegger's account, however. Kierkegaard's alignment of curiosity with the crowd and the present age also foreshadows Heidegger's alignment of curiosity with the 'they' and everyday thrownness. Aside from these structural similarities, Kierkegaard's account also offers several suggestive intimations that support even further correlations. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, for example, he writes that "the demonic [intellectual form] is able to express itself as indolence that postpones thinking, as curiosity [*nysgerrighed*] that never becomes more than curiosity, as dishonest self-deception, as effeminate weakness that constantly relies on others, as superior negligence, as stupid business, etc."[77] Here, Kierkegaard first jettisons curiosity from a religious, non-demonic form of thinking to which philosophy presumably belongs. Heidegger will also create a stark division between curiosity and philosophical thinking, a claim which, although implied in *Being and Time*, is fully developed in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*.[78] Kierkegaard further aligns curiosity with the demonic, the effeminate, and the stupid. These are ethically and politically charged characterizations. In this section, I investigate whether these political overtones are unique to

[77] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 138.

[78] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic"* (1937-1938), trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Kierkegaard or reprised by Heidegger. I will suggest that the Heideggerian rejection of curiosity is not merely a critique of ocularcentrism and the technological revolution, but it is also and perhaps more fundamentally an ethico-political claim about philosophy's self and other.

While Heidegger's definitive account of curiosity appears in *Being and Time*, that account has its roots in Heidegger's reading of Augustine in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*[79] and it comes to something of fruition in his account of wonder in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines curiosity (*Neugier*) as a mode of everydayness.[80] Dasein's absorption in the everyday, in the most general sense, takes the harrowing ownness of authentic existence and scatters it into the tranquilized subsistence of the inauthentic 'they.' This 'they' existence is decentered and uprooted. Dasein is ripped from its being in Being and cast adrift on the waves of an information and image-saturated society. Heidegger identifies three distinct modes of this everyday existence: idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. Idle talk simply talks for the sake of talking, not for the sake of knowing. Hence, as Heidegger writes, idle talk "does not communicate, in the mode of a primordial appropriation of this being, but communicates by *gossiping* and *passing the word along*."[81] Curiosity, similarly, simply looks for the sake of looking, not for the sake of knowing. When what is being seen and said is constantly on the surface and on the move, an ambiguity supervenes on the world. This

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[79] Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of the Religious Life* (1920-1921), trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[80] Like Nietzsche, Heidegger uses the German word *Neugier*. Secondary literature on Heidegger's account of curiosity includes Brad Stone's "Curiosity As the Thief of Wonder" (*Kronoscope* 6.2 [2006]: 205-229) and Corey McCall's dissertation, "Indeterminacies of the Present: Heidegger and the Philosophical Significance of Curiosity" (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2005). McCall argues that Heidegger's outright rejection of curiosity only occurs in his early work. When, in his later work, he shifts from an aesthetic to an ethical frame, however, there is reason to think he could embrace curiosity, in the manner of Foucault and Derrida. While I grant the theoretical potential that some moments in Heidegger's thought may be consistent with an ethical conception of curiosity, I take Heidegger's overt statements to be of primary salience when analyzing his place in the history of curiosity.

[81] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §35, 158.

ambiguity first involves the splitting of the world into two dimensions: that of surface and depth, a thing seen or said versus a thing understood and done. But, second, it involves the masking of this divide such that Dasein "can no longer decide what is disclosed in genuine understanding and what is not."[82] The 'they' therefore loses touch and is said to be tranquilized. This is, of course, broadly the mark of a being alienated from Being, a being alienated from considering Being, a being far from the practice of philosophy and from an authentic relationship to death.

This account of curiosity bears distinct implications for the nature and practice of philosophical thinking. At the outset of *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between curiosity and the question. "Regarding, understanding and grasping, choosing, and gaining access to," he writes, "are constitutive attitudes of inquiry [or modes of the question] and are thus themselves modes of being of a particular being, of the being we […] are."[83] We are questioning beings and, insofar as we achieve the proper alignment of our being with Being, it must be through the question. Nevertheless, for Heidegger this is not an endorsement of curiosity. Curiosity, as "the care of seeing," is "not concerned with comprehending and knowingly being in the truth, but with possibilities of abandoning itself to the world."[84] It is an inauthentic mode of the question. Heidegger's interpretation here is foreshadowed in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, specifically his 1921 summer seminar on Augustine's *Confessions*, Book X. There, following Augustine, Heidegger distinguishes curiosity from knowledge.[85] While Heidegger cites Augustine's stance that curiosity is "masked under the title of knowledge and

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[82] Ibid., §37, 162.

[83] Ibid., §2, 5.

[84] Ibid., §36, 161.

[85] Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of the Religious Life*, §9 and §14.

learning,"[86] Heidegger also cites Augustine's definition of knowledge as the "gather[ing]

together [of] those same things which the memory did before contain more scatteringly and

confused."[87] Curiosity, in its lust for experiences, scatters our attention and our thoughts. True

thinking—which is in fact true questioning, for Heidegger—gathers them together.

In *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger distinguishes curiosity not from the

question or knowledge as such, but from wonder. He begins by locating curiosity in three distinct

modes of marveling: amazement, admiration, and awe. In each case, curiosity is drawn to the

unusual: "amazement, admiration, and awe are a turning away from the usual [toward the

unusual], thereby […] bypassing it in its usualness."[88] From this vantage point, curiosity is

obsessed with what is strange, seduced by what is foreign and new. Wonder, on the other hand,

takes what is already quite familiar and generates an attitude of strangeness towards it. "This

most usual itself," Heidegger writes, "becomes in wonder what is most unusual."[89] Philosophy

today has become "a curiosity, or what comes down to the same thing: the essence of truth [has

become] the most unquestioned and hence a matter of the highest indifference."[90] This is a

sentiment Heidegger implies in *Being and Time* but does not state. Nevertheless, true

philosophical thinking is neither itself a curiosity, nor does it practice curiosity. Thinking asks

questions about the most basic components of our existence, it gathers together our attention in

pursuit of knowledge, and, above all, it wonders. Given this account, it is certainly true that, for

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[86] Ibid., §14, 166; Augustine, *Confessions*, X.35.

[87] Ibid., §9, 136; Augustine, *Confessions*, X.11.

[88] Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy,* §38, 144.

[89] Ibid., §38, 144.

[90] Ibid., §39, 157.

Heidegger, curiosity is an epistemological and therefore an ontological issue. Whether he admits it or not, I argue it is also a political issue.

In the grand scheme of Heidegger's analysis of everydayness, curiosity is first and foremost marked by a visual superficiality, in contrast to the lingual superficiality of idle talk. I want to suggest that this visual superficiality has more broadly kinesthetic, and thereby political, repercussions. Heidegger states:

> The two factors constitutive for curiosity, *not-staying* in the surrounding world taken care of and *distraction* by new possibilities, are the basis of the third essential characteristic of this phenomenon, which we call *never dwelling anywhere*.[91]

There is something about Dasein's inauthentic absorption in the surrounding world that submits it to that world's pace. Insofar as Dasein is lost to the world, Dasein is also swept along by it. The state of curiosity, then, is one of being unmoored, without having and without putting down roots. Specifically, it is marked by the following three characteristics: distraction, not-staying, and never-dwelling-anywhere. Heidegger here uses complex German compound nouns that deserve further attention. *Zerstreuung* (distraction) stems from the verb *zerstreuen* which means to scatter or disperse. *Unverweilens* (not-staying) stems from the verb *weilen* which means to stay, *ver* which is an intensifier (*verweilen* means linger), and *un* which is a negation. *Aufenthaltslosigkeit* (never-dwelling-anywhere) stems from *aufenthalt* meaning stay, residence, or whereabouts and *logiskeit* meaning '-lessness.' Curiosity for Heidegger, then, is marked by dispersion, not lingering, and having lost one's whereabouts. This is a kinesthetic characterization.[92] Dasein's everyday existence has run off and lost its foothold.

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[91] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §36, 161.

[92] As Theodor Adorno writes in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), Heidegger's "hatred toward curiosity is allied to his hatred toward mobility; both are even hammered into the mind by the ripe old saying: stay in the country and earn your living honestly" (110).

This kinesthetic dimension has political implications. The Jews are a scattered people. Students with weaker educational backgrounds—often underprivileged students—are those most likely to think in an 'undisciplined' manner. Women are, stereotypically, the more distracted sex. And homeless people, vagabonds, the Roma in Europe, and often the poor are those who do not stay anywhere. One can easily see how a critique of curiosity, especially for its instability, could and in many cases has so easily accompanied the dismissal of those on the margins of society. This is because curiosity raises not merely the problem of how we know or think, but also of what we do and how we live together. Curiosity is an ethical and political issue. Heidegger, of course, does not go here. To my knowledge, there is no overt politicization of curiosity in Heidegger's work. For Nietzsche, however, curiosity is prima facie political insofar as it is born in, out of, and against struggle. Given this, and given that curiosity is exclusively negative for Heidegger, I argue it is Nietzsche and not Heidegger who best prefigures the inherently political and dualistic accounts of curiosity developed by Foucault and Derrida. It is these accounts to which we now turn.

Turning to Foucault and Derrida

In what follows, I argue that the concept of curiosity warrants greater philosophical attention at the methodological and political level. I further argue that when we take curiosity seriously as a philosophical technique and a political axis, we are forced to address curiosity's role in both marginalization and social transformation. Developing a nascent account of curiosity from Foucault and Derrida, I identify two basic forms of curiosity: one that objectifies and one that transforms. Curiosity explains not only how philosophy develops and changes, but also how people are fetishized and in some cases excluded. Through the case study of punishment, I

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ultimately conclude it is curiosity's instability that supports both its political danger and its promise.

For Foucault, curiosity [*curiosité*] is first and foremost a structural element of institutionalized power, set to identify, categorize, and confine persons in general but also marginalized persons in particular. Foucault suggests, nevertheless, that a secondary form of curiosity may be developed to resist institutionalized power by facilitating self-care and self-transformation. In Chapter One, I develop Foucault's account of curiosity as a technique of power. Drawing on his late essays and interviews, scholars predominantly understand Foucauldian curiosity to be a practice of freedom. I turn to his early and middle work to argue that Foucault's implicit account of curiosity presents it as the technique of institutionalized inquiry, analysis, and management. In Chapter Two, I offer a revised account of Foucauldian curiosity as a practice of freedom. While many current interpretations of Foucauldian curiosity as a practice of self-care stay within the contemporary paradigms of naturalistic individualism, I offer a denaturalized, collective account. In Chapter Three, I analyze the case study of Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons (the Prisons Information Group, the GIP), an activist cell in which Foucault was involved. Through archival work, I trace not only the institutionalized curiosity at work in the 1970's French penal system, but also the transformative curiosity mobilized by resistant collectives. I argue that radical publicity—the sort that gratuitously proliferates information in the service of public intolerance for egregious injustices—disrupts institutionalized ruts of curiosity and fuels curiosity as care, especially at the communal level.

For Derrida, curiosity [*curiosité*] is primarily an expression of sovereign mastery over the object in question. Nevertheless, Derrida does suggest that a deconstructive curiosity has the potential to trouble sovereignty by continually putting the object into question. In Chapter Four, I

turn to develop this nascent account of curiosity in Derrida's final seminar, *Beast and the Sovereign*. There, Derrida addresses two forms of curiosity: 1) a scientific curiosity that objectifies its subject by dissecting it and 2) a therapeutic curiosity that masters its subject by confining it. Through a contextualized analysis of Derrida's treatment, I identify and develop a third, deconstructive form of curiosity, which resists any clean dissection or confinement, whether of terms or persons. In Chapter Five, I analyze a second case study: Derrida's *Death Penalty* seminars. I argue that these three forms of curiosity correlate with three forms of punishment: the death penalty is predicated on a question that dissects guilt from innocence; imprisonment is predicated on a question that confines; and restorative justice multiplies questions that deconstruct our traditional concepts of law and desert. I conclude that our juridical schemas have radical implications for inquiry and how we practice curiosity, conversely, creates particular penal formations.

Curiosity has long been dismissed from the annals of philosophy. For Augustine, curiosity is a lust of the eyes; for Plutarch, it is a disease of the soul; for Pascal, it is sheer vanity; for Kierkegaard, it is a stumbling block to our spiritual development; and for Heidegger, it is an expression of our inauthenticity. In this work, I make the case that curiosity is an essential element of philosophical practice and political organization. Its power to break open new vistas, however unformulaically, is critical to the future of philosophy and political community. We can only harness the power of its instability, however, so long as we are cognizant of its coterminous tendency to objectify or pass over too quickly. The pressing issue of punishment today highlights the importance of a curiosity that reverberates against one that confines. Finally, it is in this sense that I argue we find in Foucault and Derrida a legacy of Nietzsche's account of curiosity. This

argument revamps our understanding of their philosophical debts and brings together these two

figures, so often divided over the question of madness, into a new and productive dialogue.

Chapter 1

Foucault: Histories of Curiosity

In the 1980's, the last decade of his life, Foucault clearly pronounces himself to be a thinker of curiosity and he does so positively, repeatedly underscoring curiosity's centrality to his project. According to his own testimony, curiosity marks his ethics, it drives his writing, and it characterizes the world he hopes to create. To put it quite simply, curiosity is a critical element in the practice of freedom he ultimately develops. It is at this final stage and in this positive context, then, that Foucault offers his most overt reflections on curiosity. A number of scholars have taken up these testimonies and developed a variety of frames through which to imagine curiosity as a practice of freedom. Perhaps thinking through the etymology—or even alongside Heidegger—and tracing the Latin *curiositas* to *cura*, Ed McGushin interprets curiosity as a fountainhead of self-care.[1] Lynne Huffer also emphasizes curiosity as care and locates its proper purview in the archive where one is undone by an act of impossible listening.[2] Brad Stone locates curiosity within the larger framework of Foucault's *expérience*, and then compares it to the curiosity and experience thematized by John Dewey.[3] John Rajchman identifies curiosity as a critical act and then enumerates four distinct elements of that act: 1) an attention to unnoticed dangers, 2) a consideration of problematizing events, 3) the experience of de-conversion, and 4)

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[1] Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), xii.

[2] Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010), 118, 228, 248, 275, and 277.

[3] Brad Stone, "The Praise and Critique of Experience in Dewey and Foucault," Presentation at the American Philosophical Association Conference, Pacific Division, San Francisco, April 2010.

the practice of invention.[4] Charles Scott analyzes the role of curiosity in the life of a public intellectual.[5] Ed Cohen, Torben Dyrberg, and Nancy Luxon develop this analysis by placing curiosity squarely in the parrhesiastic practice, as elucidated in *The Courage of Truth*.[6] Further complicating the frame, Kevin Thompson understands curiosity as a practice of political spirituality but asks the difficult question of what this means for the current neoliberal state in which we are called to be curious self-fashioners.[7]

Thompson's question raises the specter of curiosity as something other than and perhaps wholly against the practice of freedom. Indeed, as one might expect from a thinker like Foucault, for whom there is no resistance without domination and no creation without production, he does not only speak of curiosity as an element of freedom but also as a power play. A few scholars have theorized this seeming duplicity. Paul Rabinow considers Foucauldian curiosity first as a moment in the infamous 'will to knowledge,' but then settles on Foucauldian curiosity proper as a characteristic of critique.[8] More recently, Corey McCall has taken the ambiguity in Foucault's treatment of curiosity and compared it to a similar one he finds in both Heidegger and Gadamer's

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[4] John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros; Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 140-142.

[5] Charles Scott, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 141-143.

[6] Ed Cohen, "The Courage of Curiosity, or The Heart of Truth (A Mash-Up)," *Criticism* 52.2 (2010): 201-207; Torben Bech Dyrberg, *Foucault on the Politics of Parrhesia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), e.g. 35-36, 57-58; Nancy Luxon, "Ethics and Subjectivity: Practices of Self-Governance in the Late Lectures of Michel Foucault," *Political Theory* 36.3 (2008), 377-402; Nancy Luxon, *The Crisis of Authority*: *Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 188-191.

[7] Kevin Thompson, "To Judge the Intolerable," *Philosophy Today* 54 (2010): 169-176, specifically 174-175.

[8] Paul Rabinow, "Modern and Counter-Modern: Ethos and Epoch in Heidegger and Foucault," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197-214.

discussions of curiosity.[9] There is no doubt that Foucault uses the term 'curiosity' to modify not only the kind of resistance he commends but also the sort of institutionalized power he critiques. In fact, as I will demonstrate, it is possible to interpret each of Foucault's histories as detailed narratives of an immobilizing curiosity. Whether exercised in the asylum, the clinic, the cabinet, the court, or the confessional, and whether utilized by therapy, medicine, history, justice, or sexuality, curiosity has consistently been a force for institutionalized power.

My task, in these first two chapters, is to offer an account of the concept of curiosity in the work of Michel Foucault. As such, I will establish, in Chapter One, curiosity as a technique of power in his work of the 1960's and 70's, giving teeth to what is typically only a vague, commonsense observation by Foucault scholars. Then, in Chapter Two, I will turn to Foucault's implicit ruminations on curiosity as a practice of freedom in the 1980's, heavily contextualizing the most well-worn references and pairing them with lesser known moments in the lecture courses. Throughout this narrative, I will identify where in the earlier periods Foucault anticipates his position on curiosity in the later period. In doing so, I will put flesh on the basic skeletal structure scholars have already identified. I will also, however, trace an as yet underdeveloped interpretive thread that connects curiosity to linguistic forms. It is the task of Chapter Three to elucidate this thread through a Foucauldian account of publicity as an expression of curiosity.

Foucault's Histories of Curiosity

The primary sense in which curiosity functions in the early and middle periods of Foucault's work is to characterize a technique of power that identifies, objectifies, dissects, and captures its objects, both conceptually and physically. Thus, 'power' looks curiously upon

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[9] Corey McCall, "Some Philosophical Ambiguities of Curiosity in the Work of Heidegger, Foucault, and Gadamer," *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 42.2 (2011): 176-193.

abnormal individuals of all sorts, but also upon objects of knowledge, such that the mad, the corpse, the criminal, the specimen, and the sexually deviant are all objects of institutionalized curiosity. They are, in fact, so much the objects of a curious gaze that they have become 'curiosities' themselves. In this section, I will draw Foucault's analyses of this power-based curiosity from his major histories—*The History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). I will supplement these histories with the *Abnormal* (1974-1975) lectures. I do so because *Abnormal* bridges Foucault's thoughts on curiosity in the 60's and 70's, but also because it provides his lengthiest and perhaps richest early treatment. Analyzing child sexual curiosity in relation to parental and extra-parental care, Foucault's treatment of curiosity connects his work to longstanding psychoanalytic debates but also critically distinguishes him from Freud. Across each of these histories, I will draw out Foucault's historical and theoretical contributions to an account of curiosity.

This work leads me to identify what I call Foucault's nascent account of curiosity. I suggest that there are four basic claims in this account. First, curiosity is a constitutive element of the political space. That is, curiosity is always already active in society, at an institutional level. What changes from era to era and from location to location is merely who deploys it, where and how it is deployed, and upon what it is deployed. Second, the means and objects of curiosity's deployment are co-constitutive. This means that the way curiosity is exercised affects the objects upon which it is exercised, and vise versa. In fact, curiosity's methods and materials transform together both in a given milieu and between one milieu and the next. One cannot simply assert that how we study things changes across history. Those things change in their turn. Third, curiosity is not primarily ocular, however much the philosophical tradition has relied upon this

association. Instead, curiosity mobilizes every sense organ of the individual body, from ear to finger, from neural pathways to the development of one's muscular system. Curiosity can also be located throughout the organs of the social body. It does not merely exist in the sovereign, with his powers of surveillance, but can also be found in more intimate places like the family unit. Finally, curiosity, as a constitutive element of the socio-political space, is very often deployed against whatever is considered dangerous at the time. Curiosity is directed at the aberrant because and insofar as the aberrant threatens status quo values and organizational structures. But curiosity may also represent a danger in its own right. It is, after all, inherently capable of transgressing fundamental assumptions about what is, what should be, and how we know. It is this final characterization that will give rise to Foucault's later emphasis on curiosity as not merely a technique of power but a component of ethical freedom. Interpreted in this manner, Foucault's nascent account of curiosity places it squarely at the social, collective level.

The Archeological Writings

History of Madness

  History of Madness is the history of the construction of a particular sort of madness as the object of scientific and therapeutic perception. It is a story of how that madness became the object of sanctioned curiosity and, in fact, how the mad became curiosities themselves. The tale begins in the Renaissance when unreason cracked open or split in half. On the one hand, there was "tragic" madness, depicted through "strange alchemies" and the "dark menace of bestiality," which threatened to destroy both subject and world.[10] On the other hand, there was "critical" madness, portrayed as an ironic force, which highlighted the fault lines of the subject and the

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[10] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (1961; New York: Routledge, 2006), 26; *Histoire de la folie* (1961; Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 38.

duplicity of world.[11] This divide was not only or most basically a division between one sort of madness and another. Rather, it was the segregation of madness alone from a madness born within the bowels of reason, swaddled in the signs of wisdom, and tamed by the restrictions of education. This latter madness eventually submerged the former, replacing the ship of fools with hospitals. This final development, which Foucault calls the Great Confinement, is one of the most critical moments in the narrative. The Great Confinement was a "movement," during the classical period, that "displaced unreason, removing it from the landscape where it had been everywhere present, and firmly localized it" in hospitals, asylums, and other institutional houses.[12] Unreason became analyzable, subject to reason, and, in a sense, more rational. Constructed as madness, then, it was "circumscribed in its concrete presence, within the distance necessary for it to become an object of perception," and in fact an object of "curiosity."[13] From Foucault's first history, then, we see that curiosity is a technique of power exercised upon a domesticated and disciplined unreason.

But *History of Madness* is not only the story of how madness becomes the object of scientific and therapeutic curiosity. It is also the story of how curiosity becomes scientific and therapeutic at all. If we return to Foucault's analysis of the Renaissance period, we see that "tragic" madness arouses a "demonic" curiosity in the forbidden elements of other realms. Thus, Saint Anthony was "tempted by the lure of this knowledge which is just beyond his reach."[14] Since this first curiosity is attracted to esoteric, if not interdicted, knowledge, it properly belongs to the ship of fools, whose mast is the tree of knowledge, as depicted by Josse Bade's *Stultiferae*

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[11] Ibid., 42-43. *Histoire de la folie*, 55.

[12] Ibid., 102. *Histoire de la folie*, 118.

[13] Ibid., 394; *Histoire de la folie*, 415.

[14] Ibid., 19; *Histoire de la folie*, 31.

Naviculae. Critical madness, on the other hand, deploys a more disciplined curiosity trained on this realm. Such madness "controls indirectly […] the indiscrete curiosity that fires the research of philosophers and men of science."[15] Since this second curiosity is attracted to legitimate knowledge but exercised through illegitimate ends, it rightly belongs in the hospital clinic, where it can be channeled toward only its most rational purpose. In the classical period, demonic curiosity drops off and an increasingly disciplined curiosity becomes ever more dominant. The movement by which madness becomes subject to curiosity is simultaneously the one by which another curiosity is lost, a rogue curiosity that fails to work in the proper channels on proper objects. Already, then, in *History of Madness*, we have an analysis of power-based curiosity but also the admission of another curiosity, on the other side of this growing chasm between two forms of unreason.

So what are the historical and theoretical contributions of *History of Madness* to a Foucauldian account of curiosity? Historically speaking, Foucault indicates that madness is an important object of modern, and especially medical, curiosity. Objects of curiosity change and develop over time, reflecting the interests and institutions of the age. By marking the way in which disciplined curiosity surpassed demonic curiosity, Foucault also indicates that there is more than one form of curiosity. It is not always and everywhere the same. Insofar as unreason becomes madness under this curious gaze and the curious gaze itself becomes disciplinary when turned on madness, moreover, Foucault suggests theoretically that curiosity and its object have a mutually affecting, if not co-constitutive, relationship. If we were to do an analysis of the present, we would not only have to ask what form of curiosity dominates today and what objects it most often takes, but how have this curiosity and these objects developed in tandem with one

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15 Ibid., 22. *Histoire de la folie*, 34.

another? What are the philosophical assumptions and political priorities that have conditioned this development?

The Birth of the Clinic

     The Birth of the Clinic critical analyzes the historical shift in clinical perception from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. It simultaneously narrates a shift in medical curiosity from an entirely ocularcentric model to one that involves the sensorial triangulation of eye, ear, and hand.[16] In the eighteenth century, a certain emphasis on the interrogation and thereby classification of surfaces, specifically the living surfaces of the body, governed medical practice. In the nineteenth century, however, autopsy revolutionized medical perception, by turning it toward deeper, unseen levels from which disease arises. Clinicians attempted to plumb the endless levels of death within the living being itself. *The Birth of the Clinic*, therefore, argues that the most significant condition of possibility for modern medicine is not the rise of the clinical gaze, but rather the development of the anatomo-pathological model of interacting with the living body through the lens of death. Given the intimate connection, moreover, between words and things, Foucault analyzes the manifestation of this shift in language. Where the clinical gaze utilized a linguistic cartography, the anatomo-pathological model, he suggests, wrecked language on the shoals of the corpse. As Foucault summarizes it:

> To discover will no longer be to read an essential coherence beneath a state of disorder, but to push a little farther back the foamy line of language, to make it encroach upon that sandy region that is still open to the clarity of perception […], to introduce language into that penumbra where the gaze is bereft of words.[17]

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[16] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 166; *Naissance de la Clinique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 231.

[17] Ibid., 169; *Naissance de la Clinique*, 236.

There, in the sand and the shadow of a body already gripped by its own death, the universality of words, by which they are said to bear on all that lives and breathes, ricochets off the specter of this body made eminently singular through death.

In the midst of tracking the redirection of the gaze from living surfaces to layers of death within the living (and its effects on language), *Birth of the Clinic* also narrates a development in curiosity. While medical curiosity in the eighteenth century is trained on what is visible, clinical curiosity in the nineteenth century is directed toward the invisible. Curiosity in the former period was trained on "a mixed web of the visible and the readable,"[18] where surfaces were immediately signs in a medical-spatial alphabet. Curiosity in the latter period, however, engaged a broader sensibility—not only or even primarily relying on the eyes, but on the ears and hands as well. Within the overall interrogative paradigm of nineteenth century medicine, which attempted to analyze life through the purview of death, clinical methods and techniques of observation were developed and employed that expressly promised to forecast as much as to preempt the discoveries of autopsy. Such methods and techniques, therefore, needed to sound the depth of a body years before that depth might actually be seen. It was the nineteenth century that first practiced "three-dimensional"[19] medicine, contracting the services of a sensorial "triangulation"[20] or a "trinity"[21] of sense. The hand pressed for palpitations and the ear pricked by pulse—these came to compose "a gaze that touches, hears, and, moreover, not by essence or

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[18] Ibid., 163; *Naissance de la Clinique*, 227.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 164; *Naissance de la Clinique*, 228.

necessity, sees."[22] They are aimed together at surfaces that belie the invisible depths. For Foucault, medical curiosity here shifts its attention from the ocular spectacle to the sensible specter, or from seeing on to 'seeing' through.

In *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault underscores the historical and theoretical contributions to an account of curiosity already made in *History of Madness*. Historically speaking, Foucault again analyzes the function of medical curiosity. Considering the objects of curiosity, he adds the human body to the human psyche. He again traces a shift in the objects and methods of curiosity, reiterating that the form curiosity takes is inherently contextual and situated. Two conceptually rich contributions are unique, however, to *Birth of the Clinic*. First, by tracing the extension of curiosity from the mere gaze to a triangulation of eye, ear, and hand, Foucault invites us to understand curiosity as sensual and multi-modal. Against a long tradition of locating curiosity primarily, if not exclusively, in the eyes, this analysis allows us to interrogate institutionalized curiosity as it is deployed through each of the body's senses today. Second, by narrating the shift in medical curiosity from an interest in the living body to the dead and then to death within the living, Foucault reconfigures curiosity's relationship to the life/death distinction. Traditionally aligned most often with death—and even the death drive—curiosity, Foucault suggests, is not itself either on the side of life or on the side of death but is instead the expression of power's different investments in both.

The Order of Things

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault treats head-on a moment in which historians often locate the 'birth of curiosity:' the classical period. Foucault is quick to assert, however, that this

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[22] Ibid.

period does not mark a birth but rather a shift in an already active curiosity.[23] Naturalists merely turn their curious gaze upon the elements of natural history and life. *The Order of Things*, then, performs a counter-historiography that marks not some glowing origin of modern thought but rather the slow changing relationship between words and things, from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. The Renaissance world is cast in terms of resemblance: words resemble other words, things resemble other things, and words resemble things, such that reality is an infinite zigzag between them. As Foucault observes, "This is why nature and the word can intertwine with one another to infinity, forming, for those who can read it, one vast single text."[24] Eventually, however, the question must be asked: what guarantees resemblance? How is a sign linked to what it signifies? It is on the hinge of this question that the Renaissance opens onto the classical era. Where the Renaissance insists that word, thing, and similitude are buoyed by the organism of the universe, the classical period asserts that sign and signified are bound together by the order of ideas. Imagination ensures that the script and scripted do not practically resemble but theoretically represent one another. The Renaissance circuit of analogies, similitudes, probabilities, conventions, and interpretations is thus replaced by the classical system of analyses, enumerations, certainties, discriminations, and tabulations. As the dust settles, Foucault explains, "It is the task of words to translate the truth if they can; but they no longer have the right to be considered a mark of it. Language has withdrawn from the midst of beings themselves and has entered a period of transparency."[25] But again, the questions remain: what is represented and who represents it? What relation do speaker and thing have to the words between them? The

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[23] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1966; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 157-158; *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 171.

[24] Ibid., 34; *Les mots et les choses*, 49.

[25] Ibid., 56; *Les mots et les choses*, 70.

modern era answers that there is no necessary relation between the cavernous singularity of the knower and the galactic multiplicity of the unknowable. There is only a free-floating entity called language. Hence, when Foucault writes, "The word is no longer attached to a representation except in so far as it is previously a part of the grammatical organization by means of which the language defines and guarantees its own coherence,"[26] he concludes this history with the orphaned word.

Since, for the classical period, language is not a matter of resemblance between things but rather the representation of things, the aim of investigation is not to uncover the words woven into the fabric of natural beings but rather to transcribe those beings into a series of "smooth, neutralized, and faithful" words.[27] To expedite this process, the raucous array both in language and in nature must be catalogued, such that what is dissected can be tabulated and what is identified can be indexed. It is in this context that Foucault locates the development of natural history. Thus, Foucault writes, "Natural history is a science, that is, a language, but a securely based and well-constructed one: its propositional unfolding is indisputably an articulation; the arrangement of its elements into a linear series patterns representation according to an evident and universal mode."[28] As a science and as a language, natural history conducts its dual categorization at four levels: structure, character, continuity, and catastrophe. Structure organizes the visible world, giving it boundaries and junctures, preference and depth, thereby trading organic assemblages for ordered arrangements. Character is the specific element of a structure

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[26] Ibid., 281; *Les mots et les choses*, 293.

[27] Ibid., 131; *Les mots et les choses*, 143.

[28] Ibid., 136, cp. 138; *Les mots et les choses*, 148, cp. 150.

identified as the kingpin, or "the locus of pertinent identities and differences,"[29] whereby things can be compared and contrasted with one another on a large scale. In order, however, for analyses of structure and character to hold, the entire spatial and temporal panorama of entities must be construed as having a continuity that is simultaneously punctuated by catastrophe. What makes natural history possible is not a sudden interest in new objects but rather a shift in discourse. In fact, what delimits "a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field […] and defines the conditions in which [humans] can sustain a discourse about" them.[30] This co-constitution will be true of classical curiosity.

It is within this landscape that Foucault addresses curiosity once more. Historians of ideas and of science make two assertions in connection with curiosity. First, they locate, in the classical period, a new age of 'curiosity,' due to its constitution of the never before seen life sciences. In doing so, historians suggest that curiosity can appear where none appeared before. Second, they identify as one of the causes of this new era, indeed the root of this novel biologism, a growing 'curiosity' about foreign plant and animal life. Again, in this manner, historians intimate that curious objects can appear where none appeared before. While answering these historians' broader claims, Foucault also addresses their assertions in connection with curiosity. He begins with the clarification that man, life, and nature "are none of them domains that present themselves to the curiosity of knowledge spontaneously and passively."[31] Indeed, they do not constitute "a set of constant problems uninterruptedly presented to men's curiosity by

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[29] Ibid., 140; *Les mots et les choses*, 152.

[30] Ibid., 158; *Les mots et les choses*, 171.

[31] Ibid., 72; *Les mots et les choses*, 86.

concrete phenomena as so many enigmas."[32] Life, then, is not always already an object of

curiosity throughout history. Furthermore, Foucault states that the rise of natural history during

the classical period "does not reveal a new curiosity directed towards a secret that no one had the

interest or courage to uncover, or the possibility of uncovering, before," nor does it mark "merely

the discovery of a new object of curiosity," nor indeed that "curiosity" for other things "had

diminished in the meantime, or that knowledge had regressed."[33] Life is neither always and

already nor suddenly and exclusively an object of curiosity throughout history. Rather, the shifts

in the exercise and objects of curiosity are subtle and stepwise, belying a much more

fundamental sway in the scaffolding of culture, its epistemological norms and self-reflective

perspectives. Natural history and the project of representation constitute the banks of classical

curiosity not because of their own powers of attraction but for reasons bearing the colossal stakes

of a civilization. Curiosity is a manifestation of history, the impression left in the sand, and it is

for this reason that curiosity cannot compose a historical event itself, whether cause or effect.

Here, we have a continuation of the contributions to an account of curiosity already

offered in *History of Madness* and *Birth of the Clinic*. To the objects of curiosity: the human

psyche and the human body, Foucault adds natural life and history. To the shift in curiosity by

which madness appears and the anatomo-pathological gaze is deployed, Foucault adds a shift

from Renaissance resemblances to classical taxonomies. In *The Order of Things*, however,

Foucault begins to formalize these implicit observations. Curiosity, he insists, is not born but

made. Curiosity is always already exercised in multiple fields of knowledge, across human

history. To give an account of curiosity, then, necessitates that we analyze the fields and the eras

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[32] Ibid., 157; *Les mots et les choses*, 171.

[33] Ibid., 138, 158, 137; *Les mots et les choses*, 150, 171, 149.

in which it functions, as well as the conditions under which and the objects on which it acts. This analytic process lays the groundwork for an assessment of curiosity's shifts. Is it curiosity itself that changes or is curiosity a consistently deployed element of changing circumstances? What is the relationship between curiosity and the disciplinary institutions in which it is activated? And what happens, in each instance, to something like a pre-disciplinary, 'demonic' curiosity?

The Genealogical Writings

Abnormal

In the *Abnormal* lecture course, Foucault announces that his aim is to analyze normality, "to study the emergence of the power of normalization, the way in which it has been formed, the way in which it has established itself without ever resting on a single institution but by establishing interactions between different institutions."[34] Foucault details the development of normalizing techniques by giving a genealogical account of abnormality. To do so, he traces the construction of the abnormal individual back into that of three earlier characters: the criminal monster, the child masturbator, and the incorrigible or recalcitrant individual.[35] In the context of this overarching genealogy of abnormality and contiguous with a select genealogy of the child masturbator, Foucault describes the rise of the modern family.[36] His narrative of familial constitution is woven from two theoretico-historical threads: the danger and the discipline of sexual curiosity. It is Foucault's contention that the modern family—which is, characteristically

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[34] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (New York: Picador, 2003), 26; *Les anormaux: cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 24.

[35] There is, of course, a connection, traceable in Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure* (1984; New York: Vintage Books, 1990), between the Greek *kurios* of the sovereign subject and the Latin *curiosus* of the disseminated subject, in which the former is critiqued in favor of the latter. But there is an earlier, and perhaps inverse, connection between these, traceable here in *Abnormal*: Foucault insists that the first figure of the monster, or the paradigm of monstrosity, is the king, the sovereign—by which we might say, the first *curiosus* object of a certain kind is the *kurios* (94). The later disavowal of sovereignty in *The Use of Pleasure* is, therefore, herein complicated.

[36] Foucault, *Abnormal*, especially the lectures of March 5th and March 12th, 1975.

speaking, a singular and cellular unit, at once centralized and compartmentalized, unified and distributed—composes the product of two disciplinary campaigns preeminent in the nineteenth century. The first campaign policed child sexual curiosity, through the prohibition of masturbation, and the second policed adult sexual curiosity, through the prohibition of incest. These two campaigns paradoxically discipline sexual curiosity through the exercise of surveillance, which is itself an expression of curiosity. Thus, Foucault theorizes that the modern family is a battleground of pleasure and power, a battleground repeatedly redrawn based on changing morphologies of the desire to know. This thesis is significant in the Foucauldian corpus because it is the first instance in which the bodily character of curiosity and the powerful nature of the family are made expressly disciplinary.

Before addressing the prohibition of incest, which policed adult sexual curiosity, consider the preceding prohibition of masturbation, policing the sexual curiosity of the child. Foucault stages his account of auto-eroticism against Jos Van Ussel, who claims the sudden rise of a discourse interdicting masturbation was due to the repression of the pleasurable body and the simultaneous celebration of the productive body.[37] Foucault argues, to the contrary, that repression does not explain the prohibition of masturbation. Rather, that prohibition arose when the pleasurable body was assigned to the family domain while the productive body was allocated to the state. In this process, the child's curiosity, originally aroused by the visible change in its genital organs, is progressively controlled by his/her parents' curiosity about their child's auto-eroticism.[38] As this centripetal field intensified, the child becomes curious about sex in general

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[37] See Jos Van Ussel, *Geschiedenis van het seksuele problem* (1968; Amsterdam: Boom, 1982).

[38] There are several differences between Foucault's treatment of childhood sexual curiosity here and Freud's account, as it is developed, for instance, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Perhaps most significantly, Freud roots the child's epistemic curiosity (ultimately expressed in science or art) in his/her sexual curiosity, while Foucault sees childhood sexual curiosity here as an impetus for adult epistemic curiosity, which eventually develops into new medical-juridical disciplines and discourses. Second, where Freud gives special and extended attention to

and the parents become increasingly invested in techniques of physical restraint. The nineteenth century's loud and steady prohibition of masturbation, therefore, constructs a codependent battlefield of curiosities circling around the child's body. That battlefield of curiosities, moreover, exists in the greater service of an institutional discourse that insists the family must discipline the pleasurable body. Such a discipline begins with shedding every person extraneous to the parent-child relationship (including close and distant relatives, hired servants, and trained caretakers) for the sake of composing a unit expressly formed of and focused upon the child's sex. This allows the modern familial bond to be solidified as one of "extreme closeness, contact, almost mixing; the urgent folding of the parents' bodies over their children's bodies; the insistent obligation of the gaze, of presence, contiguity, and touch."[39] The modern family appears: a tight-knit, parent-child unit bent on education and correction.

In answer to the nineteenth century campaign against masturbation is the almost coterminous campaign prohibiting incest.[40] Where the former campaign, in order to govern children's auto-erotic activity, says, "Get close to your children, establish contact with them, [and] observe their bodies closely," the latter campaign, in order to govern adult erotic activity, says, "Get married" but also, "Distribute bodies with the greatest possible distance between them."[41] Thus, the prohibition of masturbation inaugurates a centripetal power, drawing parents into a tight circle around their children's sexual bodies, while the prohibition of incest instigates

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the different developments of sexual and epistemic curiosity in male and female children, Foucault restricts himself fairly consistently to addressing the universal figure of 'the child.'

[39] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 248; *Les anormaux*, 233.

[40] Foucault observes that the aim of the campaign against masturbation is the bourgeois class, while the campaign against incest targets the working class most heavily. Nevertheless, he argues that both campaigns participate in the construction of the modern, necessarily interclass family (271; *Les anormaux*, 256).

[41] Ibid., 269-270; *Les anormaux*, 253-254.

a centrifugal power, disseminating children in a galactic pattern around their parents' bodies. Foucault summarizes the situation as follows: "In one case, the child's sexuality is dangerous and calls for the coagulation of the family; in the other case, adult sexuality is thought to be dangerous and calls instead for the optimal distribution of the family."[42] What occurs here is a doubling of the dimensions of the battlefield over curiosity. Where the first prohibition incites adult disciplinary curiosity to war with child sexual curiosity, the second, after accusing adult disciplinary curiosity of sexual investment, exercises a second level of adult disciplinary curiosity over the first level. Both prohibitions together inaugurate a tug-of-war over adult curiosity, as it hangs suspended over child curiosity. The first prohibition invokes parental restraint of their child's masturbating hand, where the second prohibition deploys the spatial arrangement of bodies to survey the movement of everyone's hands. The two interdictions together constitute the modern family by establishing its *sine qua non*: proximity and distance, the reigning in and the arrangement of things. This Foucault calls "the model of the little cell of parents and children whose elements are differentiated but strongly interdependent and which are both bound together and threatened by incest."[43]

Before leaving *Abnormal*, it may be helpful, as we start accumulating versions of curiosity, to offer a little more detail on the child and adult curiosities here. In his description of the child's curiosity, Foucault adopts the language of Dr. Simon, author of *Traité d'hygeine appliquée à la jeunesse* (1827), who writes that children are often led "'to put their hands on their sexual parts and the excitation […] causes […] an instantaneous change in the form of the

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[42] Ibid., 271; *Les anormaux*, 256.

[43] Ibid.

organ, which arouses curiosity.'"[44] For the child, then, this is a visual, tactile, and utterly somatic

experience of curiosity, driven by the vicissitudes of excitation and of change, which continues

to imbue the elements of sexuality with scopophilic interest well beyond childhood. As this

curiosity develops from a wandering hand, to the eye, into a full-bodied experience, it begins to

compromise the whole organism: "When one forbids children to masturbate, one threatens them

with an adult life crippled by illness, rather than an adult life lost in debauchery and vice."[45] As

for adult curiosity, Foucault records it turning its keen, questioning eyes upon precisely this

childhood curiosity, hoping to uncover the child's hand in the very act of auto-eroticism and thus

expecting to bring masturbation to light. In fact, Foucault insists that the entire family drama of

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be reduced to "the little theatre of the family comedy

and tragedy with its beds, its sheets, the night, the lamps, with its stealthy approaches, its odors,

and the carefully inspected stains on the sheets; the little drama that brings the adult's curiosity

ever closer to the child's body."[46] Adult curiosity, then, is just as visual, tactile, and somatic as

the child's, but it is aimed, contrariwise, at the quelling of excitation and the mollification of

change in the child's body through the application of the adult body. Adult curiosity,

furthermore, begins with the watchful eye before it moves into the restraining hand. Finally, it

matures into a wholesale somatic curiosity, through which the "application" of the adult's body

to the child's body becomes first an "urgent folding" and then an "envelopment" according to

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[44] Ibid., 234; *Les anormaux*, 219.

[45] Ibid., 237; *Les anormaux*, 223.

[46] Ibid., 247; *Les anormaux*, 232.

which "the central objective of the maneuver or crusade is revealed: the constitution of a new family body."[47]

As far as contributions to an account of curiosity are concerned, *Abnormal* follows another shift in curiosity toward another object of curiosity: the child's sexual body and, to a lesser degree, the adult's sexual body. It also reiterates curiosity's mobilization not only of the eye, ear, and hand, but in fact the whole body. *Abnormal*, however, is the first text since *History of Madness* in which Foucault discusses a curiosity exercised not by scientists or institutions, but by private persons—and, in this case, units of private persons called families. As such, Foucault here traces the democratization of disciplinary curiosity. Building even further upon *History of Madness*, *Abnormal* identifies a second form of undisciplined curiosity: not the demonic curiosity of fools, but the physical, sexual, and pleasurable curiosity of the child. Besides buttressing previous contributions to an account of curiosity, *Abnormal* brings three new forces to light. 1) It links curiosity to discourses of danger. 2) It demonstrates how curiosity is reflected in the distribution of space. 3) It illuminates the power of curiosity to produce not only the modern family but also the fast developing discourse on sexuality.

Discipline and Punish

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces the development of power, as it is exercised on the accused criminal, from a sovereign model, through a juridical and into a disciplinary one. Under the sovereign model, power is exercised on the accused criminal through torture and public execution. It works on the body, in a brutal and bloody way. The point here is "to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the

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[47] Ibid., 247-248; *Les anormaux*, 232-233.

law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength."[48] Under the juridical model,

power is exercised through the court, where a new form of interrogation is introduced which asks

about the personal motives and social factors that contributed to the crime. The accused

criminal's mental health for the first time takes center stage. As Foucault writes, "It is no longer

simply: 'Who committed [the crime]?' But: 'How can we assign the causal process that produced

it? Where did it originate in the author himself? Instinct, unconscious, environment, heredity?'"[49]

Finally, under the disciplinary model, the body and soul as the whole person are broken down

and reassembled as a machine. Taught to police themselves, to be motivated by their own

restraint, and to train their bodies according to minute techniques, imprisoned persons are now

governed by a power that takes root inside them and turns them against themselves. Thus, "the

formation of a disciplinary society" is "this movement that stretches from the enclosed

disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine,' to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of

'panopticism.'"[50] This shift in forms of power follows the commensurate shift in places of

punishment: from the public execution, to the courtroom, and finally to the prison, whose doors

today open earlier and wider than ever before.

As we have come to expect, curiosity makes an instructive appearance at each juncture in

Foucault's genealogy of the modern day prison. In the case of public execution, a question is put

to the body of the accused. If you survive the torture and execution process for too long, it

demonstrates that justice was misplaced. A crowd gathers around the scene, keen to assess the

right of the sovereign. "Hence," Foucault writes, "the insatiable curiosity […] drove the

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[48]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975; New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 49; *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 60.

[49] Ibid., 19; *Surveiller et punir*, 27.

[50] Ibid., 216; *Surveiller et punir*, 251.

spectators to the scaffold to witness the spectacle of sufferings truly endured. […] It was a moment of truth that all the spectators questioned."[51] The danger, of course, was that the crowd, for whom the spectacle was meant as a demonstration of sovereign power, might decide sovereign power had been misplaced.[52] Now, when power shifts to the juridical model, the metaphysical question posed to the execution becomes a concrete interrogation. In fact, while the accused is subject to the "ruthless curiosity"[53] of the juridical examination process, they are also subject to the raucous, though no less serious, curiosity of the public for the "almanacs, broadsheets, popular tales" and other adventures stories of great criminals.[54] For this public, "the interest of 'curiosity' is also a political interest," because something political happens here.[55] The precedent of justice is re-inscribed beside the glorification of the 'criminal.' Finally, in the case of disciplinary power, in conjunction with panopticism, there is a dissecting and segregating curiosity enveloped in a panoptic, panauditory, and pansomatic force.[56] Whether or not, as Foucault (citing Bentham) indicates, the warden, guard, or visitor is impelled by a general or mere "curiosity," the very structure of the panopticon itself extends the curious work of the

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[51] Ibid., 46; *Surveiller et punir*, 57.

[52] Ibid., 63; *Surveiller et punir*, 75.

[53] Ibid., 227; *Surveiller et punir*, 264.

[54] Ibid., 112; *Surveiller et punir*, 132. The reigning paradigm in the nineteenth century was established in different ways by Benjamin Appert's *Bagnes, Prisons et Criminels* and Pierre Lacenaire's *Mémoires, Révélations, et Poésies*, both published in 1836. These texts depict the prisoner as a self-identified solitary and unthinking exemplar of criminality, a singular criminal adventurer in the throes of chance. Compare "Lives of Infamous Men" (1977), *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 157-175; "Luttes autour des prisons" (1979), *Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988*, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), no. 273; and Foucault's preface to Serge Livrozet's *De la Prison à la Révolte* (1973; Paris: L'Esprit Frappeur, 1999).

[55] Ibid., 68; *Surveiller et punir*, 81.

[56] For panauditory surveillance, see Lauri Siisiainen, *The Politics of Hearing* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Of course, surveillance is also incredibly bodily. Take, for example, the strip search.

naturalist from the menagerie and laboratory to the prison.[57] The question at this point is: is there

a resistant curiosity in a disciplinary world or has institutionalized curiosity finally conquered

all?

The Prisons Information Group (Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons, the GIP)[58]

provides one indication of this resistant curiosity. The aim of discipline is to "transform the

confused, useless, or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities."[59] The practice, then, of

resisting such discipline must be the re-excitation of the multitude—perhaps a politicized

multitude—against these multiplicities. The GIP can be interpreted through this lens. As an

activist group in which Foucault was heavily involved, the GIP aimed both to publicize

information about prisons from prisoners and to mobilize persons in and outside the system

against the prison itself. One of its earliest tactics for doing both was the deployment of a

questionnaire, through which it "gave the floor [*donné la parole*]" to detainees. In a preface to

the first questionnaire, the GIP insists that its inquiry does not replicate juridical or disciplinary

curiosity, but instigates a resistant one. Its members write: "This is not a sociological

investigation, a curiosity-investigation; it is an *intolerance-investigation*."[60] Insofar as an

investigation is already an expression of curiosity, I understand this 'curiosity-investigation' to

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[57] Ibid., 202-203; *Surveiller et punir*, 236. Cp. Jeremy Bentham, "Letter VI," *The Panopticon Writings* (London: Verso, 1995), 47. For a classic text connecting the asylum to the menagerie, see Henri F. Ellenberger, "The Mental Hospital and the Zoological Garden," *Animals and Man in Historical Perspective*, eds. Joseph Klaits and Barrie Klaits (1965; New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 59-92. For an analysis of the menagerie in conjunction with surveillance, see Peter Sahlins, "The Royal Menageries of Louis XIV and the Civilizing Process Revisited," *French Historical Studies* 35.2 (2012): 237-267. We will return to these in Chapter Four.

[58] The Prisons Information Group (1970-1973) was an activist organization in which Foucault was heavily involved. Its aim was to generate and circulate suppressed information about the prison system from prisoners themselves.

[59] Ibid., 148.

[60] "Enquête-intolérance" (1971), *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons: Archives d'une lutte 1970-1972*, eds. Philippe Artières, Laurent Quéro, & Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: Editions de l'IMEC, 2003), 53. Hereafter *Archives d'une lutte*.

be an investigation fueled by institutional curiosity, whereas an 'intolerance-investigation' must be the expression of a politicized, mobilizing, and resistant curiosity. Thereafter, the GIP will repeatedly define its work as neither the sociological work of observing and recording prison conditions nor the reformist work of revamping prisons.[61] Rather, the GIP aimed to do the "effective work" of creating a public network for disenfranchised voices.[62] For Foucault, this was a strong antidote to "university yacking and book scribbling." Unlike the academic factory, the GIP undertook "a concrete political action" "charged with meaning."[63] This political work, however, necessarily rests on the back of a resistant curiosity.

In its contribution to an account of curiosity, *Discipline and Punish* traces multiple shifts in curiosity across multiple objects. From the traitor, the offender, the accused criminal, and the delinquent, curiosity methodically passes through the execution test, the interrogative question, the psychological observation, and ultimately the production of a new criminal subject. In each case, the conjunction of curiosity's method and object is placed within the larger context of power. Curiosity functions differently under sovereign power than it does under juridical or disciplinary power. What the GIP provides, as a supplement to *Discipline and Punish*, is the intimation not of a pre-disciplinary curiosity but of a counter-disciplinary curiosity: intolerant curiosity. While this latter curiosity takes its place beside demonic and child sexual curiosities as a third deinstitutionalized form of curiosity, it does more. Foucault has perhaps for the first time moved to imagine curiosity as a political tool and, potentially, an ethical imperative. Curiosity

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[61] Daniel Defert, "Quand l'information est une lutte" (1971), *Archives d'une lutte*, 69-73; Michel Foucault, "(Sur les prisons)" (1971), *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), no. 87, 1043-1044; and Michel Foucault, "Je perçois l'intolerable" (1971), *Dits et écrits* I, no. 94, 1071-1073.

[62] Michel Foucault, "Le grand enfermement" (1972), *Dits et écrits* I, no. 105, 1164-1174.

[63] Ibid. Foucault here regrets the idle chatter of the academy and accuses the philosopher of "distanc[ing] himself from reality."

has become not merely a concept through which to understand the disciplinary force of education or the marginalization of people with criminal records, physical diseases, or mental disabilities, but a practice one might consciously embrace as a way to resist the cellularizing effect of these forces.

History of Sexuality

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues against the reigning story of sexuality's development, stating that its hypothesis of repression, prophecy of liberation, and their commensurate vision of sovereign power relations, is insufficient for an appropriate record of sexual activity. "It is a ruse," Foucault states, "to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history" of sexuality.[64] Hence, Foucault offers his own account of the history of sexuality, insisting that bourgeois efforts at prohibition, far from effecting sexual repression, in fact produced incitation to the proliferation of various sexualities. Although, Foucault agrees, the pre-Victorian verbosity of sexuality was funneled within the confines of the matrimonial bedroom walls, he argues that same verbosity was disseminated into the various disciplinary discourses of medicine, education, politics, economics, and religion. Foucault therefore adds to his admission of "a whole restrictive economy" the observation that "at the level of discourse and their domains […] there was a steady proliferation of sexual discourse concerned with sex."[65] Moreover, the proliferation of sexual discourse—and thus the discursive policing of sexuality historically effected through prohibition—displays, according to Foucault, an other than sovereign model of power; indeed, "never have there existed

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[64] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 12; *Histoire de la sexualité I: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 20-21.

[65] Ibid., 18; *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 26.

more centers of power; never more attention manifested and verbalized."[66] Foucault proffers a

decentralized and diffused model of power capable of infiltrating educative taxonomies and

medical manuals. Power, Foucault states, is not properly symbolized in the sword of the

sovereign, but rather manifests itself in a taut field of force relations, where power and resistance

are co-constituted.

In the midst of this analysis, Foucault compares the sort of institutionalized curiosity that

produces a discourse on sex with the literary figure of a sultan, in Diderot's *Indiscrete Jewels*,

whose magic ring compels the genitals of his courtesans to tell tales of their sexual exploits.[67]

Thus, after establishing the history of sexuality which hypothesizes repression and propounds

liberation, Foucault prefaces his own work on the issue in the following manner: "The aim [*il

s'agit*] of this series of studies? To transcribe into history the fable of *Les Bijoux indiscrets*."[68]

The Indiscrete Jewels tells the story of Mangogul, a sultan of the Congo, who receives from his

genie, Cucufa, a magical ring which, when directed towards women's genitals, constrains those

genitals to tell tales. Insofar as the story 1) considers sexual practice to be the object of

solicitation and not repression and 2) considers sexual discourse to be the subject of constraint

and not liberation, the novel forms a perfect inspiration for Foucault's genealogy of the

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[66] Ibid., 49; *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 67.

[67] For a discussion of *The Indiscreet Jewels* as a reflection of Diderot's entire corpus, see Steven Werner's "Diderot's First Anti-Novel: 'Les Bijoux Indiscrets,'" *Diderot Studies* 26 (1995): 215-228, and Aram Vartanian's "Introduction" to Diderot's *The Indiscrete Jewels* (New York: Marsilio, 1993). For competing alignments of Diderot with the sultan and the 'jewels,' see Jean Starobinski, "The Man Who Told Secrets," *The New York Review of Books* 20.4 (1973): 18, and Vartanian's "Introduction." For analyses of the specific role of Mirzoza, as the representative, on the socio-political level, of Louis XVI's famous lover, Madam Pompadour, see Alice Parker's "Did/Erotica: Diderot's Contribution to the History of Sexuality," *Diderot Studies* 22 (1986): 89-106. For more background material, see Vartanian's "Diderot and the Phenomenology of Dreams," *Diderot Studies* 8 (1966): 217-253, *Diderot and Descartes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), and *Science and Humanism in the French Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 1999). Although literary critics take *The Indiscrete Jewels* quite seriously, philosophers generally share Corey McCall's opinion, as stated in "The Significance of Fiction: Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' and the Possibility of Critique," *Kinesis* 29.2 (2002), that "it is not the details of the story that interest me so much as Foucault's transcription of fable into history" (22).

[68] Ibid., 77; *Histoire de la sexualité I*, 101.

proliferation of sexualities and the incitation to discuss them. But Diderot's novel is not merely an inspiration. It is also a challenge. At its opening, Mangogul is bored. Mirzoza, who once dazzled him with tales of the region, has exhausted her treasure trove and regrets that she has no comparative access to intrigues at court. She therefore suggests they consult Cucufa. It is at Mirzoza's behest that Mangogul acquires the magic ring. What is this curiosity before curiosity? What is it for Diderot and now for contemporary society? What are we to make of the pleasure in tales, which seems to drive Foucault to write this book to begin with? Here is another trace of a secondary, more disruptive curiosity.

In the contributions of *History of Sexuality* to an account of curiosity, Foucault builds on those from *Abnormal* in several ways. Where, in the earlier lecture course, Foucault indicates that an analytic of repression is not sufficient to understand the prohibitions of masturbation and incest, arguing instead that we must see those prohibitions as inherently productive, specifically producing the modern family, in *History of Sexuality* Foucault extends this analysis to the modern subject. Curiosity is not merely instrumental in creating the judicial unit and criminal subject, the family unit and the criminalized child. It is an inextricable component of the confessional system that produces the modern desiring subject. The ability to say "I," to claim one identity or another, to select characteristics A-Z as defining components of one's personality or chosen lifestyle, these are all products of and pander to an increasingly curious social structure that extracts various forms of confession. Curiosity does not just create subjects or attend to different objects. It produces speech and even the hierarchization of different forms of speech. *History of Sexuality* thus picks up on the correlation between curiosity and the discourse of sexuality in *Abnormal*. Through Diderot, we can understand how this curiosity generates words, stories, and discourses, but that the status of what form of discourse it creates reflects its

relationship to institutionalized power. Curiosity may begin by producing something as simple as gossip and end by constructing academic sexology.

Other Lectures

Curiosity makes significant appearances in other lecture courses, besides *Abnormal*. Although one might expect to trace curiosity from sovereign, juridical, and disciplinary power into biopower, the term is strangely absent from texts like *Society Must Be Defended* (1975-1976), *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-1978), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979). Curiosity does, however, play an important role in *Lessons on the Will to Know* (1970-1971), *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-1982), and *The Courage of Truth* (1984). Its appearance in these texts shifts the conversation away from curiosity as a form of power and toward curiosity as a form of knowledge and ethics.

In *Lessons on the Will to Know*, for instance, Foucault discusses Aristotle's claim, in the *Metaphysics*, that all men are by nature want to know, all men by nature are, as he puts it, curious.[69] He compares this foundational philosophical claim to the Nietzschean will to power, suggesting that the former immediately abstracts knowledge from its sensible and historical context while the latter does not.[70] This text will be important in the discussion of Foucault's respective indebtedness to Heidegger and to Nietzsche on the question of curiosity. Perhaps the most fruitful of Foucault's discussions of curiosity in the lectures, however, comes in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*. There, Foucault exegetes Plutarch's critique of curiosity in "On the

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[69] Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970-1971* (New York: Picador, 2013), 17-18; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir: cours au Collège de France, 1970-1971* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 18-19.

[70] See Alfano's "The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemology," where, as I have indicated, he argues that curiosity, as the primary specification of the will to power, is a cardinal Nietzschean virtue.

Busybody"[71] and then Seneca's endorsement of curiosity in *Naturales Questiones*.[72] He suggests that Plutarch's busybody practices a self-destructive curiosity, driven only by a morose interest in other people's suffering, but Seneca uses curiosity as a practice of self-care when he directs it outward toward the natural world. This will be critical to developing our understanding of Foucauldian curiosity as a practice of freedom. Finally, in *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault identifies Socrates, especially Socrates in *Laches*, as one who practices the courage of truth specifically through curiosity.[73] It will be important to address this as we ask what curiosity might have to do with *parrēsia*.

Here we have curiosity as a practice of knowing, a technique of self-care, and an expression of frank speech. Insofar as these depictions follow curiosity's role in the intellectual, moral, and public life, we will address these lecture courses in the following chapter, devoted to curiosity not as a technique of institutionalized power but as a practice of freedom. Therein, these references will help us not only to construct, but to significantly revise and extend Foucault's account of curiosity.

A Nascent Account of Curiosity

Given the resources I have developed in this chapter, I can now justify two arguments that run counter to the reigning scholarly interpretation of curiosity in Foucault. First, curiosity is not merely a late concept for Foucault but is in fact a sustained concern across his work. Second,

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[71] Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), 218-223; *L'Herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Paris: Gallimard: 2001), 209-214.

[72] Ibid., 278-285; *L'Herméneutique du sujet*, 267-273.

[73] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France*, *1983-1984* (New York: Picador, 2011), 125; *Le Courage de la Verité*: *cours au Collège de France*, *1984* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 117. For a brief rumination on the role of curiosity in this text, especially as it intersects with courage, see Ed Cohen, "The Courage of Curiosity, or The Heart of Truth (A Mash-Up)," *Criticism* 52.2 (2010): 201-207.

curiosity is not exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, a technique of self-care for Foucault but is at least equally a technique of power. Curiosity as a centerpiece of Foucauldian ethics is in fact just a small glimmer of light beneath an overwhelming characterization of curiosity as the bread and butter of disciplinary attention. Before turning in Chapter Two to develop that glimmer through the most overt and well-known references in the later period, let me systematize the nascent account of curiosity I have culled so far. This nascent account includes the four structural elements of curiosity I have already previewed, but it also offers differing characterizations of curiosity's institutional and resistant forms. Additionally, I have collected general observations about curiosity's relation to language from a Foucauldian perspective. As I move through these points, I will offer some suggestive directions for revising Foucault's account in today's world.

First, there are several structural elements of curiosity, consistent across these histories, which Foucault directly identifies or implicitly utilizes. I collate them systematically below.

1. Curiosity is a constitutive element of the political space. It is never born, *ex nihilo*, into a particular location, institution, or practice. It is instead made, redirected, and redeveloped.

2. The expressions and objects of curiosity are co-constitutive. While both those expressions and those objects change, they do so not separately, as if at a distance, but together.

3. Curiosity is not primarily ocular. Its medium is not exclusively the gaze. Rather, it may involve all the other senses and, in some cases, express itself through the application of the whole body. This is true on the corresponding political register. Curiosity is not primarily exercised by the sovereign who, for so many centuries, has been represented by

the sun or the eagle eye, but may be exercised just as well through the intimate social organ of the local family.

4. Curiosity, as a technique of power, is exercised on what is considered dangerous in any given time period, whether this be the mad, death, the exotic, the abnormal, the criminal, or the deviant. It ironically also represents danger itself because, although it serves power, it is less committed to the maintenance of systems than it is to reaching beyond what those systems circumscribe.

Thus, before Foucault locates curiosity in techniques of self-care, he traces its force throughout the fabric of social existence, whether institutions, personages, or material practices. Curiosity throughout these histories is less an independent human disposition than it is a trans-material element of a Zeitgeist. This is an overlooked and yet critical addition to any account of the role of curiosity in Foucault's work. If we were to turn to our present, however, and try to identify the character of curiosity today, we would need to resist our acculturated instinct to analyze a specimen of curious persons—like Stephen Hawking, for example. Rather, we would need to work to theorize the intersection between contemporary research subjects and methods, the managerial application of bodies, and the cultural locations of risk.

Second, institutional curiosity—the sort exercised on whatever has been assessed as dangerous in a given era—is located in specific places. We have herein observed therapeutic, medical, historical, psychological, judicial, and sexual curiosity at work in the asylum, clinic, natural catalogue, education system, court, and confessional. These are the institutions in which curiosity has flourished over the past few hundred years. They have produced the disciplines of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, biology, natural history, education, law, criminology, and sexology to study the human psyche and body, natural life and history, the child and criminal,

sex and sexuality. The question for any contemporary analysis of curiosity is not only how has curiosity's deployment in these various arenas fared in the present, but also what are the new, heretofore unimagined loci of curiosity? Foucault's work, especially his final project on the history of sexuality, is implicitly marked by the raging AIDS epidemic in the 1980's and the debates surrounding it. Much for us has changed since then. Perhaps the most recent and most obvious locus of curiosity today is virtual data collection and surveillance. A contemporary extension of Foucault's work here would need to specify the methods, objects, and shifts implicit in big data collection, as well as its unique indebtedness to specific institutions.

Third, these histories provide three models of resistant curiosity—the sort exercised either by the dangerous or as danger itself. In the above discussion, I characterized these models as pre- and counter-disciplinary. Whatever sort of curiosity exists prior to a specific development in power or expressly targets a particular power formation may be considered a resistant curiosity. The three models are:

1. Demonic curiosity, as practiced by fools for forbidden knowledge.

2. Child sexual curiosity, as practiced by child masturbators for forbidden pleasure.

3. Intolerant curiosity, as practiced by agitators in a counter-disciplinary action.

These three models respectively locate curiosity in clashes of knowledge, pleasure, and politics. In Chapter Two, I will turn to develop Foucault's late embrace of curiosity as a practice of freedom in light of these three positive predecessors. In order to continue our conversation beyond Foucault, moreover, it would be necessary to ask both how these resistant curiosities have survived or been extinguished in the present, as well as what new forms of resistant curiosity may have developed in the meantime.

Fourth and finally, Foucault's histories fairly consistently fold curiosity into the vicissitudes of language, creating unique points of contact. These contact points between curiosity and language illuminate how reason and human nature are being constructed, practiced, and policed.[74] On the one hand, curiosity's expression changes depending on the status of language in any given regime. When the modern period assumed a strong word-to-thing correlation, for example, curiosity was expressed in the proliferation of taxonomies. When words became orphaned from their things, curiosity took a different tack. In a disciplinary setting, where power reproduces itself through the production of discourses, curiosity expresses itself in the development of these discourses as a way of handling or managing things rather than recording them. On the other hand, curiosity can challenge various regimes through particular forms of language. Resistant curiosity, for instance, may be both manifested and intensified through questionnaires, pamphlets, books, or other forms of publicity. It may be coincident with shifting who precisely gets to speak. At another level, curiosity is one element of *parrēsiastic* speech. It is in these senses that curiosity may form the groundwork of an ethically and politically salient response to power. Ultimately, this raises a question about the theoretical relationship between curiosity and language.

I will follow this thread more closely in Chapter Three, where I offer an account of publicity as a political expression of resistant curiosity. Before we get there, I will first finish

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[74] This contrasts with both classical and contemporary perspectives. From the Hobbesian standpoint, as I noted just briefly, curiosity and language are intimately related. For Hobbes, there are two primary marks that distinguish the human being from the animal: a) curiosity, which is a singular intent, based on a special investment in learning causes and their effects, to create a specific future, and b) speech, which is the invention of names whereby the memory of causes and effects may be preserved and thereafter utilized. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vi.35 and iv.1. Cp. *Human Nature*, x.3-5. For Ilhan Inan, author of the first full treatment of curiosity in analytic philosophy, curiosity is an intentional mental state expressible by an inostensible term and is, as such, unique to the human being. See Ilhan Inan, *The Philosophy of Curiosity*, 136. While for Hobbes, then, language supports curiosity through ostensible terms, for Inan, language supports curiosity through inostensible terms. In either case, it is the conjunction of curiosity and language that serves as a preface to reason and therefore to human nature.

developing Foucault's account of curiosity by addressing his late endorsement thereof. I will grant that he clearly imagines curiosity to be a technique of self-care, or, more formally, a critical component in an ethics of the self. I will also argue, however, that scholars who emphasize this fact, to the exclusion of the histories I have analyzed in this chapter, risk showcasing individual ethics to such an extent that Foucault's fundamentally collective and political perspective is erased. This is the subject of Chapter Two.

Chapter 2

Foucault: The Ethics of Curiosity

Across Foucault's corpus, curiosity features as an arm of institutions that identify, catalogue, control, and deploy persons and objects in the world. From *History of Madness* to *History of Sexuality*, one can trace the role of curiosity in the development of psychology and education, penal theory and punishment, sexuality studies and the various professions of desire that mark the modern, liberal subject. Although this is patently clear conceptually, Foucault uses the term 'curiosity' in this regard sparingly, although no less significantly. By contrast, Foucault's most extended and direct discussions of curiosity develop it as a practice of freedom, or, more specifically, as a technique in the care of the self. Thus, although Foucault is aware of curiosity as one of the immensely productive tactics of the modern regime, he insists that it also offers us the resources to resist objectification and subjectification. The three most familiar passages in which Foucault makes this testament, late in life, appear in an interview entitled "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual" (1980), an interview entitled "The Masked Philosopher" (1981), and the preface to *The Use of Pleasure* (1984). By taking each of these passages in turn, independently and in context, I will demonstrate that Foucault proposes curiosity as a key element in a moral life, a public intellectual life, and, ultimately, a writing life.

First, in "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," Foucault proposes curiosity as the key element in a moral life. In order to properly contextualize this claim, I will supplement my analysis of the interview with Foucault's similar comments in his 1981-1982 lecture course, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*. There, Foucault develops an account of curiosity as a specific technique in the ancient Greek practices of the self. Analyzing passages from Plutarch's *Moralia* and Seneca's *Naturales Questiones*, he explores how the practice of curiosity—not so much

about others, but about oneself and one's world—can itself be a tactic of self-transformation. The question here will be: what does curiosity add to our understanding of Foucauldian ethics proper and to Foucault's interpretation of ancient morality in particular?

Second, in "The Masked Philosopher," Foucault speaks of curiosity as critical to a public life. To contextualize this claim, I turn to Foucault's discussion of Socrates as a *parrēsiastes* in his 1984 lecture course, *The Courage of Truth*. There, Foucault attributes curiosity, alongside courage, to Socrates. By analyzing *Laches* in particular, Foucault delineates the role of curiosity in the courageous struggle for truth, a struggle that often begins with the will to ask difficult questions. It is my task here to assess why *parrēsia*, as the discursive mode of Foucauldian public life, is rooted in curiosity and how recognition of this fact might change scholarship's current interpretations of *parrēsia* and the public figure.

Third, in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault confesses to being driven, in his intellectual pursuits, by none other than curiosity. He specifically attributes the changeableness of his projects and the flexibility of his methods to this impetus. To flesh out the significance of this confession, I draw from his much earlier 1970-1971 course, *Lectures on the Will to Know*. There, Foucault contrasts Aristotle and Nietzsche's accounts of so-called curiosity, insisting that each offers a different "morphology" of the will to know. Where Aristotle restricts "curiosity" within the bounds of reason, Nietzsche roots it in the body and desire, history and struggle. I will make a case for how Foucault's intellectual career in general and the patterns of his writing in particular can be interpreted as an expression of Nietzschean curiosity.

As these three references indicate, an ethics of curiosity for Foucault is critical to a moral life, but also to the writing life of a public intellectual. On the one hand, understanding this provides a more multi-faceted account of curiosity than heretofore conceived. Namely, it extends

curiosity's purview from mere virtue or vice to social institutions. On the other hand, it enriches

and deepens our interpretation of Foucault on crucial points. Self-care, *parrēsia*, and the will to

know take on a different, more collective tenor. The facility that Foucault attributes to curiosity,

however, does not compromise its clarity as a concept. In fact, in each case, and perhaps others

besides, there is a consistent theoretical kernel. As will be demonstrated below, an ethics of

curiosity is an ethics of *acharnement*, one of feverish determination, passionate propulsion, not

without discomfort, instability, and hope. After offering an account of this resistant form of

Foucauldian curiosity, I will turn in Chapter Three to analyze a case study thereof: publicity.

Curiosity and the Moral Life

Foucault offers a unique approach to the question of the moral life. According to his

account in *The Use of Pleasure*, there are at least three elements in any moral system: 1) a moral

code, typically composed of prescriptions and prohibitions, 2) moral behavior, which indicates

the quality of a subject's relation to the moral code, and 3) ethics, or, as he puts it, the self's

"relationships with the self."[1] Within ethics, there are several layers: the ethical substance or

portion of oneself upon which one works, the mode of subjection to a rule, the elaboration or

ethical work one performs on oneself, and the *telos* or goal.[2] Together, ethics is:

> […] a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the
> object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and
> decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires
> him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself.[3]

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[1] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 29; *L'Usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 41.

[2] Ibid., 26-27; *L'Usage des plaisirs*, 37-39.

[3] Ibid., 28; *L'Usage des plaisirs*, 40.

The tripartite structure of moral systems allows Foucault to analyze systems that might well

share the bulk of their moral codes and moral behaviors, but differ significantly in their ethics or

self-relations.[4]

Foucault's account of the moral life is historical in at least two ways. First, it owes a great

debt to scholars of Greek and Roman antiquity.[5] Foucault develops his understanding of ethics

primarily in dialogue with classical texts. For the ancients, the emphasis is not on moral codes

but on "knowledge of oneself, care of oneself, and one's style of life," which are "everywhere

[…] woven together."[6] Practices of self-formation are spiritual exercises, which draw one to

invest in oneself as much as to be dispossessed of one's current self, to interiorize and

exteriorize.[7] This permits ethics to exist in the absence of any transcendent nature, reason, origin,

tradition, or constraint.[8] Second, Foucault's account of the moral life reflects the characteristics

of his own life and time. The ethical practices he himself generates do not compose a universal

proposal, but rather an ethics particular to "the history of his own freedom and thought,"

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[4] See commentary by Arnold Davidson, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics," *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 230-231, and Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157-159.

[5] It is important to grant that Foucault draws most heavily from the imperial period, when the care of the self became a way of life rather than being tied down to discrete educational or political ends. For another lineage, tracing Foucault's ethics through Nietzschean recoil, see Charles Scott, *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), esp. 86-93.

[6] Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 143.

[7] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 211.

[8] Paul Veyne, "The Final Foucault and His Ethics" (1986), *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 230. This absence of transcendence provides the backdrop for Charles Scott's interpretation of Foucauldian curiosity in *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Commenting on "Power, Moral Values, and the Individual," Scott writes, "The intellectual loses his or her privilege of reason and insight to aspire to tell us what is to be normative […] Such consequences of thought and knowledge without transcendence leave Foucault, on his own terms, with a morality of refusal, curiosity, and innovation" (142).

especially as an intellectual and a homosexual.[9] For, the self's relation to the self always exists "within the confines of a historical situation."[10] The decision to consciously take oneself as a problem is always already circumscribed by and embedded within a specific material and social milieu: a history. Before elucidating the specificity of his account of morality as a public intellectual, we turn to his debt to Greek and Roman antiquity. In each case, we will trace the unique role of curiosity in his moral system.

In his 1981-1982 lecture course *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault contrasts the modern tactics of subjectivation with the ancient care of the self. While the former extracts confessions of identity from persons in general, the latter equips individuals in particular to nurture their own self-transformation. While much has been done to understand these processes of subjectivation through confession,[11] and more could be done to analyze the sort of institutionalized curiosity involved in that extraction, I am interested here in the relationship between curiosity and ethical self-transformation. Foucault elucidates curiosity's role by turning to Plutarch's "On Being a Busybody"[12] and Seneca's *Naturales Questiones*. For Plutarch, curiosity is the prime purview of the busybody. The busybody's curiosity about other people's

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[9] James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought* (London: Humanities Press, 1990), 177.

[10] James Bernauer and Michael Mahon, "Michel Foucault's Ethical Imagination," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162.

[11] Chloe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confession Animal'* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[12] Although translated as "On Being a Busybody" in English, the French translation is *De la curiosité*, the Latin is *De curiositate*, and in the original Greek it is *Peri Polupragmosune*. As Andre Labhardt notes, "*Les termes de la famille de* periergos *et de* polupragmon*, devenus synonymes à l'époque hellénistique, apparaissent donc affectés d'un indice péjoratif que nous retrouvons dans le latin* curiosus *et* curiositas*, qui les résument et les continuent*" ("Curiositas: Notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion," 207). See also Mathew Leigh, *From Polypragmon to Curiosus: Ancient Concepts of Curious and Meddlesome Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Although Foucault characterizes Plutarch's essay "On Being a Busybody" as a "rather banal" piece that "doesn't get very far" in questions of self-care (*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 219; *L'Herméneutique du suje*t, 210), I contend it does more than he realizes with respect to curiosity.

business behaves like a parasite: curiosity saps the natural energy of the busybody and redirects it to leech other people's energies. It is a "disease" of the mind that slowly kills the proper function of the intellect by causing it to overlook itself and instead look at others.[13] It looks to others especially for their calamities, "like a maggot on dead matter."[14] If such calamities are not immediately accessible, curiosity "hunts" them out and "butcher[s]" them.[15] In place of this necrophilic interest, Plutarch recommends that people turn their curiosity inward, learn from their own calamities, identify their own personal limitations, and test their intellectual and spiritual capacities. "Block up the windows and the side-doors of your curiosity that open on your neighbors' property," he writes, "and open up others leading to your own."[16] He then proposes more than two dozen tactics by which to care for oneself by deploying curiosity properly. These include pursuing astronomy, biology, or history, refraining from the bazaar, pub, or theatre, practicing abstinence, visiting a farm, or even perusing your memory as if it were the landscape of the world.

Building on Plutarch's call for turning inward, Seneca recommends a coterminous turn outward. In the several prefaces to *Naturales Questiones*, dedicated to his friend Lucilius, Seneca admits it seems strange for an old man, facing death, to compose a thorough interrogation of the natural world. There are, after all, better ways to spend one's twilight. Nevertheless, he insists, one is never too old to seek freedom, and the truest freedom is freedom from that "continuous and ineluctable" slavery to oneself, which "press[es] constantly [upon us] day and night without

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[13] Plutarch, "On Being a Busybody," 515d.

[14] Ibid., 517e.

[15] Ibid., 519b.

[16] Ibid., 515e.

pause, without interruption."[17] To be free of oneself, Seneca proceeds to argue, one must

become a "curious spectator" of nature.[18] Inquiry into the natural world affords one an

emancipatory perspective not only on the temporal extension of the human condition, but on

existence itself.[19] In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault explains how Seneca's investigation

contributes to an ethics of the self. "This knowledge of nature is liberating inasmuch as it allows

us, not to turn away from ourselves, not to turn our gaze away from what we are, but rather to

focus it better and continuously take a certain view of ourselves, to ensure a *contemplatio sui*."[20]

Both Plutarch and Seneca therefore propose a curious study of the natural world as one means by

which to consciously nourish one's way of life, developing self-knowledge and cultivating

change. This is their *ethos*.

In "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual,"[21] Foucault identifies curiosity as central

not just to Plutarch or Seneca's morality but to his own. In context, he is not speaking about

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[17] Seneca, *Naturales Questiones*, III.pf16.

[18] Ibid., I.pf12.

[19] In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault explains, "The mind's curiosity exploring the natural world" involves a "stepping back" and a "looking down" (282; *L'Herméneutique du suje*t, 270). By it, "we see the context in which we are placed opening out, and we grasp again this world as it is, the world in which we exist," "at the frontier of life and death" (283; *L'Herméneutique du suje*t, 272). The naturalist's gaze is distinctive both spatially and temporally. Spatially, this curiosity relies on a physical proximity to the natural world to create a perspectival distance within oneself. Temporally, this curiosity draws close to the 'now' of natural life in order to achieve the distance promised by a coming death. Because of these spatial and temporal dynamics, the naturalist's gaze is an ideal exercise in transformative self-care. On my reading, Foucault later adopts Seneca's attitude, by applying the naturalist's gaze to history itself. Finishing his testament to curiosity in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault insists that his forays "made it possible to go back through what I was already thinking, to think it differently, and to see [it] from a new vantage point […] Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above" (11; *L'Usage des plaisirs*, 19). Foucault's career, as one long exercise in natural history, was also an extended act of self-care: a process by which drawing near gave him distance. While I read this section in *The Use of Pleasure* as specifically inspired by his concurrent work on Seneca, I also recognize that this impetus to understand his work as transformative distance began at least as early his 1969 introduction to *The Archeology of Knowledge,* well before his turn to the Greeks. Nevertheless, the early and late references cannot be understood without turning to Pierre Hadot's "The View from Above," *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 238-250.

[20] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 279; *L'Herméneutique du suje*t, 268.

[21] The English version first appeared as "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," *History of the Present* 4 (1988): 1-2, 11-13. The French text appeared much later as "Interview de Michel Foucault, 3 Novembre 1980,"

ancient practices of self-care or pontificating on morality. He is clarifying the role of the public

intellectual. His interviewer, Michael Bess, seems to think intellectuals should take a leading role

not only in criticizing corrupt governments but also in reconstituting them for the better of all

concerned. Bess is intent to know whether Foucault, as a French intellectual, has positive

proposals for government which reflect correlatively positive values for morality, presuming that

this is the obligation of the intellectual as such. Foucault responds by insisting that it is not the

intellectual's job to dictate what is good for government, whether that be the moral government

of the self or the political government of others. The intellectual's calling is rather to enable or

equip people to conduct the sort of critical analysis of power that produces the grounds for

resistance. If one of "the tasks of human existence" is to preserve and enhance "freedom,"[22] or

possibilities of self-care, then it is the intellectual's job ultimately to facilitate the project of

thinking the human otherwise.

For Foucault, the intellectual facilitates societal resistance by upholding certain moral

values, of which he identifies three: refusal, curiosity, and innovation. Curiosity garners its

Foucauldian weight not only as a moral value but as a practice of resistance. Contextualizing his

use of morality and power in this interview is therefore in order. In consonance with "The

Subject and Power" and *History of Sexuality*, Foucault here characterizes power as an

immobilizing force. Resistance, conversely, is a force of mobility.[23] "Power," he observes, "is

anything that tends to render immobile and untouchable those things that are offered to us as

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L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi: *Conférences prononcées à Dartmouth College, 1980* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 143-155.

[22] Foucault, "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," 1; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 143.

[23] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" (1982), *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), esp. 340-341; *History of Sexuality*, 92-96.

real, as true, as good."[24] Power may exist where one party momentarily constrains the behavior of another party or where that constraint has been sedimented or "crystallized." In the latter case, "a specific type of power relation […] has been institutionalized, frozen,[25] to the profit of some and the detriment of others."[26] However violent a form power takes, its effect is always to make torpid or inert. By contrast, the work of resistance to power cultivates movement. Resistance unfixes what is fixed, melts what is frozen, and makes what is immobile move again. Curiosity is one way to fulfill the task of enhancing freedom. For, curiosity drives us "never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile."[27] As a practice of resistance, it capitalizes on the world's inherent instability.

Foucault proposes that resistance to power can be achieved by living a moral life and, more specifically, by practicing certain moral values. To state this conversely, to cultivate a moral life is, simultaneously, to cultivate a mobile life. In keeping with his elucidations elsewhere, Foucault here forswears the commendation of sedimented moral codes and instead proffers dynamic ethical practices. "I am a moralist," he says, even if "I don't want to tell people what they should do."[28] In "For an Ethics of Discomfort,"[29] Foucault likewise recommends, against the resigned certainty of a morality that "impose[s] one's law on others," a precarious

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[24] Foucault, "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," 1; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 143.

[25] In this regard, one cannot help but hear Foucault's characterization of the state as "*le plus froid de tous les monstres froids.*" See "La technologie politique des individus" (1982), *Dits et Ecrits II*, no. 364, 1646.

[26] Foucault, "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," 11; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 147.

[27] Ibid., 1; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 143.

[28] Ibid., 1, 13; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 143, 154. Cp. "Interview with Michel Foucault" (1978): "I have […] no desire to play the role of a prescriber of solutions. […] [T]he intellectual today is not to ordain, to recommend solutions, to prophesy" (*Power*, 288).

[29] Michel Foucault, "Pour une morale de l'inconfort" (1979), *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 266, 783-787, translated as "For an Ethics of Discomfort," *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 1997), 135-146.

"ethics that tirelessly examines the given."[30] There is this negativity—uncharacteristic of

traditional morality—that marks Foucault's moral compass. A moral life, as a resistant life,

demands that one reject all creeds, tirelessly evaluate the systems in which one finds oneself, and

experiment with new ways of relating to oneself and one's world: in a word, one must be

curious.

Foucault identifies three crucial moral values: refusal, curiosity, and innovation. Refusal,

curiosity and innovation, then, are the ethical techniques whereby the immobility of power can

be resisted.

> [I do not] mean that one must live in an indefinite discontinuity. But what I mean is that
> one must consider all the points of fixity, of immobilization, as elements in a tactics, in a
> strategy—as part of an effort to bring things back into their original mobility, their
> openness to change. I was telling you earlier about the three elements in my morals. They
> are (1) the refusal to accept as self-evident the things that are proposed to us; (2) the need
> to analyze and to know, since we can accomplish nothing without reflection and
> understanding—thus, the principle of curiosity; and (3) the principle of innovation: to
> seek out in our reflection those things that have never been thought or imagined. Thus:
> refusal, curiosity, innovation. […] Listen, listen. . . How difficult it is! I'm not a prophet;
> I'm not an organizer; I don't want to tell people what they should do. I'm not going to tell
> them, "This is good for you, this is bad for you!" I try to analyze a real situation in its
> various complexities, with the goal of allowing refusal, and curiosity, and innovation.[31]

In an analysis of this passage, it is important to mark first that its elements appear to be

temporally sequential: refusal preconditions curiosity and without curiosity there can be no

innovation. The three pillars of Foucault's critical morality, then, might be understood as three

pivotal moments in a way of life. The moral life begins with a refusal to unconsciously grant to

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[30] Foucault, "For an Ethics of Discomfort," 137, 145 (trans. modified): "*une éthique de l'évidence sans sommeil.*"
Cp. Michel Foucault, "Le retour de la morale" (1984), *Dit et Ecrits* II, no. 354, 1515-1526, translated as "The Return
of Morality," *Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, edited by Lawrence Kritzman (New
York: Routledge, 1988), 242-254. There, Foucault qualifies such an ethics as a "stylistic morality" or a "stylization
of the self-relation" (1517). Foucault expressly names the Greeks but one must keep in mind Nietzsche's comments
on style in *The Gay Science*, §290.

[31] Foucault, "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," 1 and 13; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 144, 154.
The key French terms here are what you might expect: *refus*, *necessité*, *curiosité*, and *innovation*.

propositions or material realities any unearned validity. It ends with a commitment to innovate entirely new propositions and material realities. Between the refusal to accept and the commitment to create, there is curiosity. Curiosity, as it is described here, is a "need," a gnawing demand to understand the conditions under which propositions are made and might be remade.[32] Thus, somewhere between incredulity and creativity is the productive instability of desire. In total, the sequence moves from decision, through instinct or drive, to a practice of risk.

Although the interview as a whole does not offer sufficient resources by which to construct a nuanced account of either refusal or innovation, Foucault offers some further indications of how he understands curiosity. First and foremost, we see that curiosity is *moral*, given its capacity to secure mobility and thereby aid in the execution of the task of human existence. Second, insofar as curiosity is a "need," we understand it is *appetitive*. Third, curiosity is *ratiocinative*. In his brief definition of "the principle of curiosity" as "the need to analyze and to know, since we can accomplish nothing without reflection and understanding,"[33] Foucault modifies curiosity with four modes of reason's work: analysis, knowledge, reflection, and understanding. Fourth, curiosity is *negative*; it is a need to analyze limits. Finally, Foucault suggests that curiosity is *communal*. As he closes "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," Foucault asserts that any good that may come from the practice of these moral values comes about in community: "What is good is something that comes through invention. The good does not exist, like that, in an a-temporal sky […] the good is defined by us, it is practiced, it is

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[32] Curiosity is not exempt from the immobilizing force of power, nor is it an exception to the rule of tireless examination. In fact, given the naturalizing language of 'need' and 'desire,' the denaturalizing force of critical attention is especially important here. Curiosity is, nevertheless, one way of calibrating Foucauldian resistance.

[33] Ibid., 1; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 144.

invented. And this is a collective work."[34] One might be tempted to think that curiosity can function on its own, within the work of a single intellectual or as the flare of a solitary genius. But curiosity, insofar as it forms part of the moral life, through which worlds are analyzed and reinvented, is eminently social.

In summary, Foucault turns to ancient practices of self-care to develop his theory of ethics. Much like curiosity's role in those ancient forms, Foucauldian curiosity tests and transforms the self. For Foucault, however, it does so as a specific act of resistance embedded within the local struggles of communities to make and remake meaning. His account of ethical curiosity is inextricable from his account of resistance. Curiosity mobilizes against ideational and material sedimentation and supports self-transformation. More intriguingly, Foucault emphasizes the collectivity of curiosity. Not only does society affect our moral codes, behaviors, and ethics, but the community can be a source of resistance. The "care of the self" may be undertaken together or in tandem. He suggests that curiosity is not primarily personal—as one might gather from Plutarch or Seneca—but eminently social. He leaves us to ask, what is our curiosity? How does the public intellectual—or the private individual, for that matter—affect and reflect the direction and fervor of a collective curiosity? And what are the clashes between collective curiosities in our present?

Curiosity and the Public Intellectual Life

Just as Foucault extracts the moral life from abstract codes and embeds it in contingent modes of life, so he tears the intellectual life away from universalizing theory and sinks it deep into particular resistance movements. His position on the public intellectual developed in

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[34] Ibid., 13; *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 155.

dialogue with his own involvements in targeted political struggles.[35] Consistent with his

overarching critiques of the metaphysics of essentialism and the epistemology of representation,

Foucault insists that the intellectual, previously conceived of as an arbiter of the former and a

mouthpiece for the latter, is a dangerous illusion.

> The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in
> order to express the stifled truth of collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms
> of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,'
> 'truth,' 'consciousness,' and 'discourse.'[36]

The "general" intellectual, as he writes, is an individual who develops abstract theory that can be

applied universally. The "specific" intellectual, on the other hand, is a collective member,

already embedded in immediate, concrete, material, and local struggles, whose "theoretical

action" unblocks the restrictions of conduct and imagination produced by institutionalized forms

of power and discourse.[37]

Foucault embodied the specific intellectual in four major cases: the Prisons Information

Group, the plight of the Vietnamese boat people, the Iranian revolution, and Solidarity in

Poland.[38] In each case, he worked not as a philosopher, historian, or even journalist proper, but

as a "journalist of the present."[39] That is to say, he aimed in these activist moments not to get on

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[35] For a book-length treatment of this connection, see Marcelo Hoffman, *Foucault and Power: The Influence of Political Engagement on Theories of Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[36] Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power" (1972), *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 207-208.

[37] Ibid., and Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" (1977), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 126.

[38] Todd May, "Coda: Foucault's Own Straying Afield," *The Philosophy of Foucault* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 126-131. There were of course several other minor intrigues.

[39] Nancy Luxon draws attention to this phrase "*journaliste de l'actualité*." See *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault*, 287-288, and "The Disordering of Discourse: Voice and Authority in the GIP," *Active Intolerance: Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition*, eds. Perry Zurn and Andrew Dilts (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming), n5: "Towards the end of his life, Foucault provocatively claims to be a 'journalist of the present.' […] [O]ne might understand this figure to be one who works at the

top of "*what is happening right now*,"[40] but to participate in it and understand it from within. These four episodes have been interpreted, by and large, as instances in which Foucault embraced the ancient practice of *parrēsia*. For the ancients, *parrēsia* involved speaking truth at great personal risk. One might speak truth to power for the sake of the community, or speak truth to oneself for the sake of self-transformation. Through his activism, Foucault spoke out, he spoke with, and he spoke against; he spoke into the silence and amplified others' whispers into sirens. He did so in ways that threatened to sully his own powerful image, as well as to productively compromise his own being and mind. Such speaking, of course, involved experimental modes, genres, and styles of writing. It will be important to address in a moment what is to be thought of *parrēsiastic* writing. Are the monograph and the specific intellectual even consistent?[41] Before getting there, though, we will first set out to understand the ancient practice of *parrēsia* and then to investigate *parrēsia's* role in the life of a public intellectual. In both enterprises, I will further highlight the critical function of curiosity.

In his 1983-1984 lecture series "Discourse and Truth" and *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault develops an account of ancient *parrēsia* or truth-speaking as critical to the moral as well as the public intellectual life. He first identifies three sorts of *parrēsia*: rhetorical, political, and philosophical.[42] Rhetorical *parrēsia* is a dialogical, rather than monological, form of truth-speaking. Political *parrēsia* challenges power in the agora or royal court. This involves a

intersection of regimes of jurisdiction and veridiction."

[40] Michel Foucault, "The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt" (1978), *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, eds. Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 220. We can interpret this as a more militant version of writing a "history of the present" (*Discipline and Punish*, 31).

[41] Foucault insists that the death of the general intellectual signals the death of "the writer," "the great writer," the "writer of genius" ("Truth and Power," 127 and 129). What then is writing for the specific intellectual?

[42] Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (1983; Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 20-24.

relentless questioning, so as to be governed "not like that, not for that, not by them."[43]

Philosophical *parrēsia*, which Foucault equates with ethical *parrēsia*, is an act of self-care that

engages practices of self-knowledge intimately tied to self-formation. *Parrēsia* in this sense is a

truth-speaking directed toward oneself, with the aim of knowing and crafting one's mode of life.

> This mode of self-knowledge takes [the form] of the test, of examination, and also of exercise concerning the way in which one conducts oneself. And it gives rise to a mode of truth-telling […] whose role and end is to give some kind of form to this *bios* (this life, this existence).[44]

This philosophical *parrēsia* differs from philosophical discourse as traditionally conceived. In

contrast to the latter's aim of acquiring pure truth and constructing a metaphysics of the soul, the

former aims to participate in the struggle for truth and, thereby, care for and transform the self.

Philosophical *parrēsia,* moreover, is propelled by a "will to truth in its different forms, which

may be those of curiosity, battle, courage, resolution, and endurance."[45] This curiosity is not the

"*incuriosité*" regarding either styles of life or domains of knowledge, but rather an "attitude of

examination" exercised in both directions.[46] Political *parrēsia* turns this examination of practice

and discourse toward the realm of juridical policies and acts.

For Foucault, Socrates is the exemplar of both philosophical and political *parrēsia*.

Between the *Apology* and *Laches*, he practices frank-speaking to himself, important personages,

and the jury at his trial. He does so not only to know and to challenge himself, but also to

facilitate critical self-knowledge among the Athenian leaders. As indicated in *Laches*, this is

precisely what makes Socrates the ideal educator. He is not, like Stesilaus, a teacher of this or

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[43] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique" (1978), *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 1997), 28.

[44] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 160; *Le Courage de la verité*, 148.

[45] Ibid., 125; *Le Courage de la verité*, 117.

[46] Ibid., 189n*; *Le Courage de la verité*, 174n*.

that technique for armed combat. Rather, he trains young people in a holistic practice of self-care, which elevates them both as selves and as citizens. There are, then, three implicit layers in Foucault's analysis of *parrēsia*: morality, politics, and education. The *parrēsiastes'* performance in all three is motivated by curiosity. *Parrēsiastic* curiosity is not the vapid interest of a busybody or the omphaloskepsis of a solipsist. It is, instead, a critical interest in oneself and one's other as members of a larger body.[47] This inherently social curiosity plays out in morality, politics, and education. Ed Cohen identifies, for instance, Eve Sedgwick as the curious *parrēsiastes*, who risks her relation to herself and to others in the courageous, heartfelt struggle of truth.[48] More politically, for Torben Dyrberg, curiosity is an expression of "an experimental attitude,"[49] "an intellectual and political risk-taking"[50] that is one of the "essential components of a democratic ethos."[51] Nancy Luxon takes psychoanalysis and *parrēsia* as educative models for ethics and politics.[52] In doing so, she commends a curiosity that requires we refrain from capitulating to "ideals or the will of another" and instead give "attention to one's initial responses and actions […] before turning any movement to judgment."[53]

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[47] Ibid., 312; *Le Courage de la verité*, 286. See Foucault's comparison here between the *parrēsiastic* Cynic and Plutarch's busybody.

[48] Cohen, "The Courage of Curiosity, or The Heart of Truth (A Mash-Up)."

[49] Dyrberg, *Foucault on the Politics of Parrhesia*, 55, cp. 35-36. "Curiosity and freedom," he writes, "are two sides of the same coin, which politicize existing conditions by questioning and disrupting their normality" (57). For more references to curiosity, see 11, 16, 27, 57-58, 81, and 96.

[50] Ibid., 81.

[51] Ibid., 2-3.

[52] Luxon, *The Crisis of Authority*, 303-304.

[53] Ibid., 189. For additional references to curiosity, see 103n30, 159, 188-191, 189n33, 193, 294, and 300. I disagree with Luxon's reading of curiosity as a "psychological element," "psychological motivation," or "psychological capacity" (300, 190). But her reinterpretation here of the "superficiality" of curiosity as immanence is helpful.

Four years prior to *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault gave an interview to *Le Monde* in which he casts curiosity as central to publically engaged thought.[54] The interview belonged to a longer series (1979-1984) devoted to various French thinkers' assessments of contemporary philosophy. While the interview does not take *parrēsia* as its subject, Foucault behaves as a *parrēsiastes.* According to his diagnosis, most 'philosophizing' in France has failed because it occurs exclusively under the auspices of so-called 'intellectuals,' for whom it is more important to tout their individual theories than to engage critically and creatively with the world. To perform this diagnosis, Foucault insists that his name not be appended to *Le Monde*'s piece. It was consequently titled, quite simply, "*Le philosophe masqué*." Foucault explains his choice as follows: "Why did I suggest that we use anonymity? Out of nostalgia for a time when, being quite unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard."[55] Foucault had some faith that, without his notorious name overshadowing, clarifying, or even explaining away his words, those words might inspire his readers to think differently, and that the activity might then rise to the title of 'philosophy.'[56]

Foucault opens the conversation by setting up a basic contrast he will develop throughout the piece: the contrast between a thinking ruled by intellectual leaders in the foreground and a thinking captured by natural adumbrations in the background. To exemplify this distinction, Foucault refers to the story, seemingly well-known to his French audience, of several

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[54] Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher" (1980), *Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 321-328; "Le philosophe masqué," *Dits et Ecrits II*, no. 285, 923-929.

[55] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," 321; "Le philosophe masqué," 923.

[56] Of course, immediately following Foucault's death in 1984, *Le Monde* republished the piece under his name. To read this interview today, and indeed to argue its centrality in Foucault's corpus as I do, is therefore to do as much justice as injustice to Foucault's memory. I offer an analysis of the interview well aware of the risks of over-intellectualizing and de-philosophizing it.

psychologists who ran a film test in "a village in the darkest Africa."[57] After showing the film, these psychologists asked the viewers to narrate its events. Instead of narrating the personal events in the film, the viewers spoke of "the movement of the light and shadow through the trees."[58] Foucault proceeds to claim that France is always concerned with characters, faces, and intellectuals. It is focused on what is nameable. By contrast, France does not consider the soft and lost voices, fragments of personalities, shifting winds of reason within the socio-political organism, and the thoughts that have no other home. It fails to focus on what is changeable. What would thought look like if it were populated not by famous faces but by splinters of light and shadow?

It would look at least like a deluge of inquiry, innovation, and information. Such a deluge would vastly reconfigure both the realms of communication and the ranks of the academy. Foucault claims that "the problem" is not only to demythologize knowledge, by de-intellectualizing it, but also to multiply it, "to multiply the channels, the bridges, the means of information, the radio and television networks, the newspapers" and the books.[59] In this way, the tyranny of figures can be exchanged for the pollination of flights. But what greater bastion of personality fascism is there than the academy, with its league upon league of institutions? What greater instantiation of meticulous control over the production, distribution, censorship and unceremonious burial of knowledge than the university? The university functions on the same fetishistic bases as everyday culture. It is necessary to radically reconfigure not only the notion

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[57] Ibid., 321; "Le philosophe masqué," 923. It is regrettable that Foucault aligns Africa with a naïve personal past to which he hopes to return, as some kind of origin and final redemption. His association of Africa with the primordial, moreover, is racist, tired, and inexcusable. Nevertheless, the trajectory of his thought, here, renounces that servitude to some original past.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 325; "Le philosophe masqué," 927.

but the purview of pedagogy. Rather than understanding instruction as the early training for a later life, "we should now see teaching in a way that it allows the individual to change at will, which is possible only on condition that teaching is a possibility always being offered."[60] Education must no longer be merely for the young. Reading and writing, receiving and producing information, must not be restricted to a particular developmental period. "The right to knowledge must not be reserved to a particular age group or to certain categories of people, but [...] one must be able to exercise it constantly and in many different ways."[61] By decentralizing information in this way, one enables the fecund permutation of thought.

In the context of changing communications and the academy, Foucault explores three techniques that promise to enhance the new, de-intellectualized world he envisions. They are curiosity, critique, and philosophy. Philosophy is an activity by which one becomes other: it is "the displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else."[62] As a philosophical tool, critique explores the possibility that things can be otherwise; it "bring[s] an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it."[63] Curiosity fuels the critical work proper to philosophy. In doing so, it instigates the proliferation of communication, the de-institutionalization of the academy, and ultimately the re-imagination of the public intellectual. Driven by curiosity, the intellectual works to shift what can be spoken, written, thought, and lived.

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[60] Ibid., 326-327; "Le philosophe masqué," 928.

[61] Ibid., 326; "Le philosophe masqué," 928.

[62] Ibid., 327; "Le philosophe masqué," 929.

[63] Ibid., 323; "Le philosophe masqué," 925.

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science.[64] Curiosity is seen as futile. However, I like the word; it suggests something quite different to me. It evokes the 'care' one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means; the desire is there; there is an infinity of things to know; the people capable of doing such work exist. So what is our problem? Too little: channels of communication that are too narrow, almost monopolistic, inadequate. We mustn't adopt a protectionist attitude, to stop 'bad' information from invading and stifling the 'good.' Rather, we must increase the possibility for movement backward and forward. This would not lead, as people often fear, to uniformity and leveling down, but, on the contrary, to the simultaneous existence and differentiation of these various networks.[65]

As a condition for philosophy, curiosity manifests a person's "care" of "what exists and what might exist," or a person's intimate drive to enter the arena of all cognitive and creative realities and their possibilities. In order to develop new ways of living, curiosity discovers new ways of thinking. As a companion of critique, curiosity involves a "sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it." Curiosity incites multimedia expansion and fuels the burgeoning of information systems.

Foucault certainly develops his account of the public intellectual in dialogue with the ancient figure of the *parrēsiastes*, but he contemporizes the *parrēsiastes'* work in a new era of the university and mass media. Were we to contemporize his work still further, we would have to ask what the role of the public intellectual is today in a world increasingly marked by big data and social media. The *parrēsiastes* today is not merely a particular sort of speaker (or, for that matter, writer), but a particular nodal point for media, information, access, sites, and networks.

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[64] On the topic of Foucauldian curiosity and its relationship to "some science," it would be instructive to consider Foucault's connection between Nietzsche's limit-experiences and Canguilhem's life-sciences ("Interview with Michel Foucault," 252-256).

[65] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," 325; "Le philosophe masqué," 927.

Collective curiosity is already engaged and cultivated through public media or the proliferation of channels of communication.[66] Collective curiosity is both expressed and captured in infographics, infomania, and, ultimately, infopolitics. As Colin Koopman insists, "We need a concept of infopolitics precisely because we have become infopersons [… and] unless we begin conceptualizing ourselves in this way, we leave it to others to do it for us."[67] Is there still a place here for resistance, for the ethical life, or has the explosion of publicity and information co-opted this sphere—and this curiosity—into purely the expression of institutions and not struggles?

Curiosity and the Writing Life

Foucault's writing life has been understood through two, sequential paradigms: one literary and the other ethical. At first, scholarly attention collected around "What is An Author," an essay that contributed in important ways to literary criticism's influential theory of the death of the author. There, Foucault argues not only that the author is a social construct and not a biological *Ursprung*, but that we should imagine writing against or in resistance to both. Discourse might then "unfold in a pervasive anonymity,"[68] which, as we have seen, preconditions its philosophical promise. Foucault's perspective is self-admittedly indebted to Blanchot, Bataille, Klossowski, and Nietzsche,[69] as writers of the limit-experience, for whom to

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[66] While Thomas Biebricher notes the place of publicity in Foucault's work with the GIP and even refers to "The Masked Philosopher," he does not develop either its contemporary modes or its implications for a philosophy of curiosity. I have done the latter here and will do the former in Chapter Three. See Biebricher, "The Practices of Theorists: Habermas and Foucault as Public Intellectuals," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37.6 (2011): 709-734.

[67] Colin Koopman, "The Age of Infopolitics," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2014. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/the-age-of-infopolitics/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0 (accessed July 10, 2014).

[68] Michel Foucault. "What is An Author" (1969), *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 138. This more famous piece should be contextualized within the early, yet only recently translated interview with Claude Bonfoy: *Speech After Death* (1968), ed. Philippe Artières (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[69] Michel Foucault, "The Preface to Transgression" (1963), *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 38; "Interview with Michel Foucault," 241, 246-248, and 251-

write is to be lost in an implosion of the self. From this vantage point, Foucault's experiments in writing have been interpreted as resisting his own author-function. The second phase of scholarly attention coalesced around his later "Self Writing." This essay develops various writing exercises as basic to ancient practices of self-care, conscientiously tracking how diaries, correspondence, and *hupomnēmata*, or "books of life," serve to facilitate self-transformation. "As an element of self-training, writing has […] an *ethopoietic* function."[70] We see this in Seneca and Plutarch, of course, but others besides.[71] From this perspective, Foucault's experiments in writing are a means of self-care, cultivating both self-knowledge and self-dispossession. In either case, whether such writing resists the author-function or drives becoming, it provides a platform from which to critique the modern subject and its institutionalization.

Any critique of the modern subject—as a unified, self-possessed agent, with unique rational and volitional faculties—must necessarily include a critique of the curious subject. Who or what becomes responsible for various inquiries, as they continue to be undertaken? In turn, a critique of the curious subject has repercussions for critical interpretations of writing. If experiments in writing reflect a kind of curiosity, but the subject of curiosity has been dismantled, how does writing reflect or resist larger forces at work? We find some illumination in *Lectures on the Will to Know*. There, Foucault contrasts Aristotle and Nietzsche's "morphologies of knowledge." Each follows a different pathway from what Foucault identifies as curiosity—a desire to know—to philosophical discourse proper. Foucault begins with Aristotle's famous dictum:

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[70] Michel Foucault, "Self Writing" (1983), *Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 209.

[71] Placing these tactics within the larger critique of the subject, Chloe Taylor elucidates resistance especially within feminist and marginalized movements. See "Alternatives to Confession," *Culture of Confession*, 191-235.

> All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight […] [T]his, most of all the senses, makes us know.[72]

There are two claims here. The first is quite obvious: knowledge belongs to human nature. The second is less so. While Aristotle seems to locate desire, delight, and love at the foundation of knowledge, Foucault argues this is not the case. Aristotle places knowledge at the foundation of itself. It is because we know by sight that we want to know by our other senses and, ultimately, our rational faculties. It has been the work of Western philosophy since Aristotle to ensure that this circle remains intact, so that "what is really knowledge coming from sensation, from the body, belongs already […] to the realm of contemplation and theory."[73] The will to know or what "we will call curiosity,"[74] Foucault asserts, is then "derived from the preexistence of knowledge."[75] Thus, curiosity, knowledge, and philosophy are not only confined at a safe distance from the body and desire, history and struggle, but work together to obscure that debt.

It is not until Nietzsche, Foucault argues, that this grand tradition of Western philosophy is inverted, allowing desire to exist outside the circuit of knowledge, thereby foregrounding the body, history, and struggle in the practice of a new philosophy. Nietzsche combats Aristotle on both fundamental claims. First, knowledge is not a natural byproduct of human existence. To cite "On Truth and Lies," knowledge is "invented."[76] Or, in Foucault's words, it is the result of "constraint," "domination," and "violence," the effect of "instinct, interest, play, and struggle."[77]

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[72] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, *Book I-IX*, 980a.

[73] Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 13; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 14.

[74] Ibid., 17; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 18.

[75] Ibid., 218, 18; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 209, 19.

[76] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," 141.

[77] Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 215 and 206; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 206 and 198-199. Although the full transcript of Foucault's lectures does not exist, he formalized his material on Nietzsche and delivered it in

As Foucault is keen to demonstrate, traditional philosophy is not therefore some hallowed

expression of a deeply inspired commitment to pure truth. Indeed, far from reflecting the world

around it, philosophy belies severe rifts in the social fabric, stemming anywhere from pettiness to

violence. Second, however, this means that knowledge does not stem from itself but stems rather

from something exterior to it: the will to power. Mere epistemic curiosity is as illusory as

objective knowledge and pure philosophy. Curiosity exists only as a mode of the will to power.

Any other manifestation must be unmasked as in fact deeply physiological and political.

How exactly does one go about unmasking Aristotelian curiosity as merely a mode of the

will to power? Nietzsche seems to do this by a blindingly honest curiosity, one we already saw in

"On Truth and Lies:"

> Woe betide fateful curiosity should it ever succeed in peering through a crack in the
> chamber of consciousness, out and down into the depths, and thus gain an intimation of
> the fact that humanity, in the indifference of its ignorance, rests on the pitiless, the
> greedy, the insatiable, the murderous—clinging in dreams, as it were, to the back of a
> tiger.[78]

As I discussed in the introduction, recent work on Nietzsche finds curiosity to be an overlooked

disposition—or even a cardinal virtue—for him.[79] Reginster and Alfano define it as the "desire

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the first of five lectures at Rio de Janiero in 1973, under the title of "Truth and Juridical Forms." "At the center, at the root of knowledge," he writes, "Nietzsche places something like hatred, struggle, and power relations" (12).

[78] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," 142-143.

[79] Recall that, for an account of curiosity's role in Nietzsche's anti-morality, see Reginster's "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits" and Alfano's "The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemologist." Although I lack space to do so here, one might extend this attribution of virtue theory from Nietzsche to Foucault, and thereby connect their respective curiosities, through Neil Levy's "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist," *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004): 20-31. For a psychoanalytic reading of Nietzschean curiosity, see Leon Wurmser, "'Man of the Most Dangerous Curiosity': Nietzsche's 'Fruitful and Frightful Vision' and His War Against Shame," *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing*, eds. Joseph Adamson and Hilary Anne Clark (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 111-146. And for an introduction to Foucault's indebtedness to Nietzsche (and Heidegger), see Hans Sluga, "Foucault's Encounter with Heidegger and Nietzsche," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 210-239.

for inquiry"[80] or "an insatiable desire to solve novel, difficult problems and puzzles, and to discover or invent them when none are ready to hand."[81] From a Foucauldian perspective, it must also be a) a physiological desire b) at the crossroads of clashing forces that c) suspects disintegrating elements beneath the patina of knowledge.

Such curiosity is not merely that by which Nietzsche thinks; it is also that from which and for which he writes. Surely to read him is to feel one's dreams shatter on the back of a tiger. He imagines we like it:

> When I imagine the perfect reader, he always turns into a monster of courage and curiosity […] bold searchers, researchers, and whoever embarks with cunning sails on terrible seas […] drunk with riddles, glad of the twilight, whose soul flutes lure astray to every whirlpool, because you do not want to grope along a thread with cowardly hand.[82]

To reimagine curiosity after Aristotle means to think *and to write* philosophy differently. We see this in Nietzsche's own essays, fragments, aphorisms, lyricism, genealogies, and general buffoonery.

I propose we understand Foucault's own confession that he writes out of curiosity in this light. Through such curiosity, Foucault too is drawn to textual experiments of essays, anonymity, disruptions, and partial projects, by which he struggles to produce philosophy otherwise. Foucault's testament proper occurs in his preface to *The Use of Pleasure*. This text as a whole is dedicated to exploring various practices of pleasure that are utilized in the ancient care of the self. Arguably, it also stages a battle between two curiosities: the Greek *kurios*, signifying one who is sovereign or master over oneself, and the Latin *curiosus*, meaning one who is driven by a

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[80] Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," 457.

[81] Alfano, "The Most Agreeable of All Vices," 779.

[82] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Why I Write Such Good Books," *Ecce Homo*, 264.

desire for novelty. [83] Against the drive to self-mastery, Foucault embraces a curiosity by which one loses oneself, whether in one's life or in one's texts.

Before his treatment of pleasures, Foucault takes a moment to reflect on his life's work, from his early work on epistemology and politics to his late work on ethics. While naysayers might accuse him of being too changeable, Foucault insists there was a consistent motivation of his work: curiosity. It is a consistency that permits inconstancy, a stalwart passion that demands frequent changes of direction. This self-testament to curiosity is in fact what Defert had Deleuze read aloud as a eulogy at Foucault's funeral.[84] Not only, then, does Foucault claim that curiosity is the glue of his project and the glare of its distinctiveness—but Defert's choice suggests that curiosity is what makes Foucault Foucault.

> As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge [*l'acharnement du savoir*] if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. […] But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naïve positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The 'essay'—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the

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[83] A sketch of this cartography is suggested by Michael Naas, in his essay entitled "*Kurios* George and the Sovereign State." There, Naas remarks, "Were we to follow Michel Foucault in works such as *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, we might argue that the first, primary, value of sovereignty in Plato is to be found in the self's relation to itself. In this sense, being *kurios* means being sovereign or master over oneself." See Naas, "*Kurios* George and the Sovereign State," *Radical Philosophy Review* 7.2 (2005): 18.

[84] James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 35.

purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e. an 'ascesis,' *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.[85]

In this passage, we have three temporally sequential moments. First, there is the motivation: curiosity, a curiosity that "enables one to get free [*se déprendre*] of oneself," to "stray afield [*l'égarement*]."[86] Second, there is the work: philosophy, the sort of work that "thought brings to bear on itself." Third, there is the manifestation: the essay, or "the living substance [*le corps vivant*]"[87] of the work of philosophy, motivated by curiosity. The writing life, therefore, begins with this need, this drive, this desire to know. Curiosity is not the desire to be knowledgeable; it is the "*acharnement du savoir*,"[88] the dogged and determined, relentless and tenacious need to press beyond the bounds of what one already knows. Curiosity, then, drives the work of philosophy and preconditions its manifestation in the essay.

Few genres are more conducive to the practice of curiosity than the essay. Montaigne himself testifies as much when he characterizes his book as "a register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory, either because I myself have become different or because I grasp hold of different attributes of my subjects."[89] As De Marzio notes, the essay is, at one and the same time, an act of self-description and, in that

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[85] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 8; *L'Usage des plaisirs*, 15. This preface to *The Use of Pleasure* in fact replaces an earlier preface that Foucault decided to publish independently. That earlier or what I will call first preface also proposes three moments of the intellectual life: the determination to go beyond the limits of the self, resistance to rules, and refusal of what is true. See Michel Foucault, "Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two" (1984), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 199-205.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 9; *L'Usage des plaisirs,* 16.

[88] Ibid., 8; *L'Usage des plaisirs*, 15. This word translated as passion (*acharnement*) originally referred to the crazed intensity of hounds after being given the scent of flesh (*chair*).

[89] Montaigne, "On Repenting," *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 908.

very moment, one of self-creation.[90] Foucault certainly wrote essays of this sort, but he also wrote books, prefaces, course summaries, and gave written, oral, or videoed interviews in precisely this spirit: that he himself might have become different. For Foucault, to work at all is "to work hard, to begin and begin again, to attempt [*essayer*]."[91] Working essayistically, then, is Foucault's first textual expression of curiosity in service to a new philosophy.

But Foucault is not content to keep these stakes personal. In 1983, accompanied by Paul Veyne and Francois Wahl, Foucault initiated, with Editions du Seuil, a publication series eponymously entitled *Works* (*Des travaux*).[92] This series was expressly constructed against the publishing standards of Editions Gallimard, well-known for privileging only the most neatly packaged of projects. As such, the *Works* series was dedicated to disseminating three sorts of books: 1) extensive treatises, 2) brief studies, and 3) translations. Any volume that wandered far and away from its origin, that tested the waters of unlooked for seas, or that carried readers across the boundaries of nations or even continents was eligible for consideration. In the spirit, then, of putting distance and difference between ideas, Foucault defines work, in his preface to the series *Works*, as "that which is susceptible of introducing a meaningful difference in the field of knowledge."[93] This is the second textual expression of curiosity toward a new philosophy.

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[90] Darryl M. De Marzio, "The Pedagogy of Self-Fashioning: A Foucauldian Study of Montaigne's 'On Educating Children,'" *Studies in Philosophy & Education* 31 (2012): 389.

[91] Foucault does in fact return to the essay form, ala Montaigne, as a prototype on the following page.

[92] See Foucault, "Des travaux," *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 324, 1185-1186. For a further description of this project, see David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 425. *Des Travaux* is currently edited by Alain de Libera. Perhaps the first volume produced in this series was Paul Veyne's *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (1983) and then later François Jullien's *Procès ou Création: Une introduction à la pensée des lettres chinois* (1989). For a beautiful history of the press, see *Les Editions Du Seuil, 70 Ans D'Histoires*, ed. Herve Serry (Caen: IMEC, 2008); for the spread on *Des Travaux*, see 126-127.

[93] Foucault elsewhere seems to qualify this 'meaningful difference.' In "The Concern for Truth" (1984), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), he writes, "To work is to try to think something other than what one thought before" (256).

Third, to work is also to write against the author function, to extract the oeuvre from the writer-genius. All of Foucault's attempts to write anonymously, pseudononymously, and collectively would fall under this purview. "The Masked Philosopher" is just one such instance. Therein, he proposed a year of writing books without authors, a proposal he pushed again in 1984.[94] Much earlier, in 1974, Foucault published another anonymous interview about criminality in *Liberation*.[95] Then in 1978, Foucault did not offer an anonymous interview but actually interviewed Thierry Voeltzel anonymously.[96] In 1979, Foucault assumed the pseudonym of Louis Appert.[97] And again in 1984, it was Maurice Florence.[98] Besides these works, he consistently participated in collaborations, perhaps most obviously through his activist endeavors but also in texts like *Le Désordre des Familles*, a project he undertook with Arlette Farge. Throughout his career, then, writing curiously meant writing out from under the author-subject.

Through essayistic, partial, and anonymous writing, Foucault not only practices a resistance to the author-function or preserves an ancient technique of self-care and self-transformation, but in fact resumes a very Nietzschean curiosity. This curiosity repeatedly unmasks claims to objectivity, systematicity, and finality. It courts ruptures in consciousness, emphasizing the precarity of our commitments and beliefs. And it does all this by flexing the written (and spoken) word, relinquishing a commitment to its own integrity.

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[94] Michel Foucault, "Une Esthétique d'existence" (1984), *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 357, 1553-1554.

[95] Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Win (1989; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 234.

[96] Philippe Artières, "Introduction: Foucault and Audiography," *Speech Begins After Death*, 18.

[97] Michel Foucault, "Luttes autour des prisons" (1979), *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 273, 806-818.

[98] "Michel Foucault" (1984), co-written by Foucault and Francois Ewald but co-signed Maurice Florence, *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 345, 1450-1455, for Denis Huisman's *Dictionnaire des philosophes* (1984).

Conclusion

For Foucault, curiosity is central to the moral life, the public intellectual life, and the writing life. In each case, curiosity relentlessly breaks things up and allows us to imagine them differently. As I traced out Foucault's multi-pronged endorsement, I argued that such curiosity is expressible in forms of communication, media, and discourse that resist sedimentation and are particularly adept at instigating mobilization. As such, Foucault's ethics of curiosity is an ethics of *acharnement*, which places discomfort and instability squarely inside hope. But it is also an ethics of de-textualization and re-textualization. It is one which has particular repercussions for our use of language as a mode of becoming. I also argued, however, that Foucauldian curiosity is eminently social, not least as a byproduct of its textual implications. Curiosity works against the individual moralist, universal intellectual, and writer genius. It disallows not only the integrity of such characters, but also confounds their efficacy. Instead, Foucauldian curiosity exists at experiential limits and social interstices. How might we understand this more fully?

On the contemporary landscape, curiosity is often thought of as a disposition or mark of an individual. He or she is curious. I am curious. You are curious. Curiosity as such is rarely attributed to a group of people, whether a club, a team, a city, a country, a business or an organization. At the outer limit, curiosity will sometimes be attributed to species. Dogs are curious. Dolphins are curious. Humans are curious most of all. But the paradigmatically curious human is the scientist. The scientist is not merely an individual. The scientist is above all an individual who targets something secret, something hidden behind the curtain of the universe, something laypeople might believe is a final, even forbidden mystery. In an attempt to access this secret and dispel this mystery with a strong theoretical claim borne out by replicable experiments, algorithms, formulas, and methods, the scientist studies. She or he does so

systematically, adding observation to observation, locking in piece after piece of the puzzle. The scaffold comes together slowly, bit by bit, until suddenly a chain-linked network of facts topples out, rearranged, and inclusive of one or—when one is very lucky—a few more instances of the 'new.' This is curiosity: an individual's passion to uncover the secret, a passion propelled by systematic inquiry and satisfied by a slice of reality.

Foucault proposes a different figure of curiosity. Through his self-attributions and testaments, coupled with his treatments of curiosity in several lecture courses—*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, *The Courage of Truth*, and *Lectures on the Will to Know* in particular—Foucault begins by suggesting that curiosity need not and may not even primarily be an individual characteristic. He pushes us to conceive of curiosity as collective. Together, claims, norms, and institutions are problematized. In tandem, questions are raised and new arrangements can be imagined. This is part of collective social awareness. Furthermore, when that curiosity is mobilized, it is inevitably reflected in a deep, psychosomatic attachment not to the secret but rather to a proliferation of information. Collective curiosity both produces and is fostered by a sea of things said or depicted through different means, whether repetition, differentiation, fragmentation, or fractalization. Collective curiosity is public and publicized. Finally, although it may produce massive structures or schemas lasting anywhere from milliseconds to millennia, such curiosity need not do so. In fact, its very impetus is centrifugal, deconstructing and decomposing projects as they arise.

Although Foucault himself does not go this far, the trajectory of his late thought on curiosity leads me to posit the flexible, vocal community as his paradigmatic figure of curiosity. We might then turn to an instance of local activism to further develop and analyze Foucauldian curiosity's new characteristics and contours. In Chapter Three, I assess the Prisons Information

Group with just this in mind. As a local activist organization, with a robust publicity plan, the tactical deployment of specific intellectuals, and an overarching moral call to resistance, the Prisons Information Group provides a multi-faceted framework through which to analyze each of these modes of curiosity. Given that scholarly literature on the topic has focused especially on the GIP as a resistance movement with specific intellectuals, my analysis will focus on its use of publicity. How and why did it multiply channels of communication, thus providing new avenues for possible thought and action? Why is the mobilization of curiosity essential to politics and philosophy as two modes of contemporary engagement?

Chapter 3

A Case Study of Publicity[1]

In our day and age, where global-scale communication has reached an all time high, no one is strange to the suspicion of publicity. Today, this suspicion oscillates between two poles. On the one hand, there is a simple Ludditism. The hyper-proliferation of social media, massive online courses, and data-burgeoning surveillance is threatening simply because it is new and far before it is confirmed dangerous. On the other hand, there is a robust cyborgism, which at once grants the irreducible mechanization of human persons while also identifying forms of mechanization that are nevertheless dehumanizing. In either case, one of the primary worries seems to be that there is an excess of talking at the cost of listening and all that entails for knowing oneself and doing justice to the other, for philosophy and for politics.

Perhaps one of the most consistent concerns, across the history of philosophy and political theory, is the concern that publicity compromises our ability to think critically and act responsibly. Philosophers and theorists have worried that the increase in communication, especially mass media, will limit our ability to process things, whether individually or collectively. This is because it has been tied to a vacuous curiosity that dabbles in news rather than sinks deep into thought, one that leeches the lives of others rather than develops authentic relationships. Between curiosity and publicity, there is a relationship not only of positive correlation but causation. As publicity increases, so does the gnawing of our curiosity. And as our curiosity sharpens, so does our demand for more and more disparate information. Why? Curiosity is the desire for, and publicity the materialization of, the new, the unknown, the next

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[1] For a shorter version of this chapter, see Perry Zurn, "Publicity and Politics: Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Press." *Radical Philosophy Review* 17.2 (2014): 403-420.

phase, or even the future. This multimedia world, then, is an emphatically curious one but perhaps also a severely limited one. Thinkers fear it limits our understanding and practice of subjectivity and democracy. We may be already lost in a sea of information, inseparable from our smart phones, and lacking inner conviction.

Beginning with Plato's critique of sophistry, vacuous speech and, in particular, the technique or technology whereby that vacuous speech is proliferated has been severely criticized. In the Platonic tradition, both Plutarch's *Moralia* and Augustine's *Confessions* share a concern with the world's widespread saturation in superficial words. For Plutarch, this is the Achilles' heel of the *polypragmon*, while, for Augustine, it is the fault of the *curiosus*. In the *Rules*, Descartes notoriously denounces education rooted only in publications and instead advises education by exploration. Such an exploration, however, must exercise a tamed wonder, not a restless curiosity such as we find in the figure of Epistemon.[2] Marx laments that people labor under the illusions generated by commodity fetishism, especially the commodity of information. In *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard critiques his contemporaries for externalizing so much that they lose any sense of interiority. For Nietzsche and Heidegger, especially in *Zarathustra* and *Being and Time*, this leads to an inability to do philosophy; they lament the proliferation of inquiries that cover over passionate questions or, in Heidegger's case, the chief question of being. Everyday Dasein is drowning in this world of publicity and new media only because he or she is chained down by curiosity. For Habermas, in *The Public Sphere*, the tranquilization of people through mass media keeps the public sphere from realizing its potential as a political space. Thus, across history, public chatter and its companion curiosity have variously been

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[2] Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes II*, 402.

characterized as keeping us from wisdom, spirituality, education, freedom, self-constitution, philosophy, and politics.

In this chapter, and contrary to the afore-mentioned suspicions, I will consider Foucault's defense of publicity—and thereby his defense and re-imagination of curiosity. I will do so by analyzing Foucault's involvement in the Prisons Information Group (GIP), a unique 1970's activist organization that aimed to resist the prison by *publicizing* information from within it. Rather than occluding recognition or leveling down social sensibilities as philosophers and theorists have historically feared, the GIP's publicity had the opposite effect: it heightened public awareness and sharpened commitments to social change. I therefore argue that while 'regular' publicity—consonant as it is with institutionalized curiosity—might foreclose thought and action, 'radical' publicity—the sort fueled by a transgressive curiosity that ruptures institutional systems of information by gratuitous proliferation—is a condition of philosophical thought and political action. Radical publicity does so by instigating what I will call the transmigration—or the movement across and against pre-established boundaries—of thought, word, and deed.

Structurally, this chapter proceeds from the history and stakes of the Prisons Information Group to an assessment of publicity and its implications for political philosophy today. After placing the GIP within the context of Foucault's life and work, I first examine the innovative ways in which the GIP positively utilized publicity. I then demonstrate that, although Foucault had some concerns about the vacuity of publicity, he nevertheless argued that the three elements of publicity typically marshaled as evidence of that vacuity are in fact philosophically and politically productive. Specifically, 1) noise, 2) superficiality, and 3) anonymity instigate rather than quell thought and action. Traditionally, the noise, superficiality, and anonymity of publicity have been taken to obliterate difference or to 'level-down.' By analyzing Foucault's deployment

of publicity in a radical and anti-institutional framework, I develop a Foucauldian account of 'leveling' as, contrariwise, the breakdown in socio-political barriers. Leveling permits transmigration. As such, I conclude that publicity is not only a necessary companion to philosophy and politics, but a prerequisite to the philosophical as much as to the political life. In a world of irrevocable technological advance, waning philosophical relevance, and an increasing need for the work of social justice, this chapter promises to cull new and flexible resources with which to re-imagine the stakes of information-trafficking in our changing present and reignite the promise of curiosity.

Foucault and the GIP

It is quite possible to draw Foucault's defense of publicity from a number of sources. One might, for instance, turn to Foucault's work as a journalist in the Iranian Revolution, from 1978 to 1979. Foucault believed the work of journalism could capture that fertile moment in which events first produce ideas.[3] One might just as easily draw this defense from perhaps his best known work, *Discipline and Punish*. There, Foucault offers an often overlooked demonstration of how the publicity surrounding penal practices not only sediments power but can also stimulate resistance.[4] I have chosen to draw Foucault's defense of publicity from his participation in the Prisons Information Group because it provides both the earliest and most articulate account. With the incremental publication of Foucault's early 1970's lecture courses, moreover, it is a good time to revisit Foucault's 1970's activism, as we prepare to reassess the trajectory of his thought, especially on knowledge, punishment, and the public intellectual. In this first section, I will lay the groundwork by offering a short history of the GIP that emphasizes the role of

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[3] For a full discussion, see Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson's *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*.

[4] See, in particular, "The Spectacle of the Scaffold," *Discipline and Punish*, 32-69.

publicity in its development and then I will place it within the context of Foucault's overall corpus.[5]

The Historical Context of the GIP

In the aftermath of May 1968, a number of radical activists formed the Gauche Prolétarienne. In May 1970, after several intense protests, the French government dissolved the Gauche Prolétarienne and arrested the editors of its newspaper, *La Cause du peuple*. In response, members formed the Organization of Political Prisoners (the OPP) to support and defend their now imprisoned leaders. The OPP led a successful hunger strike, both among activists and prisoners. Then, in December 1970, at the behest of Daniel Defert, the OPP established a sub-commission to undertake an inquiry into the prisons. Foucault accepted the directorship of the commission, alongside Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Jean-Marie Domenach. He quickly proposed that they call themselves Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons (The Prisons Information Group, the GIP) and that they aim to gather and disseminate information about prison conditions, whether relative to the institution in general, to its inmates, or to its personnel.

The Prisons Information Group set to work in two primary ways: first, by publishing pamphlets which together composed the *Intolerable* series and, second, by serving as a relay station for various prison revolts. The *Intolerable* series included four pamphlets: 1) *Investigation into 20 Prisons*, 2) *Investigation into a Model Prison: Fleury-Mérogis*, 3) *The Assassination of George Jackson*, and 4) *Prison Suicides*. The series identified one or another intolerable reality inherent in the penitentiary system. The GIP not only raised awareness, however; it also facilitated action. By printing flyers, press releases, tracts, and manuals, it

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[5] Although most of the GIP's documents remain unpublished and untranslated, its history is available to the Anglophone audience in Didier Eribon's *Michel Foucault*, esp. chap. 16, David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, esp. chap. 11, and James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, esp. chap. 6.

catalyzed the prison revolts at Clairveaux, Nancy, and Toul, among others. To identify and address what was intolerable, then, required the GIP to spread information through various forms of publication. It is important to note that while the GIP served as a communication network in France, it also formed part of a cross-pollination of resistance movements from Italy's Lotta Continua to the Black Panther Party in the US, with which Jean Genet was the primary liaison.

As the GIP developed, it was led by a rich blend of present and formerly incarcerated individuals, their families, prison personnel, doctors, lawyers, and intellectuals. Inevitably, it was the intellectuals who were most often in the spotlight, both at the time and now in scholarly assessments. This is no doubt due in part to its longstanding academic roots in the student resistance movements of 1968.[6] The GIP came to understand itself, however, as fundamentally provisional: preparing the way for formerly incarcerated persons to take the reins. Thus, when the Prisoners Action Committee (or CAP) was formed in 1973, as an organization expressly directed by the formerly incarcerated, the GIP slowly disbanded. As might be expected, however, the CAP's aims were quite different from the GIP's. Where the GIP publicized information about the prison system and relied on prisoners' voices to do it,[7] the CAP desegregated political and common law prisoners and relied on its own voice in *Le Journal du CAP*. Where the GIP merely facilitated revolts, moreover, the CAP worked hard to introduce full-fledged prison reforms. The CAP had a much longer run than the GIP, working from 1973-

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[6] For a critique of these debts, see Dylan Rodríguez, "Disrupted Foucault: Los Angeles' Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA) and the Obsolescence of White Academic Raciality," *Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition*, eds. Perry Zurn and Andrew Dilts (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

[7] See Cecile Brich's critique of this strategy in "The Groupe d'information sur les prisons: The Voice of Prisoners? Or Foucault's?" *Foucault Studies* 5 (2008):41.

1980 and publishing no less than 67 issues of *Le Journal du CAP*, reaching a distribution rate of 50,000 copies at its height.[8]

The GIP was active for only a few years. Its brevity, however, has little to do with its political or philosophical significance. That significance is especially strong for Foucault and within a Foucauldian framework. Foucault was, in many ways, the GIP's primary intellectual leader and he is reported to have led with a blend of vision and service.[9] Besides accepting a position of leadership in the information group itself, Foucault undertook the brunt of the banal work it often required. As Jean-Marie Domenach once remarked, "I don't know how [Foucault] managed to organize everything. […] He sent the mail, made the contacts, made thousands of phone calls; he was always there when necessary."[10] Given Foucault's unique direction of and investment in the GIP, it is important to explore the GIP's position within the context of Foucault's larger project.

The Philosophical Context of the GIP

On the face of it, the Prisons Information Group clearly reflects Foucault's concerns with the sedimentation of power relations and his investment in resisting that sedimentation, even if his theory of power is not fully articulated until the mid to late 1970's. For Foucault, power is diffused and decentralized. Power is not manifest in a sovereign sword but rather through a field of force relations.[11] These relations are dynamic. The more they are institutionalized, they

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[8] For more information on the CAP, see Anne Guérin, *Prisonniers en révolte: Quotidien carcéral, mutineries et politique pénitentiaire en France, 1970-1980* (Marseille: Agone, 2013) and Christoph Soulié, *Liberté sur paroles: Contribution à l'histoire du Comité d'Action des Prisonniers* (Bordeaux: Editions Analis, 2005).

[9] Michael Welch qualifies this leadership as pastoral in "Pastoral Power as Penal Resistance: Foucault and the Groupe d'information sur les prisons," *Punishment and Society* 12.1 (2010): 47-63.

[10] As quoted in Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 230.

[11] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 92.

become immobile; the more they are de-institutionalized, they become mobile. As such, oppressive power never exists without resistant power; force may always be answered with force, and action with reaction.[12] In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault adds to this basic distinction between power and resistance as immobile and mobile a secondary distinction: power "grips" the body whereas resistance exercises the "claims of bodies."[13] As power becomes more diffused and seemingly abstract, it paradoxically becomes increasingly concrete, more deeply embedded in the flesh and even the biology of living organisms. In the GIP, we see both characterizations in play. We see the co-constitution of penal power and prison resistance as much as we see the eminently embodied character of that resistance in and through prisoners themselves.

The GIP documents rarely use the language of power and resistance. They do, however, very schematically employ the correlative language of the intolerable and intolerance. In Foucault's announcement of the GIP's first investigative project, he writes:

> Let what is intolerable—imposed, as it is, by force and by silence—cease to be accepted. We do not make our inquiry in order to accumulate knowledge, but to heighten our intolerance and make of it an active intolerance. Let us become people intolerant of prisons, the legal system, the hospital system, psychiatric practice, military service, etc.[14]

After this initial inquiry, the GIP reported its findings in the first pamphlet of the *Intolerable* series. There we find this language repeated. The GIP's stated aim is "to formulate what is intolerable" about the prison system.[15] As the intolerable is formulated, "intolerance" is cultivated. In order to map these two terms onto the familiar power/resistance dyad, let me offer a fuller explanation of them.

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[12] Ibid., 96.

[13] Ibid., 157.

[14] Michel Foucault, "(Sur les prisons)" (1971), *Dits et Ecrits I,* no. 87, 1044.

[15] Michel Foucault, "Préface" (1971), *Enquête dans 120 prisons, Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 91, 1064.

Consider the intolerable and intolerance first in their broadest of contours. For Marcelo Hoffman, the intolerable is a "climate of repression," whereas intolerance is a commitment to activism.[16] For Kevin Thompson, the intolerable involves "rigid and intransigent" conditions, while intolerance involves "transformative" dispositions.[17] The intolerable, then, might be broadly defined as a conglomerate of the demeaning prison conditions that dramatically limit the conceptualization or actualization of possibility, especially the possibility of self-formation, and signal structurally similar conditions rampant in the 'free' world. Intolerance, on the other hand, is a refusal of the current system, the courage to change it, the curiosity to imagine something new, and the innovation to recreate it. For some scholars, however, the intolerable/intolerance distinction is more specific. Michael Welch offers two characterizations: first, the intolerable is panoptic surveillance and intolerance is counterveillance;[18] second, the intolerable attacks health, or the "salut and santé" of prisoners, whereas intolerance supports health.[19] For Leonard Lawlor and Janae Sholtz, the intolerable is being spoken "for," but intolerance is "speaking out" for oneself.[20] And for Cecile Brich, the intolerable is not having a voice, while intolerance is having a voice, even if it is, as she argues, still significantly constrained.[21] If the intolerable, then, is, very schematically, a refusal of possibility, it is must be the refusal of specific possibilities for

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[16] Marcelo Hoffman, "Foucault and the 'Lesson' of the Prisoner Support Movement," *New Political Science* 34.1 (2012): 21-36.

[17] Thompson, "To Judge the Intolerable," 169. Thompson develops these transformative dispositions under the sign of "political spirituality" and with reference to Foucault's work in the Iranian Revolution.

[18] Michael Welch, "Counterveillance: How Foucault and the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons Reversed the Optics," *Theoretical Criminology* 15.3 (2011): 301-313.

[19] Michael Welch, "Pastoral Power."

[20] Leonard Lawlor and Janae Sholtz, "Speaking Out for Others: Philosophy's Activity in Deleuze and Foucault (and Heidegger)," *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, eds. Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel Smith (under review).

[21] Brich, "The Group d'information sur les prisons."

health, the gaze, and the voice. Conversely, if intolerance is a refusal of that refusal, it must refuse on very concrete, embodied fronts.

Through an albeit brief and selective review of the literature, it is clear that the Prisons Information Group may be interpreted as a Foucauldian practice of resistance to power, a practice that pays specific attention to the claims of bodies. The GIP in this sense fits well within the context of Foucault's philosophy. But it also stands out. I propose to analyze perhaps the most salient (and most overlooked) expression of the GIP's intolerance: its unique use of *publicity*.[22] Through analysis, I will demonstrate that the GIP's practices allow us to see the distinctive role of publicity in Foucault's account of power and resistance. The GIP certainly identified the intolerable and stimulated intolerance, but it did so by publicizing and proliferating information. In the following section, then, I will turn to elucidate four ways in which publicity functioned for the GIP. I will conclude by considering the relationship between publicity and Foucault's account of philosophy and the political life *per se*. Throughout, I do not take Foucault to determine the GIP's theories or practice, nor vice versa. Rather, I see them in a symbiotic relationship. I am less interested in tracing lines of inheritance here than in understanding the collaborative product.

The GIP and Publicity

It was one of the GIP's express goals to publicize information on the French prison system "as quickly as possible and as widely as possible."[23] Under careful consideration, however, this general imperative to publicize was enacted at four distinct levels, four different

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[22] After briefly mentioning the "key role played by publicity" in Foucault's practice in general and the GIP in particular, Thompson writes in a footnote, "I can do no more than trace [publicity's] operation here. [But] it clearly deserves much more careful and profound study." See "To Judge the Intolerable," 176n3. I aim, here, to contribute to such a study.

[23] From an undated leaflet, as quoted by Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, 266.

moments where publicity is crucial to formulating the intolerable and practicing intolerance.[24]

They are as follows:

1. First, publicity is *a precondition of formulating the intolerable*. Before any pamphlets could be published or press releases made, the GIP had to deliver a manifesto of sorts and distribute questionnaires. The 'manifesto' both announced the Prisons Information Group and solicited immediate involvement by "all those who want to inform, be informed, or participate."[25] At the same time, the GIP began passing out questionnaires at prison doors to alert and assemble "all those able to know or willing to act."[26] Thus, at this first level, the GIP involved publicizing *the need for information*. One mother copied each question onto a separate bit of paper which she then systematically smuggled into the prison and read from during visitation. Inmates themselves reproduced and circulated the questionnaire at high risk.

2. Second, publicity is not only the precondition but *the activity of formulating the intolerable*. As more and more intellectuals, doctors, nurses, lawyers, journalists, magistrates, educators, prisoners, and ex-prisoners got involved, the Prisons Information Group acquired, collated, published, and publicized more and more information. The *Intolerable* series is just one example. There were also newspaper and journal articles, theatre productions like *Le Procès de la mutinerie de Nancy*, and a full-length documentary, entitled *Les Prisons aussi*. Thus, at this second level, the GIP involved publicizing *the acquired information*. In this work, Foucault illegally published the GIP leaflets in his home, with a crude, unlicensed duplicator; at one point, he was arrested and fined for breaching copyright law.

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[24] With GIP history in mind, one can easily trace the thread of publicity throughout *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault is arguably interested in sketching a genealogy of the publicity that surrounds execution, punishment, and imprisonment.

[25] GIP, "(Manifeste du G.I.P.)" (1971), *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 86, 1043.

[26] Foucault, "(Sur les prisons)," 1044.

3. Third, publicity is *a strategy by which to be intolerant* of the intolerable. Not all of the GIP's activity involved the patient collection and publication of information. It often engaged in immediate dissemination, even before information could be verified or critiqued. To the pamphlets and documentary, then, the GIP added public announcements and news columns.[27] It testified to utilizing "every mode of information"[28] to publicize "on a day-to-day basis this whole seething life of the prison."[29] The aim of this relentless publicization was "to agitate" everyone—journalists and activists outside, prisoners and administrators inside—about the agitation already at work in the supposedly "static" prison system. The GIP facilitated a material echo of forces internal to the institution that were already attacking and unsettling it. Thus, at this third level, the GIP involved publicizing information as *a form of agitation*. At Nancy, for instance, inmates took lists of their demands, wrapped them around stones, and threw them from the roofs. GIP members gathered these stones and reproduced these demands without question.

4. Fourth, publicity is not only a strategy but also *an outcome of intolerance*. The GIP's activities of soliciting, systematically publishing, and instantaneously disseminating information gave rise to two unique outcomes: first, the introduction of newspapers into prisons[30] and, second, the establishment of *Le Journal du CAP*. The GIP's work of pointed publicization led to the general increase in circulation and publication. Those once segregated and silenced were now integrated and given voice. Thus, at this fourth level, the GIP involved publicizing information as *a form of abolition* and decarceration. Prior to the GIP, prison radios were repeatedly silenced

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[27] Journals that supported publications from the GIP include *Esprit*, *Temoignage Chretien*, *La Cause du peuple-j'accuse*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Politique-Hebdo*, *Le Monde*, *Le journal du CAP*, and *Libération*.

[28] GIP, "(Manifeste du G.I.P.)," 1043.

[29] François Colcombet, Antoine Lazarus, and Louis Appert, "Luttes autour des prisons" (1979), *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 273, 809.

[30] Michel Foucault, "Prisons et révoltes dans les prisons" (1973), *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 125, 1294.

during the news hour and magazines were systematically edited with scissors. Afterward, full papers were available, even if other forms of censorship remained.

To summarize, then, the Prisons Information Group mobilized publicity through four stages: the questionnaires, the reports of the questionnaires, the overnight press releases, and the proliferation of newspapers, including both the inauguration of new papers and the wider dissemination of existing papers. From this summary we can conclude that publicity at once preconditions and constitutes the formulation of the intolerable; it is, moreover, a strategy as much as an outcome of intolerance. To put it even more systematically, publicity is necessary to formulate the intolerable and to practice intolerance. Conversely, a certain lack of publicity is a means of hiding the intolerable and preventing intolerance.

The GIP's four-pronged utilization of publicity is significant within the context of Foucault's work on the prison. In particular, such publicity directly combats what Foucault calls the cellularization inherent in the prison system. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault details how prison segregates space and segments time. It does so in order to foreclose the "dangerous multitude," or, in other words, the potential for organic movements between and among the incarcerated.[31] French prisons in the 1970's heightened this segregation, as punishment for various revolts, by suspending the delivery of Christmas packages to detainees; inmates were thereby isolated from both public mail and family ties. The GIP fought this particular ban and got packages eventually reinstated to women and minors. On a much broader level, however, the GIP fought against segregation and therefore against the prison as such by relentlessly publicizing information and thereby serving as a multi-directional relay station. That is, it

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[31] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, e.g. 148.

combated widespread *cellularization*, and its proliferation of boundaries, with the

transmigration, or boundary-crossing, of thought, word, and deed.

It is important to note, here, the echoes between this description of GIP publicity and

Foucault's own characterization of philosophy and politics. Foucault regularly characterized

philosophy as thinking, doing, and being differently, and politics as doing so collectively.[32]

When you think, do and be differently and collectively, you do it transmigrantly, against limits.

Before turning to explore the implications of this publicity for philosophy and the political

sphere, however, certain qualifications are in order. The GIP was certainly an information group.

But just as certainly the GIP was not the first to provide information on prison. What, then, is the

difference between the press coverage available before and after the GIP? Did Foucault theorize

the difference between so-called 'regular' publicity and the radical publicity in which the GIP

was involved? Does he moralize here, such that there is good and bad publicity? If publicity is

properly a positive marker of philosophy and politics, in what sense is that so?

Foucault and Kierkegaard on Publicity

In order to demarcate the uniqueness of GIP publicity, a nuanced account of publicity as

such, rather than as it is utilized, is necessary. To develop such an account, I will employ one of

the traditional critiques of publicity as a foil. Perhaps the most salient version of this critique was

offered by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. There, Heidegger is concerned with the manner in

which publicness, the press, and "idle talk" level down Dasein. Naming specifically public

transportation, information services, and newspapers, Heidegger argues that the press levels

down, or destroys authenticity, in two ways. First, the press publicizes "publicness," repeatedly

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[32] Cf. "Introduction," *The Use of Pleasure*.

referring to some vaguely and therefore inauthentically shared world.[33] Second, the press

perpetuates idle talk by relentlessly indicating that what happens and what is going to happen are

always already known.[34] In doing so, and at these two levels, publicity covers over reality and

forecloses responsibility. It is, furthermore, because public discourse destroys Dasein's authentic

experience of being-with that Dasein so rarely knows wonder or engages in philosophy.

Some sixty years earlier, in *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard critiques the way the public,

the press, and a general talkativeness level down Danish society.[35] Thinking specifically of

newspapers, journals, and magazines, Kierkegaard argues that the press levels down, or destroys

individuality, in at least two ways. First, the press creates an abstraction of its audience, "the

public," as a phantom that "obliterates everything that is concrete."[36] Second, the press creates an

abstraction of its author, "the artist," that erases any "interiority" of the individual through mere

gossip.[37] It is, for Kierkegaard, because publicity destroys singularity that it also forecloses real

action and philosophy.

I have chosen Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review* as my foil, here, for two reasons. First,

insofar as *A Literary Review* devotes significant attention to the public, its account of publicity is

fuller than that offered in *Being and Time*. Second, Foucault's relationship to Heidegger is

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[33] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119-120.

[34] Ibid., 157-159.

[35] Perhaps the fullest expression of this situation is captured thus: "When the generation, which in fact has itself wanted to level, has wanted to be emancipated and to revolt, has wanted to demolish authority and thereby in the skepticism of association has itself occasioned the hopeless forest fire of abstraction, when through leveling by means of the skepticism of association the generation has eliminated individualities and all the organic concretions and has substituted humanity and numerical equality among men, when the generation momentarily has entertained itself with the broad vista of abstract infinity, which no elevation, none whatsoever, disturbs, and instead there is simply 'nothing but air and sea'—that is the time when the work begins—then the individuals have to help themselves, each one individually." See Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*, 107-108, hereafter referred to as *A Literary Review*.

[36] Ibid., 86-87 and 91.

[37] Ibid., 97-100.

controversial and therefore well-developed, whereas his relationship to Kierkegaard is something of a lacuna in scholarship.[38] For the sake of both alleviating this lacuna and defining publicity, then, I will develop an account of GIP publicity against the backdrop of the press in 19th century Danish society. I will argue that, while Foucault and Kierkegaard share a worry over publicity, they diverge over its worrisome particulars and its promise.

Foucault with Kierkegaard against Publicity

The back cover of the first *Intolerable* pamphlet, *Investigation into 20 Prisons*, announces a number of intolerable realities: "courts, cops, hospitals and asylums, schools and military service, the press and television, and the State."[39] The reader immediately understands that there is a distinction between the press and Foucault's duplicator or in fact Champ Libre which originally published the pamphlet. But what exactly is the distinction? Based upon elucidations above, we can broadly surmise that the press is intolerable because it forecloses possibility and therefore induces inactivity, whereas the duplicator and Champ Libre are intolerant, opening up possibility and inciting activity. In this section, I suggest two things: first, that Foucault and Kierkegaard share this concern with publicity's link to inactivity and that, second, they both attribute this link to publicity's proliferation of abstraction. For Foucault, as much as for Kierkegaard, the press instigates a disinterested, disinvested repetition which in turn leads to inaction.

In *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard critiques his age for being one of reflection. By 'reflection,' Kierkegaard means something quite technical. He employs two Danish terms here: *Reflex* and *Reflexion*. *Reflex* refers to a reflected image, while *Reflexion* refers to deliberation.

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[38] See Roger Poole's "The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions," *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, edited by Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-75.

[39] As quoted by Eribon in *Michel Foucault*, 224.

This deliberation, though, bears something of the image within it, so that, for Kierkegaard, the age of reflection is one that proliferates information (*Reflexion*) that is nevertheless abstracted or dislodged from the subject at hand (*Reflex*). A reflective society therefore interacts with the world superficially, at the surface level of information and image, and thereby keeps individuals from real thought, passion, and action. He writes:

> In contrast to the age of revolution, which took action, the present age is an age of publicity, the age of miscellaneous announcements […] Reflection is not the evil, but the state of reflection, stagnation in reflection, is the abuse and the corruption that occasion retrogression by transforming the prerequisites [of action] into evasions [of action].[40]

His age, Kierkegaard insists, is riddled with knowledge devoid of experience.[41] Such passionless understanding, moreover, is exacerbated by the press. The press is not only, for Kierkegaard, an institution of disinterested repetition. It also increases that repetition and magnifies that disinterest in time and across space. The press propels the image of information faster and farther with each passing day.

This disinterested repetition that Kierkegaard saw in 19th century Danish society echoes what Foucault diagnosed in 20th century French publicity on prisons. The GIP documents repeatedly critique the official reports and media representations of prisons for 1) their repetitive or scripted character and 2) their disinterested or selective treatment. As scripted, the publicly available information on prisons was at once impersonal and repetitive, always saying "the same

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[40] Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, 70 and 96-97.

[41] See Hubert Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Nihilism of the Present Age: The Case of Commitment as Addiction," *Synthese* 98.1 (1994): 3-19, and "Kierkegaard on the Internet: Anonymity and Commitment in the Present Age," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jorgen Cappelom and Hermann Deuser (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 96-109. Incidentally, this understanding without passion later appears as curiosity in Heidegger's *Being and Time*; see Harrison Hall, "Love and Death: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on Authentic and Inauthentic Human Existence," *Inquiry* 27 (1984): esp. 191-191.

thing and in the same way."[42] As highly selective, this information masked both the

contemporary conditions and revolutionary developments of the detainees, for it was the sort of

information that "lets power hide other" far more threatening "information."[43] Once the GIP was

underway, moreover, the press made concerted efforts to quell these critical voices. It accused

GIP leaders of self-aggrandizement and it accused detainees of lying and lacking sobriety.[44] Still,

the press preferred to publish submissions by GIP leaders over those of informants; for

intellectuals were at least more scripted and more selective, more easily disciplined and dispelled

than detainees, who represented the real "heart" of the matter.[45] In summary, then, the GIP

critiqued the press for disengaging, on a number of levels, from the "scandal"[46] of the prison.

In contrast to the disengaged press, the GIP aimed to publicize, in a very particular way,

information of a very particular sort—the sort that arose from "an experience of prison or a

connection with it."[47] The GIP thus countered publicity's abstraction with investment. First, it

publicized unscripted information that was both personal and fresh, revealing the state of prisons

as well as the changes therein at work. Second, it disseminated critical information that

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[42] Daniel Defert, "Quand l'information est une lutte," *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons: Archives d'une lutte 1971-1972*, eds. Philippe Artières, Laurent Quéro, & Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: Éditions de l'IMEC, 2003), 69. Hereafter *Archives d'une lutte*.

[43] Ibid., cf. Michel Foucault, "Pour échapper à leur prison…" (1972), *Archives d'une lutte*, 155.

[44] For reference to public "swipes" taken at GIP leaders, see Colcombet, Lazarus, and Appert, "Luttes autour des prisons," 812; for accusations of self-aggrandizement, see Jean-Marie Domenach, Michel Foucault, and Paul Thibaud, "Toujours les prisons," *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 282, 915-917; and for reference to the mis-characterization of detainee participants, see Michel Foucault, "Il y a un an à peu près," *Archives d'une lutte*, 195-196.

[45] Michel Foucault, "Le grand enfermement," *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 105, pg. 1170.

[46] Michel Foucault and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Enquête sur les prisons: brisons les barreaux du silence" (1971), *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 88, 1046; cp. *Archives d'une lutte*, 162.

[47] GIP, "(Manifeste du G.I.P)," 1043.

"mark[ed] targets for possible action."[48] Third, the intellectuals who led the GIP did so strategically to effect the unthinkable: "to give detainees the floor."[49] In this way, the GIP disrupted the intransigence of the press by utilizing publicity to transform. While Foucault and Kierkegaard clearly share a recognition, then, that the press can cover over the reality of shared existence and preempt the vigor of individual action, Foucault finds within publicity a means of resistance. Let us turn to mark the techniques of that resistance, contra Kierkegaard.

Foucault against Kierkegaard for Publicity

Although Foucault and Kierkegaard agree that publicity's abstraction is problematic because it leads to inaction, they part ways in other respects. Specifically, while Kierkegaard will argue that abstract, disinterested repetition is coupled with noise, superficiality, and anonymity, Foucault and the GIP will argue that abstraction can be fought by the same: noise, superficiality, and anonymity. The theoretical framework that makes this argument possible is two-fold: first, resistance is immanent to power and, second, resistance is possible outside of the will of a traditional philosophical subject. Here, I will take each technique in turn, first marking Kierkegaard's concern and then developing Foucault's use thereof.

1. *Noise*: For Kierkegaard, publicity is noise. Noise obliterates the proper distinction between speech and silence and, as such, precludes silence itself. Publicity lands us in the realm of talkativeness where everything is discussed but nothing is really said, where everything is thought and nothing is ever done. Silence, on the other hand, is a space in which distinctions are maintained and therefore decisions are possible. "Morality," Kierkegaard writes, "is character,

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[48] Foucault and Vidal-Naquet, "Enquête sur les prisons: brisons les barreaux du silence," 1045.

[49] Foucault, "Le grand enfermement," 1170.

character is something engraved,"[50] "character is inwardness,"[51] even "religious inwardness,"[52] and this inwardness exists in "silence."[53] Silence has the power to catapult a reflective existence into a revolutionary one. Noise offers the illusion of movement but in reality promulgates a static existence. Publicity, then, is the enemy of individual freedom.

By contrast, the GIP repeatedly critiques silence as a form of oppression, the evident sedimentation of institutional power, and endorses publicity's noise as an agitation necessary for public change. Foucault's analysis of silence, in *History of Sexuality*, as a constitutive moment in discursive systems, has its roots here, several years earlier.[54] The GIP identified silence as a punishment in itself but also as a technique through which the intolerable was imposed. It aimed to "break down the bars of silence," get newspapers back into prisons, get the prisoners' voices out into the public realm, and thereby refuse penitentiary administrators the luxury of silence itself.[55] Unlike Kierkegaard, Foucault conceives of publicity as an appropriate threat to a silence that itself threatens freedom.

2. *Superficiality*: For Kierkegaard, publicity is superficial. Superficiality destroys the necessary distinction between what appears and what does not, between the surface and what lies underneath.[56] Insofar as superficiality therefore lacks limits, it manifests itself in extensivity or

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[50] Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, 77.

[51] Ibid., 78.

[52] Ibid., 81; cp. 86-87.

[53] Ibid., 97.

[54] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, esp. 4, 17 and 27. For a full exploration of noise in Foucault, see Siisiainen's *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing*.

[55] See Foucault and Vidal-Naquet, "Enquête sur les prisons: brisons les barreaux du silence," for instance.

[56] Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, 102.

scope rather than "intensity" or inwardness.[57] Publicity talks about everything and therefore

nothing; it blankets the world with such an even-handed analysis that the insignificant cannot be

distinguished from the significant.

By contrast, the GIP repeatedly finds political importance in apparently superficial

details. For them, chocolate bars and Christmas packages are as significant as legal rights and the

erasure of criminal records. For instance, in a press release Foucault prepared concerning the

Toul Prison Revolt, he writes:

> Lists of demands were circulated. These began with the essential demands, those
> most difficult to obtain (e.g. transfer of the warden, chief of the guard, etc.), and
> they moved to the more detailed ones (shower temperature, meals, etc.); but these
> are not merely details or rather every detail is essential when one struggles to
> obtain, against a boundless arbitrariness, a minimum of juridical status; when one
> struggles to have the right to demand. It is important to have the right to wash, but
> it is essential when one obtains it in this way.[58]

The surface problem of cold soup and the deep problem of solitary confinement are equal

outcomes of the penal system and therefore equally serious, equally political, and equally

intolerable. The GIP's refusal to distinguish between them presages Foucault's account of

capillary power, in *Discipline and Punish*, where power enlists overt and covert operations to

suffuse bodies at critical and quotidian junctures. He develops the method of genealogy to

analyze this mottled surface. Unlike Kierkegaard, then, Foucault understands publicity to engage

the superficiality of power in resistant ways.

3. *Anonymity*: For Kierkegaard, publicity is anonymous.[59] Anonymity collapses the

distinction between someone talking and mere "abstract noise."[60] As such, it launches the power

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[57] Ibid., 97 and 102-103.

[58] Foucault, "Pour échapper à leur prison…," 153; cf. Colcombet, Lazarus, and Appert, "Luttes autour des prisons," 814-815.

[59] It is important to mark that, while Kierkegaard's critique of anonymity in *A Literary Review* is quite heavy, nevertheless it is not simple. The book he reviews was itself published anonymously. It was only after the author's

of impersonality and thereby exempts authors from passionate commitment: "Nowadays it is possible actually to speak with people," Kierkegaard admits, "yet the conversation leaves the impression that one has been speaking with an anonymity."[61] This vacuity of voice and reference, for which Kierkegaard critiques anonymity, is equally the reason Kierkegaard critiques anonymity's apparent converse: the incessant dropping or meaningless repetition of names.[62] In either case, there is a breakdown between name and subject, a breakdown that precludes responsibility and permits the proliferation of sound without signification.

The GIP, by contrast, wields anonymity as a tactic to mobilize the transformative power of information. Some onlookers interpreted the GIP's use of anonymity as a lack of commitment to the prison problem and a depersonalization of their project. Foucault addressed that accusation thus:

> To the contrary, it only signifies the renunciation of personalization; it does not signify immobility. To the GIP, that means: no organization and no leader, they really do everything for it to remain an anonymous movement that exists only by the three letters of its name. Everyone can speak. Whoever the one speaking might be, he does not speak because he has a title or a name, but because he has something to say. The GIP's only watchword is: "Speech to the detainees!"[63]

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death, in 1856, that *Two Ages* (*To Tidsaldre*) was properly attributed to Thomasine Christine Gyllembourg-Ehrensvärdhe. Kierkegaard published the review anonymously, specifically in an effort not to be an author. We can understand this in at least two ways: Kierkegaard was practicing aesthetic sensibility in this book on the aesthetic existence and/or Kierkegaard's critique of anonymity is consistent with a different embrace of anonymity. For the former interpretation, see Jacob Golomb's "Kierkegaard's Ironic Ladder to Authentic Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 32.2 (1992): 65-81, and, for the latter interpretation, see Merold Westphal's "Kierkegaard and the Anxiety of Authorship," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 34.1 (1994): 5-22.

[60] Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, 104.

[61] Ibid., 103.

[62] Ibid., 99-100.

[63] Foucault, "Le grand enfermement," 1172; cp. Colcombet, Lazarus, and Appert, "Luttes autour des prisons," 811: Foucault marks the uniqueness of the GIP and in particular its "collective and anonymous work."

Recall that the GIP's mission involved the breakdown of barriers between economic classes and social circles. As such, consistency required that the GIP eradicate the hierarchy between its intellectuals on the outside and its prisoners on the inside. Anonymity aids in this eradication. Late in life, in "The Masked Philosopher," Foucault restated his commitment to the transformative power of anonymity. He insisted that a name forecloses two things: first, one's ability to listen to what is being said and, second, one's ability to take what has been said in radical and unexpected ways.[64] Unlike Kierkegaard, then, Foucault sees anonymity as preconditioning the sort of imagination requisite to both subject and society.

In retrospect, what we see in the GIP documents is that Foucault agrees with Kierkegaard that the abstraction typical of publicity is intolerable, but Foucault argues, against Kierkegaard, that such abstraction can be countered through the noise, superficiality, and anonymity of publicity itself.

Foucault on Leveling

Let us take stock at this point. This chapter aims to demonstrate that publicity, for Foucault, is a necessary precondition of both philosophy and politics. In order to do so, I take as critical Foucault's involvement in the Prisons Information Group. At the outset, I situated the GIP within its historical and philosophical context, noting that it can be understood under the broader category of Foucauldian resistance to sedimented power. I argued, however, that there is something unique about the GIP, something that contributes significantly to our understanding of Foucault, and that is its use of publicity. The GIP used publicity in four key ways: as 1) a precondition to formulating the intolerable and as 2) the formulation itself, as 3) a strategy of

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[64] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," 321. For more on Foucault and anonymity, see Laura Hengehold's "Neither Seen nor Said: Foucault's Experiments in Anonymity," *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* 15.2 (2005): 28-47.

intolerance and as 4) an outcome of that intolerance. I then drew a preliminary description of

Foucault's position on publicity: that publicity may be intolerable due to its abstraction but that

its abstraction can be disturbed—and intolerance exercised—through the use of publicity's own

noise, superficiality, and anonymity. Publicity, in this way, resists itself from within.

But what is publicity's relationship to philosophy and politics? One has a vague sense

that publicity supports the practices of critique and activism requisite to philosophy and politics.

I turn to concretize this connection by developing Foucault's account of leveling. Recall that, for

Kierkegaard, his age has suffered a leveling (*Nivellering*) at the hands of the public and the press.

This leveling involves the razing of individuality and, thereby, the spread of generality.[65]

Consistent with his Kierkegaardian concern over publicity's abstraction, Foucault is certainly

aware of the danger of Kierkegaardian leveling (*nivellement*). Such an existential account of

leveling, however, is not Foucault's own or primary conceptualization. In this section, I will

argue that Foucault is suspicious of the existential form of leveling. I will then suggest that

Foucault actively embraces two other forms of leveling—which I will call the Stoic and the

English—in order to enact philosophy and politics as such. Since for Foucault, just as for

Kierkegaard, publicity enacts leveling, I will argue that the Stoic leveling of self-identity and the

English leveling of social barriers are both mobilized by publicity. Publicity permits one to think,

do, and be differently, collectively, and thus transmigrantly. It is therefore necessary to

Foucauldian philosophy and politics.

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[65] For a comparison between Kierkegaard's *Nivellerung* and Heidegger's corresponding *Einebnung*, see Alastair Hannay's "Kierkegaard's Levellings and the Review," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jorgen Cappelom and Hermann Deuser (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 71-95, and "Kierkegaard's Present Age and Ours," *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity*, eds. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 105-122.

One Negative Sense of Leveling

Across his career, Foucault is suspicious of existential leveling as a construct. Early on, in *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault historicizes the existential fear of leveling, locating its development in the 19th century. To do so, he contrasts the Renaissance belief that death was the great leveler to the modern belief that one can only escape a leveled and monotonous life through an authentic relation to death.[66] Later, in his essay "Theatricum Philosophicum," Foucault explores the philosophical significance of this fear. From a Deleuzian perspective, the fear of leveling marks an unhealthy attachment to categories at the expense of multiplicitous becoming.[67] Finally, in "The Masked Philosopher," Foucault specifically insists that the fear of leveling keeps people from utilizing publicity as an exercise of radical differentiation and therefore limits contemporary resistance to existing power structures. Although we have analyzed this passage once before, it is important to return to it here:

> I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means; the desire is
> there; there is an infinity of things to know; the people capable of doing such
> work exist. So what is our problem? Too little: channels of communication that
> are too narrow, almost monopolistic, inadequate. We mustn't adopt a protectionist
> attitude, to stop 'bad' information from invading and stifling the 'good.' Rather,
> we must increase the possibility of movement backward and forward. This would
> not lead, as people often fear, to uniformity and leveling down [*nivellement par le
> bas*], but, on the contrary, to the simultaneous existence and differentiation of
> these various networks.[68]

Thus, not only is the existential fear of leveling historical and diagnosable as a contingent attachment to the maintenance of categories, but this fear also, and most importantly, keeps the present from engaging in productive acts of resistance. By contrast, Foucault endorses, as I will

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[66] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 171; *Naissance de la Clinique*, 176: "*échappant aux vies monotones et à leur nivellement.*"

[67] Michel Foucault, "Theatricum Philosophicum" (1970), *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 189; *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 80, 961: "*le nivellement uniforme.*"

[68] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," 325; cp. "Le philosophe masqué," *Dits et Ecrits* II, no. 285, 928.

argue, two other forms of leveling: a form of Stoic leveling, which breaks down categories, specifically the category of the subject, and a form of English leveling, which resists power structures, especially those based on social division. In both cases, Foucault utilizes publicity, defined as the broadening and multiplication of communication channels, to transform sedimented power relations into a vibrant matrix of possibility.

Two Positive Senses of Leveling

In his commentary on Kierkegaardian leveling, Alistair Hannay uses the Stoic and English senses of leveling as foils to indicate what Kierkegaardian leveling is not.[69] In this section, I defend not only the weak claim that the Stoic and English senses of leveling elucidate Foucault's own account, but the strong claim that a revised sense of Stoic and English leveling is critical to understanding Foucault's description of philosophy and politics proper, as well as the role of publicity therein. First, then, the GIP documents offer a specific definition of philosophy which, by enacting a revised Stoic leveling, necessarily demands publicity. Stoic leveling may be defined as eliminating the locus of the subject by gaining a worldwide perspective, a "view from above." As we have noted, Seneca, in his prefaces to *Naturales Questiones*, testifies to the necessity of getting free of oneself, free from the slavery to oneself.[70] To do so, he argues, one must become a "curious spectator" of nature;[71] for, such inquiry affords one an emancipatory perspective not only on oneself but on all of humanity. In his *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault explains Seneca's position as a "stepping back" and a "looking down," by which the

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[69] Hannay, "Kierkegaard's Levellings and the Review." Hannay ultimately describes Kierkegaardian leveling as a variant of Heideggerian leveling.

[70] Seneca, *Naturales Questiones,* III.pf16.

[71] Ibid., I.pf12.

subject's position as central purveyor of the world is leveled down to a mere part or portion of the world.[72]

A revised form of this Stoic leveling appears briefly in the GIP and then substantially in Foucault's later definition of philosophy. As treated in Chapter Two, toward the end of his life, Foucault characterizes philosophy as the sort of activity that puts its subject out of place and out of joint. It does so by engaging a changeable curiosity rather than a totalizing sovereignty. This changeable curiosity, moreover, is repeatedly expressed, for Foucault, through the vicissitudes of publicity. In the *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault defends the vacillation in his publishing forays. He does so by insisting that doing philosophy curiously makes it possible "to go back through what I was already thinking, to think it differently, and to see [it] from a new vantage point […] Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above."[73] In the "Masked Philosopher," where Foucault directly defends an increase in publicity, he further suggests that curious philosophy is the work of thinking, doing, and being differently, "the movement by which one detaches oneself" not only from normalized social expectations but also from subjective ones.[74] When Foucault endorses this practice of curious philosophy, with its radical destabilization of the subject, he also endorses a revised sense of Stoic leveling. Although Foucault refuses the Stoic illusion of absolute suspension, or the extraction of oneself from the surrounding world, he recommends here a steady stream of experimentation which acts, in a similar way, to divest the subject of itself. This philosophical curiosity, moreover, not only levels abstractly. Through the vicissitudes of publishing and publicity, it concretizes the communication requisite to philosophical transformation.

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[72] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 282, 283.

[73] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 11.

[74] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," 325, 327.

Now, this distinction between curious and sovereign philosophy does not only exist on an individual level. On a social level, Foucault locates sovereign philosophy in the university and curious philosophy in real world struggles and conflicts.[75] In the GIP documents, Foucault lambasts the "university yacking" and "book scribbling" of this "vague little university discipline" called philosophy.[76] Philosophy is not only, as a university discipline, a cellularized form of knowledge within a highly segregated system; it is also, as a disciplined form of thinking, a way of 'totalizing' things.[77] This segmentation must be disrupted and broken up by getting involved in real struggles, in the movement of the world itself.[78] It was by getting involved in the GIP or being invested in particular questions that Foucault gained the changing perspectives he sought and the flexible theories he produced. As he says:

> I tried to do things that required a personal, physical, and real involvement, things that would address problems in concrete, precise, and definite terms in a given situation. It was only from that moment that necessary analyses could be proposed. Working with the GIP on the problem of the prisoners, I attempted to initiate and carry through an experience.[79]

By experience, here, Foucault means the sort of full-bodied and affective ordeal that not only leads a subject but can lead an entire network into new, de-institutionalized relations with itself. Where philosophy might hierarchize, he suggests, philosophical involvement in struggle can really level.

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[75] Cp. Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography" (1976), *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980): "Now this role of referee, judge, and universal witness is one which I absolutely refuse to adopt, because it seems to me to be tied up with philosophy as a university institution. If I do the analyses I do, it's not because of some polemic I want to arbitrate but because I have been involved in certain conflicts regarding medicine, psychiatry and the penal system" (65).

[76] Foucault, "Le grand enfermement," 1169.

[77] Lazarus suggests so in "Luttes autour des prisons," 817.

[78] Foucault, "Le grand enfermement," 1173.

[79] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," 281.

It is important to point out that this first form of positive leveling is enabled by and manifested in radical publicity. It was the GIP's use of publicity to resist the intolerable and practice intolerance that helped Foucault to think differently about power, knowledge, and the penal system. Likewise, it was his relentless practice of thinking differently that produced the notable vacillation in his publishing forays.

Second, the GIP documents offer a specific definition of politics which, by enacting what can be characterized as a revised English leveling, necessarily demands publicity. The Levellers were 17th century English rebels who aimed at social justice and therefore fought a variety of social hierarchies in order to increase parity.[80] Their rebellion included such disparate actions as 'leveling' the hedges that enclosed common land (Midland Revolt, 1607) and demanding that the law be translated into the common tongue (English Levelers, 1645-1649). The latter movement started with John Lilburne's denunciation of the disparity between members of Parliament and common soldiers and his later imprisonment. It continued, moreover, through an exceptionally adept plan of pamphleteering and general publicity.[81] Leveling in this second sense destroys barriers of oppression, reconnects citizens, and refuses limitations of suffrage and egregious imprisonment.[82]

This secondary sense of leveling clearly appears, in a revised form, in the GIP's definition of politics. It is "a political act," Defert writes, when detainee families join prison

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[80] See Christopher Hill's *Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham: Spokesman Press, 1976) and *World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin 1984).

[81] For more on the revolutionary role of the press, see David Cressy's *England on Edge: Crisis and Revolution 1640-1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially Chapter 12.

[82] Foucault refers to the Levellers in the context of early race war discourse in '*Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 59, 102, and 107-109. For commentary on this aspect, see Ladelle McWhorter's *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009), 56-66.

activists, across great chasms of experience.[83] It is "a political act," Foucault writes, when such

people investigate so as to attack the covert machinations of power.[84] It is "political knowledge,"

Foucault and Vidal-Naquet claim, when knowledge becomes collective, reverberating "from

mouth to ear, from group to group."[85] It is a "political" struggle, Foucault writes, when an action

becomes "a collective force, with its own organization, objectives, and strategy."[86] And a revolt

has a "political dimension," Foucault insists, when it includes not two or three people but a real

"collective movement," in and outside the prison.[87] Finally, it is a political action when the

barrier between the quotidian and non-quotidian breaks down:

> It is a political form of action when, for example, the following demands are
> posed: better diet, heating, not being condemned to absurd punishments for
> piddling infractions—demands, then, that exist in the domain of their immediate
> interest and that are posed in a collective fashion, by drawing on public opinion,
> by addressing not their superiors, the prison directors, but power itself, the
> government, the party in power. From this moment, their action has a political
> form. Perhaps you will say that there is still no political content. But isn't that
> precisely what characterizes current political movements: the discovery that the
> most quotidian things—the way one eats or is nourished, the relationship between
> employee and employer, the way one loves, the way in which sexuality is
> repressed, familial constraints, prohibition of abortion—are political?[88]

Each of these descriptions characterizes the political as that which "levels" one or another

barrier: the barrier between detainee families and prison activists, between overt power and

covert power, between those who know one thing and those who know another, between

individual activists or rebels, between those inside and outside the prison, between the everyday

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[83] Defert, "Quand l'information est une lutte," 73.

[84] Foucault, "Préface" (1971) to *Enquête dans vingt prisons*, *Dits et Ecrits* I, no. 91, 1063.

[85] Foucault and Vidal-Naquet, "Enquête sur les prisons: brisons les barreaux du silence," 1046.

[86] Foucault, "Pour échapper à leur prison," 155.

[87] Foucault, "Prisons et révoltes dans les prisons," 1295.

[88] Ibid., 1296.

and the exceptional. These barriers exist to maintain divisions and therefore support the sedimentation of power.[89] The GIP aimed to level them. This leveling did not suffer under the English illusion of a physical commons, shared by natural right among equals, but fought instead for a social commons without transcendental justification.

As with Stoic leveling, English leveling is also enabled by and manifested in radical publicity. It was by steeping himself in the work of sending the letters and making the calls that Foucault developed a network across socially enforced barriers. The GIP itself was then capable of serving as a relay station, passing news and techniques between interested persons, as well as producing diverse publications.

In summary, then, Foucault engages in philosophical and political activity, saturated in publicity, in order to level the prison (à la the English), with its correlative divisions, and to level the subject (à la the Stoics), with its commensurate illusions. Contrary to Kierkegaard, Foucault is a leveler all his own. His divergence from Kierkegaard on the conceptualization of publicity, moreover, signals a far deeper divergence here over the nature of subjectivity and the importance of collectivity.

Conclusion

In today's world, with, as Cornell West puts it, "weapons of mass distraction," publicity—and its correlate curiosity—is a central issue. It is involved in the political question of how society ought to be run and in the philosophical question of who we ought to become in the future. Our present requires neither wholesale dismissals nor endorsements; rather, it demands a balanced account. This chapter finds such an account in Foucault's thought and his work with the

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[89] Recall Foucault's frustration, as quoted in François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana's forward to the Collège de France lecture series, regarding his own "public," the public of auditors who precluded questions, exchanges, feedback, and "real collective work," in this light.

Prisons Information Group. There is certainly a kind of publicity, fueled by an institutionalized curiosity, that gathers and disseminates information as disinterested as it is already aligned with the ethos of the period. But there is another, resistant sort. After locating the GIP's specific use of publicity within the context of Foucauldian resistance to power, this chapter used Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review* as a foil by which to demonstrate not only Foucault's positive retrieval of publicity but also its grounds for a constructive theory of leveling. As such, this work identifies a de-institutionalized curiosity that, working through radical publicity, challenges and revamps the hierarchies, values, and ideologies of the present.

The Prisons Information Group, therefore, not only enhances our understanding of Foucault and prison activism, but it also offers a fresh perspective on Foucault's relationship to Kierkegaard. While Foucault grants the existential critique of everyday publicity, he parts ways with Kierkegaard (and thereby Heidegger) when he embraces a second sort of publicity (and curiosity), just as real as the first. As I have argued, this bifurcation aligns Foucault far more closely with Nietzsche. At bottom, however, the GIP contributes to long-standing debates over the nature of philosophy and politics. The GIP's use of publicity suggests that the noise of political activity is, simultaneously, the sound of a philosophical life. I conclude that the press and publicity must accompany and inescapably undergird a robust sense of both philosophy and politics. Ultimately, I contend Foucault shows us that philosophers and theorists have no choice but to be public intellectuals—to foster this making-public so much that they put their intellectual standing at risk—because society itself cannot function, in a healthy way, outside of a commitment to radical publicity. This is equally a commitment to radical curiosity—that is, the desire to counter-know, to know in ways that dis-unify the subject and de-sediment the social structure.

The relevance of the GIP, however, is not limited to either everyday publicity or the future of philosophy. Our world today is marked, yes, by an explosion of media, but also with a global-scale increase in incarceration and a massive prison construction system. At one level, the massification of media is certainly used to keep the public from seeing or caring about practices of mass incarceration. Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander argue that media trains our attention to consume images of prison without consideration for prisoners themselves.[90] Gratuitous proliferation of information, however—the sort produced by radical publicity—is not in and of itself contrary to social justice. As I have shown, the media can and must be used to fight mass incarceration by formulating the intolerable, promulgating the voices of those who have been denied a voice, and heightening public intolerance. Organizations like CARA, Generation Five, and the REACH Coalition do this sort of work every day. Their goal is not to dull or dismantle our curiosity but to really awaken and direct it away from the endless television shows like *Lockdown* or *Breakout* and toward the current stories, struggles, and analyses of people inside.

If Chapter One established that Foucault's in some sense first account of curiosity recognized it as an institutional force, defining what is known and how it is known in the social sphere, and if Chapter Two established that Foucault's secondary account located curiosity in ethical practices of the self that are deeply embedded in and respond to the collective ethos, then the present chapter develops and extends these analyses through the case study of the Prisons Information Group. First, this chapter underscores that a transformative curiosity is turned inward as much as outward, challenging both specific individuals and the collective at the

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[90] Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete*? (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 17-19. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012), esp. 59-61. Of course, the publication and success of Davis and Alexander's books indicate commitment to something more like the radical publicity I develop in this essay.

philosophical and political level. Second, it does so by analyzing a case study in punishment and prison resistance. This prima facie indicates that the problematic of curiosity, especially when analyzed through the axis of publicity, is in fact intimately enmeshed with the problematic of punishment. Punishment is maintained, marketed, and even fetishized through institutionalized curiosity. And punishment segregates according to boundaries that radical curiosity breaks. How those marginalized in carceral institutions are known and come to know themselves is already a reflection of how curiosity works at the social level. Reimagining curiosity's function, therefore, as expressly de-institutionalizing is not only a question of philosophy and politics, but of punishment and community.

Chapter 4

Derrida: Deconstructing Curiosity

In the *Honor of Thinking*, Rodolphe Gasché argues that Jacques Derrida thinks "without wonder."[1] By this he means that Derrida's thought has no proper philosophical beginning. Deconstruction is always already underway within the text and overtaken by its structural forces. But, if deconstruction does not start with wonder, then what? Where does Derrida begin? How does he begin in the face of his resistance to beginnings? Donna Haraway suggests that deconstruction begins with curiosity. Derrida, she writes, is "the most curious of men," because he spots and responds to what interrupts and entangles us.[2] Hélène Cixous affirms that deconstruction is indeed driven by "a curiosity for sighs and hesitations," but she goes farther. She attests to sharing with Derrida an especially linguistic curiosity: "a curiosity for the signifier, a greediness for tastetexts."[3] Without composing a foundation or origin, does deconstruction nevertheless begin here, with a linguistic curiosity? What would that mean for philosophy? Is this even a proper source for philosophy or does Derrida's work, indeed, wallow in mere textual "freeplay," as his detractors suggest?[4]

In *Beast and the Sovereign*, Session 11, Derrida discusses curiosity at some length. He first observes, "It's a fine word, a very fine verbal animal, *curiositas*."[5] Why is it fine? For

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[1] Rodolphe Gasché, "Thinking Without Wonder," *The Honor of Thinking: Critique, Theory, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 348-363. Thanks to Peggy Kamuf for this reference.

[2] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 20.

[3] Helene Cixous, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 137.

[4] We might also call this mere "lexical play," as Michael Naas would have it. See Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), xxvi.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign I*, eds. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. Session 11.

Derrida, its fineness is attributable at least to its versatility. As he briefly points out, the Latin *curiositas* is composed of two heads or two senses. On the one hand, and following the etymology of *curio*, *curiositas* indicates an interrogating gaze set on an object. On the other hand, following *cura*, *curiositas* indicates the act of caring for someone or something. Each sense involves a particular treatment [*traitement*], in the double sense it has in French: *curiositas* may involve the careless, detached handling of an object, or it may generate the full-fledged care of therapy. Derrida develops these two modes of curiosity through an analysis of a particular moment in French history: the scientific dissection of an elephant in the court of Louis XIV in 1681 and, shortly thereafter, the therapeutic confinement of animals and humans in zoological gardens and asylums. I will call these two curiosities by turn scientific and therapeutic or dissecting and confining, respectively.

Although these curiosities can be momentarily distinguished, Derrida ultimately argues that both are interconnected expressions of sovereignty. That is, they negate the inherent instability of objects, divisions, walls, and procedures. Scientific curiosity is a drive to dissect an object in the service of knowledge, cleanly separating one thing from another. Therapeutic curiosity is a drive to confine an object in the service of care, definitively isolating one thing from another. Implicit within *Beast and the Sovereign I*, Session 11, however, there is a deconstructive curiosity that inhabits, resists, and disorganizes sovereign curiosity in both its scientific and therapeutic guises. Drawing on Cixous, Derrida, and Sarah Kofman, I will characterize this deconstructive curiosity in three ways: linguistic, animal, and critical.

First, cued by Cixous, I unpack deconstructive curiosity as linguistic. Linguistic curiosity resists the scientific by not allowing a clean dissection of terms, and it resists the therapeutic by compromising the clean confinement of terms. Following Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore*

I Am, I then characterize this curiosity as animal. Animal curiosity is not governed by some final teleology nor does it end in certainty; rather it tracks a scent, regularly suspending its paw, as if to emphasize the meandering and precarious quality of knowledge. Finally, turning to Sarah Kofman, I characterize deconstructive curiosity as critical. Critical curiosity combats the illusions of pure revelation, whether through science, scripture, or art, and instead draws attention to the conjuring trick, the systematic substitution of signs, undergirding them. In each case, deconstructive curiosity proliferates uneasiness and destabilizes sovereign impetus.

While Derrida's analysis of curiosity may begin in a particular historical moment and develop through particular texts, artworks, and personal experiences, his deconstruction thereof extends well beyond history or science, aesthetics or phenomenology. Indeed, his analysis targets, as I will show in closing, the sovereign practices of traditional philosophy. The Platonic paradigm of Western philosophy proceeds by way of *diaeresis* and *epimeleia heautou,* dissection and self-care. Against this tradition, Derrida weaves a deconstructive curiosity that bedevils ahistorical concepts, displaces the centrality of the human in philosophy, and calls attention to the sleights of reason by which philosophy is enshrined as pure, abstract, and glorified. The deconstruction of curiosity here becomes the deconstruction of philosophy.

"The Most Curious of Men"

In *Infinitely Demanding*, Simon Critchley argues that philosophy does not begin in wonder at the things that exist but rather in a disappointment that things are not what they might be.[6] He is not the only one to suspect that reflective thinking is anything but wonderful. For Gasché, it is the honor of thinking to challenge the limits and the foundations of critique, theory, and philosophy. Gasché specifically addresses wonder. While philosophy may begin in wonder,

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[6] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2008).

thinking, real thinking—this is also for him deconstructive thinking—*thinks* without wonder. For Gasché, to think without wonder is to think without several basic assumptions that undergird the experience of wonder as traditionally conceived from Plato to Heidegger: that truth is universally accessible, by a unified subject, through fundamental philosophy.[7] We have, in wonder, "a metaphysics of the subject," an "anthropology," and "features of humanism."[8] It is quite worrisome for Gasché that wonder presumes a gulf between subject and object, knower and known, the one who wonders and the wonderful. We can presume, Gasché argues, despite Derrida's relative silence on the matter,[9] that deconstruction necessarily does not begin in wonder and is not reducible to wonder because deconstruction functions on precisely the deterioration of these gulfs. This is but one of the reasons deconstruction signals the end of 'philosophy' as such.

In one sense, Haraway begins *When Species Meet* where Gasché finished. Without addressing deconstruction's turgid relationship to wonder, Haraway states straightaway: "Derrida is the most curious of men, among the most committed and able of philosophers to spot what arrests curiosity, instead nurturing an entanglement and a generative interruption called response."[10] For Haraway, deconstruction begins not with what arrests us, or stops us short—like

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[7] Gasché, "Thinking, Without Wonder," 348, 353, and 356.

[8] Ibid., 354.

[9] Ibid., 353.

[10] Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 20. Gayatri Spivak seconds this attribution. As she writes in "Class Individual: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on Jacques Derrida," *Artforum International* 43.7 (2005), "Derrida's insatiable curiosity about grasping it all kept him on the question of sexual difference. Curiously enough, Freud seemed not to have been his sourcebook for answers on this topic" (52). Then again, in "Notes Toward a Tribute to Jacques Derrida," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16.3 (2005), Spivak interprets *Glas* as an expression of Derrida's curiosity. There, as she says, he is "curious to see how much control he had over the name, not as mark but as sign" (103). Even Simon Critchley, in "Derrida: The Reader," *Derrida's Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone (New York: Routledge, 2008), will remark, "Derrida's work is possessed of a curious restlessness, one might even say an anxiety" (10).

wonder, but rather in what increasingly entangles and disrupts us—something she calls 'curiosity.' Deconstruction in this sense has a genesis, but that genesis is an irreducibly enmeshed beginning where, as she states, "to be one is always to *become with* many."[11] Before Haraway goes on to develop a robust cyborgism, focusing specifically on the imbrication of the natural and artificial, she locates Derrida's perhaps most enmeshed curiosity in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. In his analysis of his cat staring up at his naked body, Derrida deftly dismembers the binaries between human, animal, and machine around the question of responsivity (and responsibility). While indebted to his analysis in important ways, Haraway nevertheless faults Derrida for not being curious enough about the curious cat to ask, "Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with this cat? Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered?"[12]

Although there is much to commend Haraway's challenge—and many still wish Derrida had written a treatise on cats—it misses something fundamental about the curiosity at work in deconstruction. Derrida writes *The Animal That Therefore I Am* not as a scientist observing his cat, nor as a novelist descending into the psyche of his cat, but rather as a philosopher (against philosophy) who writes within and at the limits of several material and theoretical texts. These include previous Cerisy conferences, Derrida's own oeuvre, Genesis 1-3, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Thus, deconstruction begins where it is, already inside a text, already in relationship to another, not over and against an object. To return to Gasché, deconstructive thinking is overtaken by the multi-valent resources that exist wherever it finds itself. In turn, it sets out to overtake every dominant discourse with the resistant resources within those very

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[11] Ibid., 4.

[12] Ibid., 22.

discourses. If there is any wonder—or curiosity—at the outset of deconstruction, then, it is "nothing less than an awareness of being overtaken" by language and a corresponding impetus "to catch unawares and overtake" through the instability of discursive words themselves.[13] Curiosity in deconstruction is clearly textual, even linguistic.

Unsurprisingly, it is Cixous, perhaps Derrida's most intimate interlocutor, who offers the most robust account of linguistic curiosity for Derrida and deconstruction.[14] In *Rootprints*, Cixous defines curiosity as "this urgency, this need to decipher what cannot be said, what is expressed otherwise than in verbal speech which nonetheless arouses the desire for words."[15] This curiosity for what is before language, which nevertheless exists in language, is something that both Cixous and Derrida share. They do so differently, however, given their respective homes in literature and philosophy. Derrida's curiosity aims at the "primitive scenes," she says, whereas Cixous' focuses on "symptoms" or "the phenomenon of an instant."[16] For both, however, this linguistic curiosity is a "vital curiosity." It is a curiosity that breathes and that writes. It is a curiosity that breathes writing and that writes out of breath.[17]

In *Insister*, Cixous offers concrete features of this vital, linguistic curiosity. It is an urgent need for the richness of language. It is the desire to trace the excesses of words, which escape

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[13] Gasché, *The Honor of Thinking*, 362.

[14] See Cixous, *Rootprints*, 55 (definition of curiosity), 88, and 90, as well as Cixous, *Insister of Jacques Derrida* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 14, 137, 141, and 177. For an example of Cixous' use of curiosity when not in direct reference to Derrida, see *Stigmata* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 17, 27, 65, 104, 105, and 138.

[15] Ibid., 56.

[16] Ibid., 90.

[17] Ibid. Compare the following passage from Cixous' *Insister*: "I open at random and at will any text at any page, certain as I am to find what for. What what for? Always at least two whats. Something is going to happen. I read you out of need, desire, vital curiosity [*une curiosité vitale*], together, for some glorious event of writing (for example the *glorious appeasement*). In order *to breathe*. When I read you, I breathe" (14). This is a curiosity between body and word, breath and machine.

even as they appear. It is an electric attraction to colloquialisms, to etymologies, and to word

plays. When Derrida and Cixous write to one another or for one another, they write between

philosophy and literature, as if in a dream space. According to Cixous, Derrida shares his dreams

with her, and she shares hers with him. These dreams include REM dreams, dreams of the to-

come, and written texts, which are perhaps their favorite sorts of dreams.[18] In this dream-like

writing of these dream-texts, curiosity plays a central role:

> […] a curiosity for the signifier, a greediness for tastetexts, an inclination to jokes, *Witz*, witticisms, all those verbal penchants that lead us toward every kind of language activity or sport. With a curiosity for sighs and hesitations. And a curiosity for the abundantly stocked idiomatic storehouse of French of which in any and every context we exchange a few specimens that the worms had not gotten into.[19]

The deconstructive curiosity so well marked and yet misdiagnosed by Haraway is now fully

captured by Cixous. It is a curiosity for what is beyond language, for what exists in language, but

particularly for what of the beyond exists in language such that language is overtaken by itself,

destabilized by itself. It is a curiosity for the reservoirs of signification. Derrida deconstructs

philosophy through linguistic curiosity.

Such a description of deconstructive curiosity sounds dangerously close, if not identical,

to a common mischaracterization of Derrida by some of his critics. As Jonathan Kendall

famously claims in his obituary for Derrida, deconstruction is mere language play, the

indulgence of a few private curiosities repeated ad infinitum across innumerable, though hardly

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[18] Cp. Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): "How can we finish a book, a dream" (98); "Difficult Joys," *The Body and the Text* (New York: Macmillan, 1991): "We should write as we dream" (22).

[19] Cixous, *Insister*, 137. As the French has it, "Avec une curiosité pour le signifiant, une gourmandize de tastetextes, une inclination pour la plaisanterie, le *Witz*, le mot d'espirt, tous ces penchants à verbes qui nous portent vers toutes les activités ou sports de la langue. Avec une curiosité pour les soupirs et pour les états d'âme. Et une curiosité pour les abondantes réserves idiomatique du français, dont nous échangeons à tout propos quelques spécimens pas piqués des vers" (91). See *Insister: à Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2006). It is important to disentangle Witz as practiced by Derrida and Witz as criticized by Derrida, for instance in *The Death Penalty I*, eds. Geoffrey Bennington, Marc Crépon, and Thomas Dutoit, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), e.g. 223.

illuminated, texts. Deconstruction is "slippery," "murky," and "contortionist," proceeding by way of "puns, rhymes, and enigmatic pronouncements.'"[20] Such a misconstrual, Nicole Anderson notes, has been given academic pedigree by the likes of John Searle and Richard Rorty.[21] In his review of Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction*, Searle describes the outcome of deconstruction in the following way: "What we think of as meaningful language is just a free play of signifiers or an endless process of grafting texts onto texts."[22] For Searle, this makes deconstruction not only a failed literary theory, but a failed philosophy. For Rorty, Derrida does indeed "giv[e] free rein" to his "fantasies" and "trains of association," but this is in fact the requirement of liberal ironism.[23] Where metaphysics has died, the only robust response is self-creation through contingent theorization.

Derrida's sympathizers, however, argue that his plays with words, genres, concepts, and arguments have more philosophical weight and rigor than Searle or Rorty would ever allow. Richard Klein, for instance, in his introduction to Derrida's interview entitled, "Positions," suggests that Derrida's performance of *differance* is no mere amusement. Rather, it is a means by which Derrida launches a substantial critique of philosophy. Klein argues that Derrida does so by inviting, upsetting, and then refashioning our curiosity. First, *differance* "invites the intrusion of our eager curiosity."[24] What will Derrida write? Will we finally access the truth? Then, it upsets our curiosity, so that "our curiosity—its misery or authenticity, its vulgarity or validity—[…] [is

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[20] Jonathan Kendall, "Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74," *New York Times*, October 10, 2004.

[21] Nicole Anderson, *Derrida: Ethics Under Erasure* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 7.

[22] John Searle, "The World Turned Upside Down," *The New York Review of Books* 30.16 (1983): 74-79.

[23] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 125. While Rorty does claim that curiosity is a characteristic of the liberal ironist, he does not align curiosity with linguistic freeplay.

[24] Richard Klein, "Prolegomena to Derrida," *Diacritics* 2.4 (1972): 29. This serves as Klein's introduction to Derrida's interview entitled, "Positions," published in *Diacritics* 2.4 (1972): 35-43.

itself] put into question;" "we find our own impulses, ourselves, unaccountably on stage."[25] In doing so, Derrida confounds our illusions of access, whether metaphysics, idealism, teleology, spiritualism, logocentrism, essentialism, or history. Finally, *differance* highlights this curiosity—about the limits of curiosity and the illusion of the secret—which we might call deconstructive curiosity. Klein characterizes it as a Nietzschean, "vulgar curiosity" to see beneath the philosopher's discourse, call forth what has been repressed, and honor a basic materialism.[26] Derrida thus curiously celebrates the inherent play of language in order to critique the foundations of philosophical curiosity.

In sum, scholars testify that Derrida is indeed driven by curiosity, may in fact harbor a deconstructive curiosity, and critically interrogates traditional philosophical curiosity. As it happens, Derrida himself bears witness to these claims. We begin here with his treatment of curiosity in *Beast and the Sovereign*.

Sovereign Curiosity

The Beast and the Sovereign was Derrida's final seminar, delivered at the École des hautes etudes en sciences socials (EHESS). As such, it rather appropriately offers a rumination on finitude, solitude, and the limits of human existence—whether plants and animals, on the one hand, or despots and figure heads, on the other. Beasts and sovereigns come to a head in Session 11, where Derrida undertakes an analysis of the kingly subject and creaturely object of curiosity. Although he opens with a promise to address not "this or that curiosity" but "just curiosity," as if it were some simple, unified thing, Derrida closes with a reflection on curiosity's inherent

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 30.

duplicity. It aims to observe and it tries to cure. It is at once scientific and therapeutic, dissecting

and confining.

> The culture of curiosity thus organizes the showing of curiosities for curious crowds, but
> the same culture of curiosity also had ambitions to *treat*, to care for, if not to cure. Or
> even to liberate by locking up differently. The *cura* of this curious curiosity always
> hesitated between two forms or two aims of what is always a *treatment* [*traitement*].[27]

As I marked above, *traitement* has a duplicity that is analogous to that of curiosity, referring to

careful treatment but also to coarse handling. The Latin *cura*, likewise, has two sides. Sometimes

it is used to mark attentive inquiry. At other times, it means administrative oversight. Derrida

argues here that pre- and post-revolutionary France offer a perfect demonstration of curiosity's

duplicity, ranging from animal autopsy under Louis XIV to zoological gardens and insane

asylums of the classical period.

In 1662, Louis XIV established the Menagerie of Versailles, where, under the auspices of

the Académie des Sciences, a variety of creatures were collected, studied, and dissected.[28]

Perhaps the most spectacular of these dissections occurred in 1681, when an elephant was carved

up before the court and Louis XIV himself.[29] This first, scientific curiosity is "a seeing, a

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[27] Derrida, *Beast and Sovereign I*, 299.

[28] Derrida refers throughout to Gustave Loisel's *Histoire des ménageries de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Doin et fils, 1912) and Ellenberger's "The Mental Hospital and the Zoological Garden." Interestingly, Ellenberger's text, which connects zoological gardens to asylums, was originally published in 1960, but one year before Michel Foucault's *History of Madness*, which connects asylums to prisons. While Foucault does not mention Ellenberger nor raise the issue of zoological gardens in *Madness*, Ellenberger was a longtime Foucault family friend. For more information on a Foucauldian interpretation of the Menagerie at Versailles, see Peter Sahlins' "The Royal Menageries of Louis XIV and the Civilizing Process," as well as Foucault's later mention of it in *Discipline and Punish*, 203.

[29] In "See Topsy 'Ride the Lightening': The Scopic Machinery of Death," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012), 74-94, Kelly Oliver enriches our understanding of this scene by analyzing a similar display of human sovereignty: the execution of animals. For the long and sordid history of such a practice, see Edward Payson Evan's *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906). Elissa Marder remarks, in "The Elephant and the Scaffold: A Response to Kelly Oliver" published in the same issue, that while the elephant serves to prop up human sovereignty, it is also a hybrid figure that stands inside and outside the law. Like its namesake in the idiom "an elephant in the room," this elephant "threatens the foundational stability and speculative limits of a given discursive conceptual field" (96). I argue that a non-sovereign exercise of curiosity aims to ferret

theatrical *theorein*, a gaze cast onto a visible ob-ject, a primarily *optical* experience that aims to touch with the eyes what falls under the hand, under the scalpel."[30] Like the pure *theorein* of the *eidos* of Western philosophy, this curiosity aims to reveal what is hidden through the exercise of a tactile sight that is at once disciplined and discursive. Skin is peeled from muscle, ligature, and bone. Joints are separated. Each cut unveils the nerves, arteries, and veins below. With this curiosity, things are best seen when they are least alive.

The French Revolution deemed the Menagerie of Versailles a spectacular waste of human wealth and animal life. Such collections, however, were not entirely obliterated. They survived in the form of 19th century zoos and asylums.[31] Here, a second, therapeutic curiosity appeared. This curiosity had "the ambition or the pretension to treat, to care for, to take great care (*cura*) of what it was enclosing and objectifying and cultivating."[32] There was, correspondingly, a marked improvement in living conditions for beasts, as well as "madmen." Such care aimed not to identify some hidden truth but rather to manage behavior. It confined rather than dissected. Humans and animals were restricted, constrained, and placed in cell-like structures. Some were strapped to beds or locked in pens. Floors were padded or covered in hay. With this curiosity, things are best treated when they are least free.

In this session, Derrida observes that both pre- and post-revolution France have a culture of curiosity. He further remarks that this culture shifts in its practice of curiosity from autopsy to asylum or from the scientific gaze to the therapeutic hand. Nevertheless, what remains

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out and highlight this duplicity.

[30] Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign I*, 277.

[31] Ibid, 297.

[32] Ibid., 300.

consistent, he suggests, is this culture of curiosity's intimate relationship to sovereignty.[33]

Whether curiosity constrains or confines, it does so to death. Scientific curiosity is a matter of the "objectifying to death of the object."[34] Therapeutic curiosity, on the other hand, "consists in enclosing, depriving of freedom of movement and, hence, of freedom itself, hence of power, or power to see, to know, to have beyond certain limits, and hence of sovereignty."[35] Sovereign subjects exercise scientific and therapeutic curiosities in such a way that they deprive their objects of sovereignty. Whether the curious gaze alienates beasts and "madmen" from itself or gathers them together, it dominates and subjectivizes them. In fact, it is Derrida's final suggestion that this subjectification, which is equally an objectification, is a form of castration. Quite literally, scientific and therapeutic curiosities have led to "the castration of domestic animals and the more or less virtual sterilization of the mentally ill."[36] Correspondingly, there is also something structural about sovereignty and sovereign curiosity that castrates its objects, makes them non-sovereign, non-human, even non-animal. As Lisa Guenther argues, the process of intensively confining domesticated animals is itself de-animalizing.[37]

Derrida briefly asserts that the elephant's dissection under Louis XIV must be read within the larger context of medical history, depictions of anatomy, and Cartesian thought. He specifically states that Rembrandt's famous painting, "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas

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[33] Grégoire Chamayou, in *Les corps vils* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), argues that a sovereign autopsic curiosity remains alive well into the 19th and 20th centuries in the form of experimentation on criminals and the criminalized.

[34] Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign I*, 274n30.

[35] Ibid., 300.

[36] Ibid., 304.

[37] Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), Chapter 6.

Tulp" (1632),[38] which captures the dissection of an executed criminal, must be taken into account. What Derrida does not mention here, however, is that this painting formed the subject of his tribute to Sarah Kofman. Kofman wrote a brief, posthumously published essay entitled "Conjuring Death: Remarks on 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp.'"[39] Derrida's memorial essay for Kofman, simply titled (or not titled) "…..,"[40] takes Rembrandt's painting and Kofman's commentary as its central texts. All three works—Rembrandt, Kofman, and Derrida's—offer a specific analysis of dissection, which then extends to a broader reflection on curiosity itself. Kofman in fact wrote a second, complementary essay on curiosity, entitled, "The Imposture of Beauty: The Uncanniness of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*."[41] In this instance, Kofman is concerned not with the cut of a scalpel but with a painting that captures—indeed, confines—Dorian. By analyzing both of Kofman's texts, through Derrida's memorial essay, I will argue that together they fill out the nature and the critique of sovereign curiosity.

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[38] Incidentally, in Cixous' *First Days of the Year* (1990; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), she mentions "The Anatomy Lesson" in a rich passage addressing guilt and innocence, dissection and care, death and life (70-72). Although I do not have the space to develop it here, a careful reading of this passage would no doubt enhance the present discussion, as well as our understanding of the connection between Cixous and Derrida on curiosity. I want to thank Michael Naas for this reference. Direct mentions of curiosity in *First Days of the Year* appear on pages 29, 76, 155, 163, and 170. I want to thank Michael Naas for this reference.

[39] Sarah Kofman, "Conjuring Death: Remarks on 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp,'" 1995, *Selected Writings*, eds. Thomas Albrecht, Georgia Albert, and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 237-244.

[40] Jacques Derrida, "…..," 1997, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 165-188. Although Derrida is clearly responding to Kofman's 1995 essay, Kofman may well be indirectly responding to Derrida's comments on curiosity, the secret, and conjuration in *The Gift of Death* (1992; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and *Specters of Marx The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993; New York: Routledge, 1994). In *Specters of Marx*, for instance, Derrida attributes curiosity to a deconstructive messianism: "Some, and I do not exclude myself, will find this despairing 'messianism' has a curious taste, a taste of death. It is true that this taste is above all a taste, a foretaste, and in essence it is curious. Curious of the very thing that it conjures—and that leaves something to be desired" (212). For a rich symposium on these co-reverberations, see *Parallax* 17.1 (2011).

[41] "The Imposture of Beauty: The Uncanniness of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*," published in *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 25-48. For a comparative reading between "Conjuring Death" and "The Imposture of Beauty," see Pleshette DeArmitt's "Conjuring Bodies: Kofman's Lesson on Death," *Parallax* 17.1 (2011): 4-17.

Rembrandt's commissioned piece depicts the annual public dissection, sponsored by Amsterdam's Guild of Surgeons and undertaken by Dr. Tulp, the guild's Praelector Anatomiae.[42] The event took place on January 31st, 1632, in Amsterdam's Anatomy Theatre (1639-1690), housed above a meat market in the convent chapel of St Margriet, patron saint of pregnant and laboring women.[43] The subject of dissection was a recently hanged recidivist thief, by turns referred to as Adrian Adriaenz or Aris Kindt, who was given a Christian burial as recompense for his posthumous service to God and country. Besides the guild members, the remaining guests were all notable persons, capable of paying a handsome price for their seat, a collection from which no doubt some of Dr. Tulp's own remuneration was taken. The anatomy demonstration was, thus, at least as much an indication of wealth as it was a display of knowledge. The irony of its participants' distinction above the indistinguishable cadaver is one to which we will return.

In "Conjuring Death," Kofman develops a critique of curiosity in its scientific, artistic, and public guises. She begins by identifying the supposed lesson of the "Anatomy Lesson." Dr. Tulp is surrounded by seven doctors; together, they compose the perfect body or corporation [*font corps*] of knowledge production and dissemination.[44] This medical body, however, is entirely disembodied: almost everything beneath the white ruff at the doctors' necks is shrouded in black. What is eminently visible is the cadaver. Lying nearly naked on a wooden table, with the vascular and skeletal structure of its left hand and forearm delicately splayed open, the hidden body appears doubly unveiled. This is Dr. Tulp's lesson: the secret of the human body revealed. Kofman suggests, however, that the lesson is not successful. Although the cadaver is

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[42] See William Heckscher, *Rembrandt's Anatomy of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp* (New York: New York University Press, 1958).

[43] Angela Vanhaelen, *Comic Print and Theatre in Early Modern Amsterdam: Gender, Childhood and the City* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 191n129.

[44] Kofman, "Conjuring Death," 237.

twice bared for all to see, every eye, without exception, is trained either on the anatomy book at

its feet[45] or on the audience. No one is looking at the object of dissection. The object of

dissection not only goes unnoticed, it also goes unnamed, lying there "in absolute anonymity."[46]

The book is much like the cadaver, in that it goes unnamed and only the tip of its left page is

displayed. It does, though, take the place of both natural revelation, on the one hand, and

spiritual revelation, on the other. As Kofman analyzes this multi-layered scene of visibility, thus,

she traces what such visibility makes invisible.

Kofman theorizes this duplicity in two ways. First, curiosity dissimulates in the very act

of disclosure. In their "intense curiosity" for the "secret," doctors conceal the body they unveil.

Moreover, they conduct this concealment, this making secret, secretly. "With the help of a

cadaver that is fully exposed," Kofman writes, "the cadaveresque that each living being […]

carries within itself comes to be hidden," however silently.[47] Second, curiosity represses in the

very act of calling forth. The noxious sight of death is redeemed, the odious made palatable, and

the intolerable tolerable. "The fascination is displaced," Kofman states, "the anxiety is repressed,

the intolerable made tolerable, from the sight of the cadaver to that of the book wide open at the

foot of the deceased."[48] Much like scientific curiosity, artistic and public curiosities also

dissimulate and repress. Rembrandt's curiosity veils and ameliorates its subject, such that "the

colored envelope of the painting makes tolerable the sight of the flesh."[49] Likewise, viewers in

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[45] In this analysis, Adriaenz' marbled feet stylistically prop up the textbook, directing the doctors' gaze away from the corpse. His feet, then, symbolize sovereign curiosity's techniques of conjuring away death.

[46] Ibid., 238.

[47] Ibid., 239.

[48] Ibid., 238.

[49] Ibid., 240.

the Amsterdam theatre, observers of Rembrandt's painting, and even the readers of Kofman's text all exercise a public curiosity that becomes blind to what it sees and buries what it unearths.

The role of the book in "The Anatomy Lesson," at least from Kofman's perspective, really cannot be fully appreciated without reference to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde's novel is a devastating tale. It begins with Dorian becoming bewitched by Lord Henry's hedonism. Such an intense desire to experience the limits of sensual pleasure leads Dorian to sever his young beautiful body from his aging, slowly corrupting soul. The latter is caught—or confined—in his friend Basil Halward's painting of him. As Dorian goes about his life, he obsessively returns to the painting, which lies upstairs, in a locked room, behind a thick curtain. He returns "more and more curious."[50] On Kofman's reading, Dorian's behavior can be explained as his futile attempt to conjure up, within his own face, an image of his mother's beauty and thereby conjure away the truth that she is not only dead, but she has been decomposing now for some time. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is therefore the story of a melancholic curiosity, a failure to mourn that inspires an obsessive, curious return.[51] The conjuration at work in this melancholic curiosity functions not through dissection this time but through confinement, a confinement whereby Dorian saves, cares for, preserves, and protects his own visage. While that visage was extracted by a rift between body and soul, a cut, a "knife thrust,"[52] it is now preserved, sealed off through enclosure—much like Dr. Tulp's book.

Throughout her ruminations on "The Anatomy Lesson" and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Kofman shows us not only that curiosity naturally saps life and freedom, but that curiosity structurally covers over what it investigates. Sovereign curiosity—whether scientific or

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[50] Kofman, "The Imposture of Beauty," 34.

[51] Ibid., 47.

[52] Ibid., 30.

therapeutic, dissecting or confining curiosity—ultimately is such that it bears on a split, a cut, a

severance and produces two costly confinements: one of pure illusion and one of de-

contextualized matter. In either case, curiosity functions on devastating, deadening, and

debilitating illusions. For Kofman, this is the double face of sovereign curiosity.

In his tribute to Kofman, Derrida is quick to grant her critique of curiosity. The doctors—

and, by extension Rembrandt and their various audiences—"triumph over death," as he explains,

by "trying to forget, repress, deny, or conjure away death."[53] He then elucidates Kofman's term

of choice here to describe the way death is called up only to be spirited away: conjuration.

> To 'conjure death,' as she says in her last text—which implies both to conjure it up and
> conjure it away, to summon ghosts and chase them away, always in the name of life, to
> summon and chase away, and thus to pursue the other as the other dead.[54]

Such conjuration, in its very denial of death through morbid curiosity, nevertheless 'pursues the

other as the other dead'—whether dead on a slab (like Adriaenz or the elephant), dead in an

anatomy book, dead in a painting (be it Rembrandt's or Basil Hayward's), or dead in a majestic

floor-length mirror.

Derrida elucidates this dynamic of conjuration with reference to the Eucharistic

displacement and disavowal of the body into something else. Both scientific and therapeutic

curiosities, dissecting and confining curiosities, save their objects by conjuring them away and

replacing them with an illusion.

> 'This is my body,' 'keep it in memory of me,' and so, 'replace it, in memory of me, with
> a book or discourse to be bound in hide or put into digital memory. Transfigure me into a
> corpus. So that there will no longer be any difference between the place of real presence
> or of the Eucharist and the great computerized library of knowledge.[55]

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[53] Derrida, "……," 176.

[54] Ibid., 171.

[55] Ibid., 169.

Derrida's alignment of conjuration with "the Eucharistic paradigm"[56] elucidates the curiosity we see in art and philosophy (Rembrandt and Kofman), but also in religion and the university (Christ's body and the library). These spheres of curiosity attempt to save, preserve, and know their objects by 'bloodless abstraction'[57] so that what feels alive—whether knowledge, beauty, or truth—is always already dead. This is the unique work of sovereign curiosity that Kofman uncovers and Derrida emphatically confirms.

Animal Curiosity

Is curiosity always and in each case sovereign? Could it be non-sovereign? Could it be animal? Derrida intimates as much when he opens *Beast and the Sovereign I*, Session 11, with a somewhat cryptic remark that curiosity is a "fine word," a "very fine verbal animal."[58] Derrida's use of the word *animot* is well known.[59] The term marks the way our concept of 'animal' is embedded in logocentric commitments. By characterizing *curiosité* here as an animal, even a verbal animal, Derrida makes the opposite move. He indicates not that animality is a linguistic construct but that language is deeply animal. What might this mean? This animal of a word, which Derrida uses throughout the session to mark sovereign power, is itself not sovereign. It moves from one meaning to another, from one practice to another, across shifts and slips of sense, as if it were slivering or sometimes prancing. It is overtaken by its own inner resources, by *cura*. For Derrida, this is true of *curiosité* but of all words more generally. Here, I contend that

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[56] The Eucharist, of course, is the sacrament whereby bread and wine take the place of the body and blood of Christ. Over time, the New Testament displaced the Eucharist as the primary means of commemoration. Believers come to recall, to perceive, and to increasingly meet Christ further and further from his flesh.

[57] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* (1881; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), §105.

[58] We are "always in fine messes [*beaux drames*]" because of curiosity (Cixous, *Rootprints*, 56), this fine word [*un trés beau mot*], this "very fine verbal animal [*un bel animal verbal*]" (Derrida, *Beast and Sovereign I*, 276).

[59] *Animot* is neologism. It is a homonym of *animaux* and conjoins the French *animal* and *mot* (meaning 'word').

curiosity is not only an animal word—even a beast of a word—but that this word also marks a critical philosophical practice of attending to the fundamentally animal nature of language. Specifically, I will argue that this verbal animal 'curiosity' can refer to a non-sovereign curiosity, an animal curiosity.

In philosophical history, curiosity is typically seen as either animal or human, properly appetitive or ratiocinative. As I have already indicated, Augustine set the tone for the medieval period when, in the *Confessions*, he defines curiosity as an animal appetite, specifically a lust of the eyes that leaves one epistemically and spiritually set adrift from God.[60] Hobbes prefaced the modern period and even today when, in the *Leviathan*, he argued, by contrast, that curiosity is essentially a rational faculty, an interested inquiry into causation that separates humans from animals.[61] Resisting this basic opposition, Derrida troubles the alignments of curiosity with either humans or animals—and in fact multiples his alignments with both. Given that I have emphasized his discussion of Louis XIV, I will turn here to his discussion of animals.

Scholars have developed at length the way in which Derrida deconstructs animality and humanity. Of particular interest for this project, Len Lawlor, in *This is Not Sufficient*, traces that deconstruction through the question. Western thought typically denies animals the ability to question and to think, to answer and to name, but it grants those abilities to humans.[62] We have and they have not.[63] Upon consideration, however, humans cannot ask a question either. True questions, questions worthy of the name, are unconditional questions, questions that are

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[60] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.35.

[61] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vi.35.

[62] Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 9.

[63] Ibid., 67.

completely unreserved and open to what might come unannounced and unexpected. Irrespective of our personal limitations and investments, such questions are structurally impossible. We humans, then, like the animals, fail to question.[64] This does not mean that there is no difference between a human and an animal but that both share a structural failure. The response to this failure ought to be, as Penelope Deutscher puts it, an "ethics of negotiation," one that aims to cultivate "a patient, attentive, negotiating relationship to the ways in which we fail the other."[65]

Such an ethics, or a "deconstructive responsibility,"[66] should not be undertaken, as one might more easily believe, by mimicking animal vulnerability in our writing and thinking,[67] but rather by attending to that very same vulnerability shared between texts and creatures, thoughts and beasts. After all, as Cixous says, "There is animal trace, animals write."[68] What does this attentiveness look like? Lawlor thinks of it as writing like a cat: "when [Derrida] is writing *aporias*, he most resembles a cat pacing back and forth before a door, waiting to be let out or to be let in."[69] David Krell, by contrast, imagines writing like a Bernese Mountain dog. Referring to the German verb *sinnen*, meaning to thoughtfully meditate, Krell remarks that such work "meditates by sniffing, pursuing a scent, following a trace left in the ice of high mountains."[70]

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[64] Ibid., 77.

[65] Penelope Deutscher, *How to Read Derrida* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 64 and 82.

[66] Ibid., 84.

[67] Kelly Oliver's argument for animal pedagogy—or "the ways in which animals […] teach us how to be human"— resembles this approach. See Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 5.

[68] Hélène Cixous, "Jacques Derrida: Co-Responding Voix You," *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 43. As quoted in Anne Emmanuelle Berger and Marta Segarra, "Introduction," *Demenageries: Thinking (of) Animals After Derrida* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 4.

[69] Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 78.

[70] David Farrell Krell, *Derrida and Our Animal Others* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 164. Time

For Anne Berger and Marta Segarra, it means to write scratching out or grafting new meanings "by nails or claws."[71] Whatever animal or animal activity it resembles, Lawlor insists that this writing uses animal techniques of waiting, following, carrying, and 'not-thinking.'[72] Together, such writing practices allow the development of what he calls 'weak thought'—the sort that negotiates with its own vulnerability. What Derrida indicates is that while we can and should do this with language, this is also what language more or less just does. It misses, redraws, and fires again. It slips and it slips up.

Writing and thinking in a way that honors that slippage is not just animal or ethical. It is inherently philosophical. In "Derrida's Flair (For the Animals to Follow…),"[73] Michael Naas explores the confluence between Derrida's philosophical interest in the animal and his animal-like methodology in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Naas suggests that just as the wolf or the hound[74] repeatedly sniffs out or "picks up the scent" of another animal,[75] Derrida has a nose for the work and play of words.

> […it is] a flair for language, true, but also for argument, and for the ways in which philosophical argument must always be tracked through the thickets of language; and

would be well-spent investigating the mechanics and kinesthetics of sniffing and tracking a scent. What is the logic of this movement?

[71] Berger and Segarra, "Introduction," *Demenageries*, 10. Berger and Segarra are drawing on Derrida's play with the *coupe de greffe* and *coup de griffe* in *The Monolingualism of the Other: Or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1996; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 66. Essays of particular interest in this collection include Marie-Dominique Garnier, "Animal Writes: Derrida's *Que Donc* and Other Tails" (23-40) and James Siegel, "Tout Autre est Tout Autre" (213-244). Garnier argues that Derrida's heavy reliance on "k" sounds throughout *The Animal That Therefore I Am* relies on the common French association of this sound with what is foreign, uncouth, imperfectly naturalized, and animal; this would arguably include *curiosité*. As for James Sieger, he offers a delightful analysis of the "wholly other" as incorporating an exchange of gazes, rather than a single fetishizing one.

[72] Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient*, 79-96.

[73] Michael Naas, "Derrida's Flair (For the Animals to Follow…)," *Research in Phenomenology* 40 (2010): 219-242.

[74] While Naas draws the wolf, ferret, and hound from Derrida, scientifically speaking the bear, the shark, and the moth are more sensitive to smell. What would the style of deconstruction look like through these latter figures?

[75] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 55.

claims, no matter however universal or abstract, must always be followed, ferreted out, and picked apart through the idioms of particular languages, and in his case, for the most part, the French language.[76]

In the Western tradition, curiosity is often associated with the practice of following a scent. For Plutarch, the everyman or the busybody—much like the journalist of today—has a nose for news.[77] Derrida has a nose not for the new but for 'the already' that disrupts what is. He has his nose to the ground, ferreting out the traces of concepts, arguments, and systems. His animal curiosity is fundamentally philosophical. [78]

If it is true that deconstruction begins (and it is always just beginning) with a curiosity at the limit of both language and philosophy, and if that curiosity, as well as those very limits, are *animal* in some meaningful way, then surely this animal curiosity must be traceable throughout the philosophical moves of *Beast and the Sovereign I*, especially Session 11. How is a philosophical analysis of sovereign curiosity undertaken there through the practice of animal curiosity? Consider the session's four major moves:

1. *Figurative Language*: With figurative language and a dash of hyperbole, Derrida opens the session by introducing curiosity: this "verbal animal," a "very fine verbal animal." Like a race horse or a show dog, it waits at the gate, chomping at the bit, an outstanding specimen of its kind. This is its show, a moment in which it can demonstrate its many fine capacities.

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[76] Naas, "Derrida's Flair," 219.

[77] See, for instance, Plutarch, "On the Busybody," 520e. In the *Confessions*, Augustine speaks of curiosity catapulting us toward the hunt. This association is again reprised in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §45.

[78] Grégoire Chamayou, again, would caution us here by marking that sovereign power has always and still expresses itself through hunts, especially the manhunt. Not incidentally, menageries were often the source of animals for royal hunts. See *Les Chasses à l'homme* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2010).

2. *Etymology*: Having introduced us to this animal, Derrida draws on the storehouses of

    etymology, especially from *cura* and *traitement*, to illuminate curiosity's already

    bifurcated nature or the two-headedness of this monster. First, he identifies scientific

    and therapeutic curiosity. In thus bisecting *cura*, however, Derrida is not copying

    Louis XIV's dissection of the elephant, as though to uncover the truth,[79] but rather he

    does so to unsteady this division and then suggest we build a third sense precisely on

    the slippage between them.[80]

3. *Polyptotons*: Before exploring that third sense, Derrida marks the structure of

    sovereignty inherent in both scientific and therapeutic curiosity. He does this through

    the use of polyptotons. He states, for instance, that dissection, as a kind of autopsy, is

    both autoptic and necropsic or is exercised through the gaze and on the corpse.[81]

    Derrida thus indicates that sovereign power is as visual as it is tactile. He then

    compounds his account by stating that a sovereign's *savoir* is equally his *pouvoir*,

    voir, and *avoir*—that is, his knowledge is also his power, his gaze, and his grip.[82]

    Beneath the visual and tactile effects of scientific and therapeutic curiosity, there lies

    the fountainhead of sovereign power: knowledge.

4. *Homonym*: Finally, Derrida imagines another form of knowing, a non-sovereign

    knowing. He does so through the homonym *pas/pas*, meaning both "not" and "step"

    in French. This other knowing, fueled by a third curiosity, lifts its paw or suspends

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[79] Derrida's use of etymology should not be understood as a reflection of etymologism, which, à la Heidegger, would approach the root or 'original meaning' of words as the bearer of some final truth.

[80] Derrida, *Beast and Sovereign I*, 297.

[81] Ibid., 296 and 287.

[82] Derrida also offers a sub-argument by means of analogy, arguing that an analysis of curiosity permits us to see an "analogy" between different sovereignties, whether in zoological gardens or insane asylums (281).

itself on a regular basis so as to negate the steady progression of sovereign

knowledge.[83] Such curiosity does not intrepidly divide or confine. Instead, it tries and

tests; it slips and stretches. It illuminates, perhaps.[84]

Each major step in the philosophical analysis of Session 11, therefore, is instigated by an animal-

linguistic curiosity. Derrida takes his argumentative cues from the fault lines of French and dares

to probe their vulnerability. It is in this sense that Derrida actually does ask and develop an

answer to: what is a cat's curiosity? It is not a sovereign curiosity (like the scientific or the

therapeutic), but an animal-linguistic curiosity, that tracks the scent of words and suspends its

paw. It is a deconstructive curiosity which, rather than opposing sovereign curiosity, slips

through its clutches. Such a third curiosity challenges not only the illusion of a clean dissection

or safe confinement, the definitiveness of a position or the stability of an opposition, but it also

explores new, untested concepts and lines of argumentation. Before elaborating upon this

eminently critical curiosity, I want to explore further the limits of its animality.

Limit Cases: God and the Herb of the Field

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida attributes curiosity to three figures: Derrida

himself, his cat, and God.[85] In so doing, he indirectly challenges the dominant cultural tradition

of associating curiosity with the everyman rather than the philosopher, with women rather than

men, with the human rather than the animal, and with Lucifer rather than God. In each case, he

utilizes Augustine and Heidegger's shorthand for curiosity: to see "just to see." As I have

marked, for Augustine, curiosity "pries into objects […] for trial's sake," "not to engage itself in

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[83] Ibid., 278-279.

[84] For more on the role of 'perhaps' in deconstruction, see John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[85] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* , 4, 16-17, and 33.

the trouble they bring;" while, for Heidegger, curiosity "takes care to see not in order to understand […] but only in order to see."[86] In this section, I will argue that both divine curiosity and plant curiosity in Derrida's work enhance our understanding of what I have up to this point called animal or linguistic curiosity. In concert with the double sense of *flair*, divine curiosity follows the scent of possibility, while plant curiosity disseminates and embellishes sense. Each, in its own way, is a form of inquiry that is precisely non-sovereign and in fact inimical to sovereignty.

Let us begin with the third curious figure: God. In the Judeao-Christian tradition, to which Derrida is so indebted, God is considered precisely not curious because God is all knowing. If God knows everything, all of God's curiosity has been satisfied. In fact, insofar as God is eternally omniscient, God's knowledge has never satisfied some prior lack. God has never been curious. This understanding, of course, has created innumerable problems for philosophers of religion who attempt to safeguard human freedom in the face of divine omniscience.[87] Derrida, however, attributes curiosity to God and therefore a certain ignorance of precisely what will happen, what is going to happen, at the hands of human caprice.

Derrida begins by turning to the creation story, in which God brings the animals before Adam "in order to see" what Adam would call them. I quote the King James Version (Derrida the Dhormes and Chouraqui):

> And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all the cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. (Genesis 2:19-20)

Derrida comments on this passage as follows:

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[86] Augustine, *Confessions,* X.35, 177; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 161.

[87] See, for example, Keith Yandell's *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Chapter 14.

> This 'in order to see' marks at the same time the infinite right of inspection of an all-powerful God and the finitude of a God who doesn't know what is going to happen to him with language. And with names […] This powerful yet deprived 'in order to see' that is God's [….] God's exposure to surprise, to the event […] has always made me dizzy.[88]

Derrida is dizzy at the thought of God's curiosity. This is not only because it suggests there are things God does not know but more troublingly that God may very well sin or become otherwise than who he is.

In Biblical theology, Eve's curiosity led to the first sin: eating from the tree of good and evil. Eve wished to know what she ought not to know. She wished to become other than who she was. Like Eve, Pandora was insatiably curious. She opened the box long enough for every evil to escape, but all hope remained inside. Both remind us that knowing more than befits our station will endanger our very existence.[89]

Given Eve's legacy, Derrida's choice to attribute curiosity to God in the Garden of Eden is highly loaded. God of course has the prerogative to know everything, but who is to say what the surprise or the event might do to affect God himself? How might God as God be put at risk by the unknown? Is God, like Eve, sinning? If to sin is to live beyond one's station then yes, God is acting unethically insofar as he is subjecting himself to finite risk, in the face of Adam's voice, to be named and to be called to respond. If, however, to sin is to disrespect other lives and leave them no chance of response, then yes again, God is acting unethically. For, in exercising his right of infinite inspection, God is manipulating creatures as play-things. Here, in microcosm, we see the divide between the two curiosities to be found in Derrida's work. The one is sovereign, unresponsive, before the face of the other, while the second is animal, responsive and ready to

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[88] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 17.

[89] To Eve and Pandora we can add Blue Beard's wife, who was forbidden to open a secret cabinet. When she did, their idyllic life was destroyed by knowledge of his true past. See Charles Perrault's *Contes* (Lausanne: Éditions Rencontre, 1963), 123. Thanks to Elissa Marder for this reference.

respond to the other. The divine curiosity of infinite inspection is both scientific and therapeutic. It aims to dissect the animal taxonomy by marking out each by its own name. It also aims to confine the animals, whether to their own proper group or together under the shepherding of Adam. But the divine curiosity that can be surprised by a name or by another's speech is a linguistic curiosity. It flourishes in the infinite abyss between words, between things, or between words and things.

Derrida grants that the divine 'just to see' and the feline 'just to see,' which put into question precisely who or what we assume is capable of answering or in fact of asking a question,[90] reminds him of *Alice in Wonderland*.[91] While on the outside, Alice is convinced creatures cannot speak or hold a conversation, she quickly becomes aware, after falling down the rabbit hole, that she is wrong. There, she speaks with many animals, monsters, insects, and objects, but also "the garden of live flowers"—the tiger lily, the rose, the violet, the daisies, the larkspur, and the willow tree. It is to plants, then, to which we now turn.

While much attention has already been paid to Derrida's work on the animal question,[92] some has also been paid to his thought on plants. Take, for example, Elaine Miller's *The Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* and Michael Marder's more recent *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*.[93] In her attention to 19th

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[90] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 10: "We shall discover in the follow-through the question of the question, that which beings by wondering what to respond means."

[91] Ibid., 7-9. Incidentally, in the words of Tiger-lily, Lewis Carroll explains why we have never thought of plants as responding: "In most gardens, they make the beds too soft—so that the flowers are always asleep." See *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 136.

[92] See especially Lawlor *This is Not Sufficient* and Krell's *Derrida and Our Animal Others*, but also Oliver's *Animal Lessons*.

[93] Elaine Miller, *The Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002) and Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

century German philosophy, Miller identifies two traditions of subjectivity. The first theorizes the subject as animal and therefore individuated; the second interprets the subject as plantlike or vegetal and therefore interdependent, vulnerable, and changeable. Miller argues that the latter thread is taken up productively in 20th century French philosophy by figures like Derrida, Deleuze, and Irigaray. Derrida practices philosophy as a vegetal dissemination rather than animal insemination. "A disseminating reading of texts," Miller writes, "recognizes that interpretation is always productive or fecund rather than simply investigative and analytical. It resists totalization and subverts any attempt to master a reading definitively."[94] This practice of plantlike thinking, Miller ultimately argues, does justice to a form of feminine subjectivity previously occluded in philosophy.

Marder builds on Miller's characterization of plantlike thinking as resistant to totalization and instrumentality. He draws, however, not on 19th century German philosophy, inflected with feminist critique, but on the 20th and 21st century traditions of hermeneutical phenomenology, deconstruction, and "weak thought." These three traditions offer "an ethical manner of thinking that permits the entity 'thought through' to thrive (1) in the way it manifests itself and relates to the world, (2) in its own self-ruination and singularity, and (3) in its essentially incomplete hold on existence,"[95] respectively. Adding to an analysis of Derridean dissemination, Marder also addresses Derrida's critique of metaphysics, originary violence, the thing itself, sexual difference, as well as his theory of the remainder, iterability, and afterlives. Marder attends closely to *Glas*, where it is Derrida's aim to diagnose the sovereign logic of reproduction in

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[94] Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, 183. Miller then cites Derrida's *Dissemination* (1972; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), where he calls dissemination a resistance to the "effacement of seminal difference through which the leftoverness of the outwork gets internalized and domesticated into the ontotheology of the great Book" (53).

[95] Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 7.

Hegel and to offer, through Genet, an account of non-sovereign replication. The flower is a figure for the latter. Ultimately, Marder argues, there are unforeseen resources here not only to continue post-metaphysical philosophy but also to address the environmental crisis of our times.

In both Miller and Marder's work, the plant is used as a deconstructive figure that resists the structure of sovereignty and, in that sense, falls on the side of animality. For Derrida, however, nothing is essentially sovereign. Sovereignty itself is not pure, although it is built on the illusion of purity. Derrida opens Session 8 of *Beast and the Sovereign I* with the provocative question: "The phallus, I mean the *phallos*, is it proper to man?"[96] He then turns to analyze the phallus' simultaneous alignment with sovereignty, animality, and vegetal existence. Take, for example, La Fontaine's "The Wolf and the Lamb," which depicts sovereignty in an animal guise. In his dedication of the story to Louis XIV's young son, La Fontaine writes, "It is a highly agreeable spectacle for the universe to see growing thus a young plant that will one day cover with its shade so many people and nations."[97] The plant, Derrida muses, particularly in the form of a tree, is paradigmatically phallic, erect, and seemingly sovereign. It symbolizes the power of surveillance, the power to see, to observe, and to know, all so well modeled by Louis XIV for his son.[98] Indeed, the flower, as Derrida writes in *Glas*, is "*coupable*."[99] It is cuttable, culpable, and eminently castrateable, just like any other form of phallic life. But it is not only so. The plant is also a deconstructive figure that resists sovereignty and in that sense falls on the side of animality.

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[96] Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign I*, 206.

[97] Ibid., 212.

[98] Ibid., 215.

[99] Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (1974; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 14, 20.

In *Finitude's Score*, Avital Ronell recalls Derrida's seminar at Irvine in 1992.[100] Derrida

apparently argued that animals are not the only non-human beings capable of expressing

curiosity. In the midst of discussing "the modalities of questioning and the difference between

Neugier [curiosity] and *Sorge* [care] in Heidegger's *Being and Time*,"[101] he suggested plants can

be curious as well. To quote Ronell:

> According to Heidegger, an animal cannot ask questions because it does not experience death. Derrida, in response, has suggested that there are, however, acts of questioning which do not necessarily take recourse to discursivity. The consequences of this assertion are not inconsiderable, for this would mean that acts of questioning are not necessarily uniquely human. Plants may be questioning, too. Every living being is equipped for receiving information. Every living being is capable of investigation, looking for something, one doesn't always know what. Vegetal beings show curiosity: a plant or a root probes.[102]

Plants can question, investigate, look for, probe, receive information and ultimately be curious.

This curiosity, moreover, is non-discursive—although, it is still patterned after the linguistic

model. Ronell indicates that Derrida's deconstruction of the human must logically extend

curiosity not merely to animals but also to plants. While this makes structural sense, the phrase

'plant curiosity' remains somewhat vague.

Unfortunately, "The Secret" lectures have yet to be released. In their absence, it is

possible to draw resources from Miller and Marder by which to understand the theoretical

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[100] These lectures, entitled "The Secret," are housed at the University of California, Irvine's Special Collections unit, Collection #: MS-C01, Box: Folder: 21:4-9, "Répondre du Sécret," 12 sessions given from 13 Nov to 8 April, 1991-1992, 6 folders. Derrida is said to have taught this seminar at the EHESS, at UCI, and possibly at New York University.

[101] Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 329n4.

[102] Ibid., 3-4. Ronell continues: "This supplement of indeterminacy says no more than that the human inability to question is radically different from animal inability. These observations, as peculiar as they may seem, widen the scope of what it means genuinely to question without taking refuge in the humanist arrogance of man which has effectively destroyed the world. The thought that 'man' is the questioning animal has long been abandoned; what has to be faced now is a history of the human inability to question."

potential of 'plant curiosity.' These resources may then be confirmed and extended through a brief foray into *Glas*.

In imagining what plant curiosity might mean, Miller takes cues from the disseminative movement of the plant's seeds.[103] For her, plant dissemination occurs not merely when seeds are dispersed in the wind or water, but also when they are carried by insects, animals, and humans. In *Glas*, Derrida suggests that plants reject the reproductive virginity, by which the sovereign father merely copies himself. Rather, plants practice *verginity*. Poetically, he muses on the "theft of flowers, their flight in(to the) place of verginity. To steal the keys, to fly into pieces, to splatter, peal of bells."[104] In this movement, there is no pure plant-place or process left intact. Rather, plant dissemination is itself a giant question. Marder turns from the seed to the actual flower. In order for a flower to raise its head, it must break open. This signifies the simultaneous erection and dehiscence that constitutes plant life.[105] Derrida confirms this simultaneity in *Glas* and adds its inverse: "the tissue ceaselessly reforms itself around the incision."[106] For a plant, growth will always mean a cut or break, just as much as a cut or break will always be covered again by growth. Texts work in the same way. To write like a plant is to follow the splitting of words and to resist a clean split between paragraphs by writing *paraphs* for example, marginal

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[103] Cp. Claudette Sartilliot's "Herbarium, Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers," *Diacritics* 18.4 (1988): 68-81: "The botanical model of the flower links deconstruction and dissemination in the sense that neither opposes signification or production (of meaning) but proposes an extravagant reading which reveals the writing process as providing an excess of syntax over semantics, a waste, a squandering of seeds (and semes) out of which meaning is eventually derived" (72).

[104] Derrida, *Glas*, 17.

[105] Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 115. He then turns his attention to the leaf, as an endless iteration, and to the whole plant itself as a non-discursive gesture or language (110 and 74-75). When plants reach or bend toward the light, they may well feel their way along, like an animal sniffs or a human tests something out. Plants, in this sense, are curious.

[106] Derrida, *Glas*, 20-21 and 25.

abbreviations or cuts from the paragraph placed to one side.[107] Plant curiosity, then, is not only

the interest in tracking seeds or semes, but the practice of letting language flower and, in that

sense, letting it deconstruct itself.[108]

      Derrida's third, deconstructive form of curiosity is at least animal—and, perhaps,

fundamentally animal. But it also has other faces throughout Derrida's work. As we have seen,

curiosity appears in plants and in the figure of God, well beyond its typical location in either

animals or humans. And although plants, animals, humans, and God, as figures, may all be

aligned with sovereign power—and, by extension, scientific and therapeutic curiosity—Derrida

has provided intriguing resources by which to read these figures differently. In a very real sense,

curious plants and a curious God are animal-like insofar as they oppose specific illusions of

sovereignty like absolute knowledge and independence, pure reason, and teleological inquiry. It

is for this reason they can, perhaps counter-intuitively, serve as models of animal curiosity.

Moreover, curious plants and a curious God allow us to understand this animal curiosity in new

ways, as, for example, essayistic, vertiginous, and non-discursively inquisitive.

      Fundamentally, animal curiosity is a technique of deconstruction. It interrogates the

limits of concepts, positional oppositions, and argumentative structures. It highlights the inherent

instability of these critical elements and negotiates with that vulnerability. It is this criticality to

which we now turn in closing.

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[107] Ibid., 3, 5, 32, and 25.

[108] Ibid., 56: "The non-species of a writing, quasi-anonymous, without signature. A writing that will never return, by some proper or circular course, to its own place. For this writing has no place and its non-place has no determinable contour."

Philosophical Curiosity

To really understand how animal curiosity disrupts sovereign curiosity at the level of philosophy, we must return to Kofman and to Derrida's reading of Kofman. There, we can trace a re-imagination of philosophy, contra philosophy, through the pathways of curiosity.[109]

Kofman certainly "points a finger" at the doctors, "protests" this movement, and "denounc[es] them to some extent."[110] While Derrida joins in the protest, he is interested in identifying the limits of Kofman's denunciation. While at one level, he argues, Kofman critiques curiosity, at another, deeper level, she practices and therefore affirms it. Kofman has written an essay. Like the doctors of Amsterdam, she too has displaced the body with the book. She, too, has swapped one corpus for another. In fact, upon her death, she left a large body of work. Derrida takes a moment to reflect on Kofman's corpus, pinpointing her texts on Nietzsche and Freud as exemplary. He remarks how Kofman displaces the body on the very same three registers of her critique. First, as if inspired by scientific curiosity, Kofman writes analytically. She analyzes books like Dr. Tulp dissects bodies, reading them "inside and out," as if her interpretations were "operations, experiences or experiments."[111] Second, as if driven by artistic curiosity, Kofman writes revealingly. She interrogates philosophical questions like Rembrandt paints a figure, turning her lucidity, her "ray of living light," on a variety of issues, including death, melancholia, and sexuality.[112] Third, in step with a long tradition of observations,

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[109] For both Kofman and Derrida, this re-imagination of philosophy occurs in conjunction with the endorsement of psychoanalytic practice. Philosophy, in this sense, can be thought as a kind of therapy, a sort of therapy inconsistent with therapeutic confinement described above. See Mary Beth Mader, "Suffering Contradiction: Kofman on Nietzsche's Critique of Logic," *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 87-96.

[110] Derrida, "…..," 180 and 169.

[111] Ibid., 173.

[112] Ibid., 173. Rembrandt, of course, is known for his use of light and shadow.

interpretations, and commentaries, she has written speculatively or even scopophilically. Like the auditing public, Kofman summons Nietzsche and Freud "to appear and [to] speak."[113] In these ways, Kofman offers a bookish replacement for the real cadaver, the real painting, even the real audience.[114] What does it mean that "Conjuring Death" itself conjures death?[115] What does it mean for Kofman to perform the very thing she critiques? What really is her position on curiosity?[116]

Kofman performs her curiosity through a particular medium and by a particular method. Her medium is philosophical reading and writing. Through philosophy, Kofman constructs other bodies, another form of a corpus. In doing so, Derrida argues, she does not ultimately denounce the movement whereby the body is displaced. Rather, she affirms philosophical curiosity and the knowledge it produces.

> She ends up affirming the triumph of life […] not through the relinquishing of a knowledge of death, but, on the contrary, through an active interpretation that renounces neither knowledge nor the knowledge of knowledge, that is to say, the knowledge of the role that occultation or repression might still play in certain forms of knowledge. Whence the deployment of so many types of knowledge, the rigorous analysis of an intersemiotic and intertextual imbrication of speech, writing, and the silence of the body, of the sacred book and the book of science, book and painting, in more than one corpus.[117]

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[113] Ibid., 173.

[114] Even if she had written a biography of Adrian Adriaenz or a history of criminal experimentation, she would have participated in the work of conjuration.

[115] Derrida will even argue that by authoring an essay that both exists outside her and outlives her, Kofman has literally and doubly conjured her own death.

[116] Kofman is certainly indebted to Freud for her sense of curiosity's involvement in philosophy, art, and sex. Kofman begins *Camera Obscura* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) with a rumination on Nietzsche and Leonardo da Vinci on curiosity (0, 29-34). She also addresses Freud's reading of curiosity and Leonardo in *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 166. Kofman speaks of an expressly sexual curiosity in a scene of her mother's nakedness in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 55. This could be compared to her discussion of sexual curiosity in *The Enigma of Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 9, 40, and 197. For her reading of Socrates as curious, see *Socrates: Fictions of a Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 63, cp. 152.

[117] Ibid., 181.

As Derrida observes, Kofman illuminates the dance whereby many, many forms of bodies are placing and displacing one another on the scene of life. To participate in this dance is as much an affirmation of life as it is a triumph over death. This affirmation, however, must be qualified. It is "without resurrection or redemption, without any glorious body."[118] Kofman does not participate in the Eucharistic movement whereby the body's displacement is erased through its glorification. Hers is a non-salvific philosophical method that precisely calls attention to the conjuring trick rather than trying to pass it off as real.

Derrida's reading of Kofman demonstrates his sense that there is a non-sovereign form of curiosity that is not only eminently linguistic (expressed in reading and writing) or even animal (bedeviling the ultimate human act of science), but is thoroughly philosophical. Such curiosity looks behind the curtain, calling awkward and often highly disruptive attention to the mechanics whereby illusions are made and sustained. If, in any of its guises, sovereign curiosity feigns interest in the other, but ultimately refuses to face that other, this non-sovereign form of curiosity opens onto the other. It is responsive. It refuses to function within the economy of repression. For this reason, it is deeply affirmative. Of course, the risk of uncovering the conjuration of death and affirming the instabilities of life is that both death and life newly demand our committed and constant negotiation. What is philosophy if it is not this work? Derrida might answer that traditional philosophy has in fact not grappled with life/death, but surreptitiously denied both.

For Plato, and for much of Western philosophy after him, philosophy begins in wonder: "this wondering […] is where philosophy begins and nowhere else."[119] Such wonder is injected

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[118] Ibid.

[119] Plato, *Theatetus* 155d.

with vertigo in the face of aporia and perhaps with pain at the hands of a sharp question. Thereafter, philosophy proceeds through dissection, or *diaeresis*, and ultimately develops into a form of self-care, or *epimeleia heautou*. *Diaeresis* is a particular form of philosophical dissection, where a definition is developed through extended bipartite analysis. Plato defines both the sophist and the statesmen in this manner, in his eponymously titled dialogues. This involves repeatedly cutting in two, grabbing hold of what falls to the right of the incision, and cutting again.[120] It is in this manner that true essence is revealed. *Epimeleia heautou* is the therapeutic application of this scientific dissection to a philosophical life. As we see so well in the *Apology*, relentless inquiry forms the backbone of self-care. The one who heeds the Delphic Oracle and cultivates themselves through an examined life—only this one is qualified to care for the city and lead it into its future.[121] For Plato, there is an organic progression from the wonder-inducing questions, through the self-examination of dissection, to a politically viable life of care.

Insofar as scientific curiosity is related to *diaeresis* and therapeutic curiosity to *epimeleia heautou*, the reading of Derrida's analysis undertaken so far would indicate that wonder—properly philosophical wonder—is intimately related to sovereignty. Such an indication supports Gasché's argument. If Derrida resists sovereign curiosity, it is only a matter of consistency to resist wonder as well. But philosophy, especially for Plato, does not only proceed by way of wonder, dissection, and self-care. It also proceeds, however inadvertently or tortuously, through semiotic language. Despite Plato's vituperous rejection of rhetoric in the *Ion* and *Republic*, we see that his dialogues follow not merely reason, but shifts and slips of sense, not only assertion

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[120] Plato, *Sophist*, 264e; cp. 253d-e. The subject of the *Statesman* is identified in the same manner; see 258b-266e in Plato, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1925).

[121] Plato, *Apology*, 36c, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1914); cp. *Alcibiades* I 124b and 129a.

but humor and overall a real stylistic craft.[122] Derrida seems to begin in this margin, this

elsewhere, this space in which words overtake and carry you along into recesses that rupture any

stable sense meaning or practice of inquiry. In fact, just as Derrida's critique of sovereignty

supports his overall rejection of metaphysics, his critique of scientific and therapeutic curiosity

involves a re-imagination of philosophy. He demands that philosophy be done in another way

and by other means.

One technique Derrida recommends for doing philosophy differently is, as I have argued,

the practice of a deconstructive curiosity. I began by analyzing Derrida's commentators who

suggest there is a distinctly deconstructive curiosity at work in Derrida's person, as much as in

his texts. I turned to Derrida's treatment of menageries and asylums in *Beast and the Sovereign I*,

to elucidate this curiosity as expressly animal, in contrast to sovereign curiosity. I then explored

different ways of understanding an animal curiosity through the limit cases of God and plants.

Finally, I returned to Derrida's commentary on Sarah Kofman, through which he suggests that

deconstructive curiosity may be expressed as an aesthetic curiosity, one that affirms life and

unmasks the conjuration of death. I concluded by placing this deconstructive, animal, and

ultimately philosophical curiosity within the context of the Platonic tradition. The former, fueled

by what could be called, counter-intuitively, a 'rhetorical question' literally, asks for something

other than to be answered. It asks to be destabilized, to be surprised, and to ask again.

What are the implications for a Derridean account of curiosity? At the outset, Derrida's

work aids us in understanding curiosity not as monolithically good or bad, but rather as a

triumvirate of practices implicated in a series of hierarchies and responsibilities. By situating

these various forms of curiosity in the history of medicine, Derrida pushes us to re-evaluate the

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[122] Plato, *Republic*, 398; cp. *Ion*, 535.

progress of knowledge. Moreover, by unmooring curiosity—setting it adrift among plants, animals, humans, gods, and beyond—Derrida implies that the ecological turn in philosophy will need to account for curiosity and work in tandem with revolutions in theology. Ultimately, however, a Derridean account of curiosity requires that we reconfigure philosophy. What would it mean if philosophy were driven by wonder no longer but by this linguistic curiosity? Or perhaps it already begins in linguistic curiosity. If so, what would it mean to recognize that fact? To whom and for what would it matter? There is certainly a humiliation promised here, a humiliation of the human, but also the honor of thinking like an animal.

Chapter 5

A Case Study of Inquiry

In one sense, inquiry and penalty appear to be at odds. Inquiry investigates a subject,

opens it up, allows it to be more than previously imagined, whereas a penalty closes down a

subject and limits it on the basis of a definitive decision. The university, as a bastion of inquiry,

is still a far cry from the prison, as the examination room is from the execution chamber.

Nevertheless, there are, as Foucault so persuasively argued in *Discipline and Punish*, structural

and tactical similarities between the university and the prison, similarities only exacerbated today

by the increasing privatization of both education and confinement. On a more fundamental level,

inquiry or investigation typically precedes and justifies penalty. The philosopher of punishment

thus finds him or herself in the strange position of having to question penal practices while

questioning the question—this question that forms the very foundation of philosophy at all.

In Chapter Four, we saw Derrida's distinction between scientific and therapeutic

curiosity. These two kinds of curiosity give rise to two different kinds of questions. To put it

schematically, the sovereign question acts scientifically when it dissects life from death. It acts

therapeutically when it confines one term to itself. For curiosity to trouble sovereignty, it must

question not in order to identify the definitive line or to cut that line, but rather to trouble it and

make it abyssal. These kinds of questions, in turn, mirror specific kinds of punishments. The sort

of question that dissects might be correlated with a punishment that cuts death from life: the

death penalty. The sort of question that confines might be correlated with a punishment that

confines persons: prison. The sort of question that deconstructs and confounds might, in turn, be

reflected in practices of restorative and/or transformative justice. In this chapter, I will analyze

just the first correlation, between the dissecting question and the death penalty. I will do so

through an extended analysis of Derrida's penultimate seminar, *The Death Penalty*.

Technologies of Theological-Political Sovereignty

In *Death Penalty I*, Derrida conducts a double-barreled deconstruction of the death

penalty and of philosophy. On the face of it, the death penalty and philosophy have little to do

with one another. They belong to two different institutions: the state and the university. They

directly affect two different phenomenological loci: the life of the body and the life of the mind.

The death penalty ends something, whereas philosophy seems to never end or put anything to

rest. The death penalty is a sentence, whereas philosophy is a discipline. But, in another sense,

and analyzed from a Derridean perspective, the death penalty and philosophy have everything to

do with each other. In *Death Penalty I*, Derrida identifies an essential shared ground between the

death penalty and philosophy: the line between life and death. Both penalty by death and

philosophy (which, at least in its Western instantiation, has been trained on death from the

outset) suppose, presuppose, allege, and assume to know the limit between life and death. The

death penalty may be said to 'know' the temporal point and philosophy the conceptual point at

which the one becomes the other.

Many an introduction to philosophy course begins with Benjamin Jowett's *The Trial and

Death of Socrates*. There, somewhere between the pages of the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and

Phaedo, students are likely to learn not only that Socrates is the father of Western philosophy but

that, even more directly, death is the *Ursprung* of philosophy. Granting the immediate limitations

of this lesson and suspending the issue of fatherhood just for a moment, permit me to follow out

this line in but a cursory manner. In one sense, philosophy might be said to begin with the death

of some one, some person, some body: Socrates. In another sense, philosophy might begin with a

slight death, the slight death of anyone who, trying their hand at philosophizing, tears their soul

ever so slightly away from the body. In yet a third sense, philosophy might well begin with *my*

death—not some death, some slight death, but *mine*. As I read *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, I

am suddenly faced with the reality that I, too, will one day die. What does this mean to me?

What will this mean for me? And what sense could my death, the experience of my death,

possibly have? There are a number of thinkers, from Plato to Heidegger, who might aid us in

understanding the origin of philosophy in some one's death, in some slight death, or in my death.

There are others, however, who might insist that by focusing on the death of Socrates, we

have still not yet begun to think the origin of philosophy. Distracted perhaps by metaphysics and

too taken with the fetish of this or that figurehead, we may well have ignored the most critical

piece: the conditions, the socio-historical conditions that make this scene possible. One could

easily identify patriarchy as one of the conditions that permit Socrates to become the father of

Western philosophy. Derrida himself would mark phallogocentrism, or the privileged connection

between the father and signification, as one of those conditions. And a certain Eurocentrism in

the American imaginary continues to ensure Socrates' position in our present day classrooms.

But what permits Socrates' *death* to serve as an origin? As with the figure of Socrates, there is a

certain configuration of power that allows for this particular scene of spawning. For Socrates'

death to occur and take on the significance that it did, there had to be a detainment, a trial, and a

death sentence, replete with a successful instrument of death. From the historical and technical

perspective, then, philosophy begins with punishment and, more precisely, the sentence of death,

accompanied by an instrument of execution. Philosophy, it might be said, springs from the death

penalty.

In *Death Penalty I*, and under the auspices of the death of Socrates, Derrida begins his deconstruction of these two friends—or at least these two companions—the death penalty and philosophy. He begins by asking why. Why is death the object of a sentence? By placing Socrates alongside Christ, Joan of Arc, and Al Hallaj, Derrida observes that all are sentenced to death for the sake of religion—a particular religion in each case, yes, but religion nonetheless. This permits Derrida to argue that the death penalty and philosophy share a certain ontotheologocentrism (or a direct alignment of being, divinity, and rationality), whose centripetal force constructs the scaffold of a theological-political sovereignty. This sovereignty is then invested in two figures: that of the king and reason, respectively. It is the sovereign king who pronounces and executes the death penalty. Likewise, it is sovereign reason that arbitrates philosophy. Thus, for Derrida, the death penalty and philosophy are not only historically and technically related, they are structurally related, such that a simultaneous deconstruction of both requires a critique of the theological-political sovereignty that undergirds them equally.

Derrida's critique here has already been deftly developed by the likes of Michael Naas, Thomas Dutoit, Kas Saghafi, and others, who have contributed extensive analyses of theological-political sovereignty through Derrida's writings on religion, Kant, etc.[1] While I will retrace their steps to some degree, I am interested in turning from the framework of religion to that of technology. I want to ask the question not so much of why, but of what. What constitutes and what cuts the limit between life and death? What technical machinations unite the death penalty and philosophy? I also want to ask the question of how. How is death the object of a sentence (in both a juridical and linguistic sense)? It seems a truism that for every sovereign, there is a sword.

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[1] Michael Naas, "The Philosophy and Literature of the Death Penalty: Two Sides of the Same Sovereign," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 39-55; Thomas Dutoit, "Kant's Retreat, Hugo's Advance, Freud's Erection; or, Derrida's Displacements in his Death Penalty Lectures," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 107-135; Kas Saghafi, "The Death Penalty, in Other Words, Philosophy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 136-142.

The sovereign figure, whether king or reason, wields a sovereign sword; the sword is the means by which that sovereignty is enacted or ensured. Socrates, Christ, Joan of Arc, and Al Hallaj are each sentenced to death by hemlock, cross, fire, and sword—a particular technology in each case, but a technology nonetheless. If in fact the death penalty and philosophy are structurally inextricable, then what might a critique of the technology of the death penalty mean for techniques of philosophy?

I will argue that, for Derrida, the two swords most germane to the mode of sovereignty exhibited in the death penalty and philosophy are the guillotine and the question, respectively.[2] The guillotine best demonstrates the mechanism whereby theological-political sovereignty executes the death penalty. Likewise, the question is, perhaps, the best instrument whereby a theological-political sovereignty enacts philosophy. In this chapter, I will argue that Derrida's basic deconstruction of the guillotine bears radical implications for how we understand the philosophical technique of the question. By developing this implicit critique of the question throughout *Death Penalty I*, I will conclude that Derrida's abolition of the death penalty— founded, as it is, on a deconstruction of the guillotine—is also an abolition not just of philosophy but of the fundamental technique of philosophy: the question or *inquiry itself*.[3] While traditional philosophical questions might be posed, in a somewhat guillotinesque style, with the expectation

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[2] The rationale for choosing these is not only textual but philosophical. Textually, Derrida addresses the guillotine and the question more than any other sovereign technologies. Philosophically, addressing common sense, almost cliché images invites a certain Heideggerian reflection on the strangeness of the given.

[3] This is perhaps no surprise, insofar as the *Death Penalty I* lectures are inscribed, for Derrida, under the broader heading of *Questions du responsibilité IX*. Other lectures in this series are *Le Secret* (1991-1992), *Le Témoignage* (1992-1994), *Hostilité/Hospitalité* (1995-1997), and *Le Parjure at le pardon* (1997-1999).

of definitive, even divisive and dividing answers, I will argue that deconstructive questions should wait, ring, and multiply and, as such, our philosophy must be fundamentally retooled.[4]

The pathway for my excursus here is as follows. In the second section of this chapter, I will delineate Derrida's joint critique of the death penalty and philosophy, through an analysis of theological-political sovereignty, with an eye to the respective technologies used in service of that sovereignty. In the third section, I will briefly trace Derrida's deconstruction of the guillotine as the ultimate technique of the death penalty. The fourth section develops an account of Derrida's deconstruction of the question as the ultimate technique of philosophy. In the last section, I offer a basic sketch of a deconstructive philosophical inquiry (and what remains of the question) after Derrida's dual abolition of the death penalty and philosophy.

The Death Penalty and Philosophy

Philosophy is inextricably linked—"soldered (*soudée*), welded, *wedded*,"[5] as Elizabeth Rottenberg has it—to the death penalty. It is so not just historically, as we saw with Socrates, but conceptually, through the logic of sovereignty. The very structures of the death penalty and of philosophy, as they have been heretofore conceived, share something absolutely essential: ontotheologocentrism, whereby sovereignty, reason, and a sovereign reason govern at once intelligibility and legitimacy. Thus, Derrida writes: "Philosophy and, more precisely, ontology, in their essence or, what amounts to the same thing, in their hegemonic tradition [… are welded]

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[4] I do not take the dual abolition of the death penalty and philosophy to either aggrandize philosophy or trivialize the death penalty. These are two distinct objects which, nevertheless, share essential structural features.

[5] Elizabeth Rottenberg, "Cruelty and Its Vicissitudes," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 148.

to the political theology of the death penalty and to the principle of sovereignty, which, through different figures, reigns there supremely."[6]

Their shared sovereignty may be understood in two ways: as dominion over what constitutes a thing and over what separates it from other things. First, the sovereign king decides upon *what is*, just as sovereign reason identifies essences. Derrida, reviewing Carl Schmitt's account of sovereignty, argues that the sovereign does not decide on the exception or in the exception; rather, the sovereign "decides on *what is* [*ce qu'est*] an exceptional situation and […] affirms or proves in this way that he is the sovereign."[7] The sovereign rules over the limits of the state, over life and death, over what is and what is not a living human member of that state. Philosophy, on the other hand, identifies *what is* and finds in the question *qu'est-ce que* the ultimate philosophical form.[8] Second and concomitantly, the sovereign king draws lines, just as sovereign reason enacts *diaeresis*. The sovereign draws the line between peace and war, friend and enemy, citizen and foreigner, life and death. Philosophy, likewise, separates life from death. "Without the supposed or supposedly possible knowledge of this clear-cut, sharp limit [*cette limite tranchée, tranchante*], there would be no philosophy or thinking of death,"[9] nor, I might add, a sovereign decision over death, or a death penalty. Both assume that there is a line, a juridical-existential line and that it can be drawn with a word.

Having tied the death penalty and philosophy together through sovereignty, especially sovereignty over the beginning and the end, I will now delineate the deconstructive questions

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[6] Jacques Derrida, "Death Penalties," *For What Tomorrow… A Dialogue*, ed. Elizabeth Roudinesco (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 147.

[7] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 222.

[8] Ibid., 236-237.

[9] Ibid., 238.

Derrida serves up to each one. First, consider the death penalty. In *Death Penalty I*, Derrida begins to deconstruct the death penalty not by offering a critique of capital punishment in the United States or a genealogy of its Judaeo-Christian heritage, although he does both of these things, but rather by asking the question of the death penalty as such. What is the death penalty? What is death by penalty? This question is, at least, both the question of death and of sentencing to death.[10] On the one hand, then, Derrida investigates the line between life and death: where is it drawn, how is it drawn, and can it really ever be drawn at all? On the other hand, he inquires after the sovereign who sentences and, in sentencing, draws or at least assumes that line: who is the sovereign, who has the power over life and death, and is sovereignty just as phantasmatic as this concomitant line between life and death? In this manner, Derrida investigates, we might say, both the principle and prince of the death penalty. Ultimately, he will argue that the sovereign and the sovereign's sentence of death together disavow the inherent instability of death. Deconstruction, by contrast, demands we negotiate between the fact and the ambiguity of death.

Deconstructing philosophy also requires a critical appraisal of its princes, or 'great thinkers,' and the principle of reason. Although Derrida draws on a range of philosophers—including Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, and Foucault—he leans more heavily upon literary authors like Blanchot, Camus, Genet, Hugo, Montaigne, Shelley, and Wordsworth, not to mention Freud. Curiously, then, in asking the question of philosophy, Derrida shifts to a reliance on literature and the theatre. The very opening of *Death Penalty I* is characterized by multiple beginnings, repeated stage-setting, and a lyrical style. This is one way Derrida indicates that what is to come is anything but a dry, formula-crunching appraisal of the death penalty. In doing so, he shifts not from reason to passion or the heart *per se*, but from Reason to, perhaps, reasons of the heart. It is,

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[10] Ibid., 241. In Session 9, the question of death is secondary to that of the death penalty.

then, at the level of philosophy's princes and principles that Derrida destabilizes the canonical and methodological traditions of philosophy itself.

As an indication of the powerful force of the heart's reasons for deconstructing classical philosophy, Derrida turns to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau is quite clear that the death penalty is justified on the grounds of the contract: one agrees to live under shared governance with the understanding that one may well be put to death if one breaks that agreement.[11] Nevertheless, Rousseau's clear endorsement wavers when he turns to address the sovereign right to pardon. Suggesting that pardon jeopardizes the strength of the contract, Rousseau suddenly stops, as if he is hearing himself make such a cold pronouncement for the first time. "Frequent pardons proclaim that crimes will soon no longer need them, and anyone can see where that leads. But I feel my heart murmur and check my pen; let us leave *these questions* to be discussed by a just man who has never lapsed, and never himself been in need of pardon."[12] Rousseau's heart stays his pen from staunchly supporting the death penalty, as if it were the heart—and not Reason—that keeps things in question. It is this heart, Derrida remarks, that "nervously proliferate[s]" Rousseau's "reservations, folds, and regrets."[13] While Rousseau looks for some pure, godlike man one who might settle these unstable questions, Derrida will follow the stammering of his own heart into new ones.

To think with the heart is, at the very least, to think or to exercise reason with some interest or investment, an investment of the body, the passions, and even the will. For Derrida, disinterested reason is as incoherent a notion as a calculable, decidable, sentence-able death.

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[11] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), II.5.64.

[12] Ibid., II.5.65 (my emphasis).

[13] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 16.

Whatever else today's death penalty abolitionists might argue, he suggests, they must admit of interested reason, of interest at all—specifically our inescapable interest in life. Thus, Derrida quickly admits, "I say head on: yes, I am against the death penalty *because I want to save my neck*, to save the life I love, what I love to live, what I love living."[14] Against an entire philosophical abolitionist tradition of calculative reason, therefore, Derrida makes his case with interest. He delivers, for example, a "pathos-laden" seminar on the death penalty,[15] one that "think[s] ceaselessly," but "by way of the heart, the imagination, and the body."[16] And he chooses to signal that honesty about his very interested version of philosophy by relying first and foremost on the power, the pathos, the interest and investment of literature to express his abolitionism. It is as if he aims to ask a question—and to keep asking it—by way of his heart. One is of course forced to think with one's reason, but reason is destabilized by the heart. Traditional philosophy forecloses a negotiation between these two forces, while deconstruction demands it. Moreover, when we negotiate between them, we are forced to see the inherent inadequacy of classic philosophical arguments both for and against the death penalty.

Having indicated the connection between the death penalty and philosophy, as well as marked the beginning of their deconstruction, we will turn to an analysis of two specific techniques for each: the guillotine and the question.

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[14] Ibid., 255.

[15] Ibid., 2.

[16] Ibid., 3. Derrida adds, "Where else would I find the strength and the drive and the interest to fight and to struggle, with my whole heart, with the beating of my heart against the death penalty" (257).

The Guillotine

In this section, I will develop Derrida's critique of the guillotine, specifically as the technique of sovereignty used by the death penalty. Across history, the guillotine has served as perhaps the most paradigmatic figure of the death penalty. It is the purest expression of sovereign power. Mechanizing punishment, so as to ensure the least human and therefore the least inhumane exercise of justice, the guillotine permits the sovereign to coolly calculate and cleanly execute death, on a precise day, upon the hour, to within a millisecond.[17] Thus, the guillotine objectively identifies, scientifically grasps, and mechanically severs that single line between life and death—in this case, the line of the neck.[18]

But precisely how and according to what technique does the guillotine assume and sever the line between life and death? Let us recall the structure of this basic but deadly machine. Here I quote from Jean-Baptiste Labat's classical description of the guillotine's Spanish predecessor: *la mannaia*. "[The] deadly cross-piece is raised to within 1 or 2 inches of the top beam, to which it is attached by a short length of cord. At a sign from the chief of police, the executioner simply cuts the cord and the cross-piece, dropping vertically onto the condemned man's neck, cuts it clean through without any danger of the stroke miscarrying."[19] As I read it, Labat's description separates the guillotine's mechanism into three moments: the blade waits, then it falls, then it

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[17] This attempt at a painless and instantaneous death is equally a mark of lethal injection. It would be interesting to compare the three drugs in lethal injection to the three moments of the guillotine. Sodium thiopental induces unconsciousness, pancuronium bromide paralyzes the body, and potassium chloride stops the heart. The waiting blade heightens conscious awareness, the falling blade moves quite quickly, and the cutting blade severs the head. For a Derridean reflection on the role of lethal injection in the death penalty, see Peggy Kamuf, "Death Penalty Protocol," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 5-19.

[18] In "Cruelty and Its Vicissitudes," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012), Elizabeth Rottenberg suggests the guillotine is a hyphen and therefore a bonding agent (150). I suggest that this hyphen is as much a cut as a bond.

[19] Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 15. This is a citation from Jean-Baptiste Labat's *Voyage du P. Labat… en Espagne et en Italie* (1730), describing *la mannaia*, a mechanical precursor of the guillotine.

cuts. In waiting, falling, and cutting, the machine finds, pursues, and finalizes the line between life and death. Some might argue that the fall and the cut are not two separate moments but rather one and the same, since they are at least visually identical, if not contemporaneous. Indeed, it is the elision of moments two and three that historically relieves the executioner of direct responsibility. So long as the issue is structure, however, and not perception or responsibility, the three moments stand independently.

Now, insofar as the guillotine, the machine of the blade, terminates, it does so on the principle of determination. Derrida deconstructs the guillotine, then, by arguing that the principle of determination supervenes on a phantasm. Both death and life are essentially indeterminate, at once multiple and provisional. Death, in general, is a series of incommensurate moments. Modern medicine continues to identify more and more lines across which 'death' could be placed. The three most definitive are death of the brain, the heart, and the lungs.[20] Life, likewise, is indeterminate; where it begins and ends is impossible to say. It is always more and less than itself. It is indeterminate, moreover, from *and because of* its other: death. Marking the multiplicity inherent in mortality, Derrida writes: "To deconstruct [the unity of] death [… is] to keep our eyes open to what this word of death, this word 'death' means, to what we want to make it say [… all while recognizing that] we don't know what [death] is, if and when it happens, and to whom."[21] It is the dream of deconstruction to deconstruct the most apparently indestructible entity: death itself, but also, therefore, life itself. To deconstruct death/life, means to put each back into question and to hold them there, refusing to settle the what, when, who, etc.

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[20] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 241. Derrida draws these from perhaps an unlikely text: Karen Long's essay, "Oh Death, Where is Thy Starting," *Baptist Standard: Insight for Faithful Living* (November 3, 1999), whose title he incidentally changes to "What is Death?," a *ti esti* question.

[21] Ibid.

Derrida deconstructs death/life not by posing and answering the paradigmatic philosophical question (*qu'est ce que*), but by unleashing a series of unruly questions indifferent to the holy bounds of such concepts.

The guillotine not only assumes the determinate line between life and death, but then severs that line. The guillotine, therefore, exists on the presumption that death/life are not only determinate but capable of being determined by some agent of power, whether intimately by the executioner or ultimately by the sovereign. Thus, despite the fact that the severed body still quivers, the head still speaks, intestines ripple and pupils dilate,[22] the guillotine cuts *as if* death could be instantaneous and *as if* that instantaneity could rest in mere mortal hands. Of this presumption, Derrida writes:

> The insult, the abuse, the fundamental injustice done to the life in me, to the principle of the life in me, is not death itself […]; it is rather the interruption of the principle of indetermination, the ending imposed on the opening of the incalculable chance whereby a living being has a relation to what comes, to the to-come and thus to some other as event, as host, as *arrivant*.[23]

There is a peculiar indeterminacy inherent in life. It is the indeterminacy of the other. The sovereign who ends someone's future acts as an agent, not an other.[24] An agent calculates the incalculable, whereas the other is the incalculable. Against the absolute termination of life and the absolute inauguration of death, Derrida deconstructs the technique of the guillotine with the incalculable.

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[22] Ibid., 235; cp. Albert Camus' case against the cruelty of the guillotine, in "Reflections on the Guillotine" (1957), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 173-234.

[23] Ibid., 256. Derrida offers earlier indications that he understands this 'principle of life' in a Nietzschean sense (142), such that death, insofar as it is a moment in the evolution of life, is not itself opposed to the principle of life. Later in the lectures, he clarifies: "It is the principle of life that sentences to death the death sentence" (202).

[24] I borrow this helpful contrast between an agent and an other from Matthias Fritsch., "Derrida on the Death Penalty," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 56-78.

The Question

Derrida also critiques the question, specifically as the primary technique of sovereignty used by philosophy. What is more, across Derrida's references to the question in *Death Penalty I*, he overtly employs the metaphor of the guillotine. The question, Derrida writes, may hang suspended or it may fall, dividing one thing from another until someone loses their head. I, therefore, propose to analyze Derrida's references to the question according to the three moments of the guillotine: the question is suspended (or waits), then it is posed (or falls), and finally it divides (or cuts). In conducting this analysis, my aim is twofold: first, to develop an account of the philosophical question par excellence—that is, the non-deconstructive question. Second, by contrast, I want to begin a characterization of the deconstructive question, by which philosophy might be done differently. What really are the marks of a deconstructive question beyond its ability to 'put into question' some concept or some limit between two concepts?

First, let us briefly recall some orienting marks of sovereign philosophy. By the very act of philosophizing about one thing or the other, philosophy assumes the line between those concepts and then names that line, effectively severing these concepts from one another. Like the death penalty, it assumes and effects determination. Classical philosophy, then, supervenes on a similar phantasm: the phantasm that the concept of, for instance, death is determinate and determinable. In this sense, the question, philosophy's primary technique by which such determinations are made, must be essentially a practice of sovereignty. When suspended, the question shadows the line; when posed, the question locates a line; and when dividing, the question severs a line. If the death penalty and philosophy are to be abolished because of their relationship to sovereignty, then the subsequent non-sovereign inquiry, propelled by deconstructive questions, must—at least negatively—not shadow, not locate, not sever.

Suspension

Throughout *Death Penalty I*, Derrida leaves various questions suspended. This is not

unusual. Derrida often expressly leaves questions suspended, for one reason or another, in one

place or another. But in *Death Penalty I*, Derrida specifically says he leaves questions suspended

above our heads, waiting in cold blood, about to drop, like the blade of the guillotine. Why speak

as if the suspended question were a suspended blade? What is the extent of this comparison?

Consider the following instances:

> I leave this question suspended.[25]
> Let's keep these questions and suspicions waiting.[26]
> Let's leave these questions hanging over our heads; we'll see later where they
> fall.[27]
> We must approach once more [the anesthetic question], letting wait a little longer,
> in cold blood, the supplementary inquiry called up by what one should 'espouse at
> the cost of one's life.'[28]

Taking these references in context, I will argue that Derrida suspends his questions as a way to

highlight and ultimately critique the sovereign suspension of classic philosophical questions.

According to his critique, *the classically suspended question*, as a suspended blade used in the

service of some sovereign inquirer, *is a form of cruelty that acts cinematographically*.

1. *The suspended question is a form of cruelty*.

The question, suspended like a blade over one's head, is threatening. The question,

suspended like a murderer waiting in cold blood, is menacing. The suspended question, then,

threatens and menaces, but does not yet act. It waits, in suspense. This suspense is, specifically,

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[25] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 249.

[26] Ibid., 220.

[27] Ibid., 167.

[28] Ibid., 273.

the "suspension of an imminence that can appear infinitely brief or last interminably."[29] It takes a special sort of power to suspend imminence; it is the sort of power that is sovereign not only over living and dying, but over saying and not saying, asking and forbearing, permitting to speak and silencing. It is for this reason that the suspense in question is first and foremost cruel. Whether or not what is imminently to come is an execution or a pardon, an interrogation or some inquiry of another sort, if the advent of that blade or that question lies exclusively in the hands of one and not of another, it is already cruel. Will the governor phone in? Will the suspense end with the suspension of law? Will he give the word? The answer?

Derrida invites us to imagine the cruelty of the suspended question. I begin by marking two possible sorts of suspended questions: a) a question imminent but not yet asked and b) a question mentioned but not yet posed. In the first instance, a question might be silently suspended above my head. What are you?[30] It is suspended there because some power relation simultaneously constitutes me as questionable, at any moment, and constitutes some other person as always already in the privileged position of interrogator. In the second instance, a question might be expressly suspended above my head. It might hang there as if it were a potential weapon. The weapon has not been activated, so I cannot respond to it with a parry. I have no right, yet, to offer an answer to it. I am simply the subject of a question without my subjecthood. The question stands aloof. Perhaps either the language of the question itself or the terms of the

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[29] Ibid., 138. Although it is not my focus here, this suspension of the instrument on the side of punishment also appears in the suspension of the law on the side of sovereign pardon (86-87).

[30] Perhaps one of the more haunting descriptions of a suspended question is offered by W. E. B. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Radford: Wilder Publications, 2008). There, he writes, "Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word" (5).

game in which it is deployed preclude me from answering it. It is a question, suspended with a certain cruelty.

2. *The suspended question is a form of cruelty that acts cinematographically*.

Suspension permits cruelty; it often does so, moreover, cinematographically. That is, the visibility of this suspension highlights and underscores the sovereign power at work. Consider the suspension of the blade. The machine is surrounded by barriers, the barriers are surrounded by soldiers, and the soldiers by people. The confessor works to obtain absolution; the chief of police waits for the confessor; and the executioner looks to the chief of police. Consider, too, the suspension of the pardon. Derrida recalls Clint Eastwood's *True Crime* (1999), in which the suspense of the pardon is depicted in slow-motion, "with the cinematographic exploitation that shows all the operations, all the moments of the progression of the fluid."[31] The suspended question is no different. From above, it supervenes on a window into the machinations of power. Who gets to speak? When? What is the proper purview of interrogation? How is this power transferred? Etc. The suspension of the blade, the pardon, and the question visibly reveal, in and through that suspended space, power's operations.

Having established that *the suspended question is a form of cruelty that acts cinematographically,* we must now return to our opening passages in which Derrida himself suspends questions. We are surely to assume, given his metaphors, that Derrida invites us to think about the question as the blade of a guillotine. But are we therefore also to think of Derrida as an executioner?

Derrida suspends his own inquiry in *Death Penalty I* and does so cinematographically in *Death Penalty II*. In *Death Penalty I*, Derrida repeatedly suspends the imminent beginning of the

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[31] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 49.

seminar: "Before beginning, let us begin. We would begin. We would begin by pretending to begin before the beginning," and so on.[32] In *Death Penalty II*, Session 1,[33] he suspends the seminar's three guiding questions: what is an act, what is an age, what is a desire? He suspends them, moreover, "on the wings of a kite," the sort of military kite used to acquire the lay of the land. The former suspension may be somewhat cruel to the reader, who wants desperately to begin. And the latter is certainly cinematographic, allowing readers to acquire a sense of his trajectory as well as appreciate the stakes of his inquiry. Nevertheless, there is something else, here, something that resists rather than purely reveals the structure of sovereignty. Derrida suspends his beginning without knowing what a beginning is or where exactly to begin. He suspends, moreover, his guiding questions without being certain where they will lead. A deconstructive suspension is at least a warm-blooded waiting for what is to come, without yet knowing what is coming. It is in this sense that the suspended question, on Derrida's lips, is a bit like a prayer, suspended not as an act of certainty, but as a practice of faith. Given time, we might read this in light of the trapeze artist to which Derrida refers who, while suspended in mid-air, *believes*.[34] "These are the questions," he writes, "that still await us," whether next year or, in some meaningful way, forever.[35]

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[32] Ibid., 1.

[33] Derrida, Jacques. *The Death Penalty, Volume II*. Forthcoming. Edited by Geoffrey Bennington, Marc Crépon, and Thomas Dutoit. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming. This title will first be published as *Séminaire: La Peine de mort 2 (2000-2001)*. Paris: Editions Galilée, forthcoming.

[34] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 154. Derrida employs the metaphor of the trapeze artist to speak of belief.

[35] Ibid., 68.

Position

Suspended questions are not the only sort to which Derrida refers. He also writes of questions people "let drop" or "pose."[36] This language correlates with the second moment of the guillotine, where the blade falls. This may sound a bit heavy-handed. Surely one can pose a question innocently, or at least pose an innocent question. But let us really set the stage here. Before anything has been said, there is a silence between two people or two parties, a certain tonal balance. Then, there is the posing or imposition of a voice, the demand to be heard, the demand to be answered. This posing is one-sided, unidirectional. The posed question is already an assertion of priority by the one who poses it.[37] And it is a statement of desert. The answer to the posed question is somehow always already owed to the one who poses it. Whoever receives the posed question is stopped in their tracks, caught on a hook, summoned to confess. This is no scene of friendship; rather, it is the scene of sovereignty. By analyzing Derrida's mimicries and rejections of the posed question, I will argue that, according to his implicit critique, *the posed question is an essentializing form of interrogation that assumes indemnification*. Moreover, if there is a counter-sovereign, deconstructive form of the question, then, it would not interrogate, essentialize, or indemnify.

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[36] Ibid., 167.

[37] When I reflect on the posed question, I cannot help but think of particular populations who are disproportionately subject to this imposition. The community of people with atypical sex anatomies is one such group. In *Intersex: A Perilous Difference* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), Morgan Holmes, after narrating the "trafficked" details of a particular intersex person (48), testifies to the deluge of posed questions sustained by people with atypical sex anatomies as a whole. She states, "As much as I want to make intersexuality understood from the point of view of intersexuals themselves, at the same time I am loath to pry open their/our lives, allowing yet more voyeuristic, academic curiosity to access intersexuals' already over-accessed bodies" (64).

1. *The posed question is a form of interrogation.*

In a preliminary gesture, Derrida tracks cruelty from the suspended question to the posed question. After suggesting that we "leave these questions hanging over our heads," for a moment, Derrida writes:

> If there is something cruel, it is perhaps, to begin with, the question itself, the putting into question as putting to the question that initiates torture and that threatens, in the course of an interrogation, in the course of a quest, an inquest, a requisition, an inquisition, a perquisition, to cause the subject in question to lose his or her head.[38]

Here, the cruelty of withholding or preserving a question now becomes the cruelty of putting a question to someone or of putting someone to the question. The issue, in this case, is not when the question falls but at what intervals (*inter-rogāre*) the questions will fall. In an interrogation, however, there is more than a control over temporality. There is, perhaps more directly, the assertion of property. Something within the subject's head already belongs to the interrogator. The interrogator will therefore retrieve that piece of property at the risk of the subject's sanity and often at the cost of the subject's life.

Interrogation is first and foremost an element of war. As such, it is important to reread the posed question, in the sense of a falling blade, as expressly militant and militaristic. A question that is not asked but imposed is, as Derrida writes, one of "machinic and armed" intensity.[39] It is imposed from the outside, from another, or from history. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida offers some elaboration.

> The question is no longer a theoretical question, a question of knowledge or recognition, but first of all, like recognition in Hegel, a calling into question, an act of war. The question is posed, it is posed to someone; someone puts it to

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[38] Derrida, *Death Penalty I,* 167. In context, the question is falling. Compare the question being 'cut loose' (270).

[39] Ibid., 69.

himself like an attack, a complaint, the premeditation of a crime, a calling into question of the one who questions or interrogates.[40]

It is important to remark, in this context, that although the question must be posed from one to another, it may be posed within the purview of a single subject. I can pose a question to myself, interrogate myself and put myself into question as an act of war. This locus in no way compromises it as an act of power.

2. *The posed question is an essentializing form of interrogation.*

To pose a question is not only to interrogate, or to acquire knowledge through inquiry. It is also to essentialize, or to assume knowledge by inquiry. A posed question assumes the essence or an idea of the essence of the thing in question. Speaking of the question, "what is an exception," Derrida asks, "Can one pose this question? Is there an essence of exception, an adequate concept of this supposed essence?"[41] It is as if, in the very act of posing, a presumed essence is imposed upon a thing and then extracted. This essentializing character of the posed question is perhaps best evidenced in the question of essence itself, the *ti esti* question, which is also the philosophical question *par excellence*. Thus, Derrida writes:

> If I tried to sum up in four to five words […] the impossible questions that have imposed themselves on us, that have not failed to *impose themselves* on us even as we were trying to *pose* them, without ever managing precisely either to let them drop or to pose them, I mean to master them in a formal, formalizable, manipulable structure, I would say this: not 'what is cruelty?', then, but 'how am I cruel? How to be cruel', a question that becomes, once one takes cognizance of the fact, following Nietzsche, that cruelty has no contrary but only different ways, different modalities, different intensities, different values (active or reactive) of being cruel, only a différ*a*nce, with an *a*, in cruelty, a differ*a*nt cruelty—and the logic without logic of difference is that of a paradoxical economy—a question that becomes, then, 'how *not* to be cruel.'[42]

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[40] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (1994; New York: Verso Press, 2005), 162-163.

[41] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 47.

[42] Ibid., 167-168.

Derrida here draws a connection between the essentializing character of the *ti esti* question and the formalizable structure of the posed question. In each instance, there is a presumption of mastery. Whatever captures the subject formally also captures it conceptually, so that the posed question is doubly captor of the subject in question. This question represses the inherent *différance* of concepts.

3. *The posed question is an essentializing form of interrogation that assumes indemnification.*

To pose a question is not only to identify an essence that is safely ensconced within the object in question, but it is also to assume oneself to be a place intact, indemnified, and immune from the object in question. To pose a question is to assume objectivity—or even indifference—on the side of the inquirer and a definitive separation or a distance between that inquirer and the subject of inquiry. Addressing the question of cruelty, Derrida characterizes this implicit indemnification as follows:

> Does this question itself, the strange question 'how to be cruel?' or just as well 'how not to be cruel?' proceed from a place that is still protected by some innocence or some immunity or indemnity (the one who poses this question having to do so from a place still intact from any cruelty, any cruel contagion) or else is it already, already and always, contaminated, overtaken by the contagion of this cruelty that it comprehends in advance.[43]

Whether it inaugurates the question of cruelty or of peace, the very act of posing a question sets its subject apart. Nevertheless, Derrida intimates that this indemnification, buried in the structure of the posed question, is an illusion. The inquirer may already be contaminated by the subject of inquiry and therefore be incapable of posing a question at all.[44] Indeed, the purity advanced by

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[43] Ibid., 168.

[44] One might in fact say of the question what Michael Naas says of the *salut*: "Derrida distinguishes a [question] of sovereignty and ipseity, a [question] that affirms and sustains identity, that protects or indemnifies identity, that is, a

the questioner's position or the question's imposition may not only be illusory but in the end seems to work against the spirit of the question itself: an openness to the other, a cross-pollination of forces and sentiments, and an intimacy between systems.

At the outset of *Death Penalty I*, Derrida remarks that, throughout the seminar, he will be "posing critical or deconstructive questions" to abolitionist, as well as anti-abolitionist, discourse.[45] Given his critique of the guillotine and the way in which a posed question mimics the fall of a blade, what might he mean by posing a deconstructive question? At the very least, he must mean that the question is not launched in an interrogation, nor does it support the illusion of indemnification, whether of the inquirer or the subject of inquiry. Elsewhere, Derrida suggests one concrete form of resistance to this indemnifying tendency of the posed question. It involves not saying or posing a question, but "rehearing it, by letting resound once again the echo," as it "cross[es] my mind."[46] This resonance is a material insistence of the contamination already at work. While the posed, essentializing question represses *différance*, a deconstructive one attends both to the instability of its object as well as to the instability between the question and questioner.

Division

Some will argue that to pose a question (to let it fall) is already to use it to divide (or to cut). This is one way to understand the hermeneutic circle, as an elision of the falling and cutting of the blade: as if the posing and the answering of a question were one and the same or, at the

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[question] that offers either salvation or health, redemption or indemnity, from the [question] of an unconditional welcoming that, as we will see, compromises every identity and opens it up in an autoimmune fashion to what is beyond or outside it." See *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York: Fordham, 2012), 51.

[45] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 5n7.

[46] Ibid., 250.

very least, of a piece. Here, however, I want to address that third and final moment by itself. In some significant way, questions determine borders and boundaries as much as they over-determine essences or cores. In order to even ask what a thing is, you must already and immediately cut it away from what it is not.[47] To characterize the question as a cut may seem forced or overly dramatic. After all, does not a question, in its best sense, aim to open and include rather than cut away and exclude? But take the question, "What is a question?" Already the purview of conversation has been pared down to one thing, just this one thing: the question. We will not consider the statement, the exclamation, the command, nor will we analyze the act of musing, marveling, or calculating. The question is already the first cut. We are, however, likely to consider the question within the context of English language conventions, the cultural-historical milieu of the 21st century, and the Western humanistic tradition. The question's cut, therefore, appears within an already carefully etched material and ideological landscape. It is for this reason that Derrida will critique *the dividing question* as *a diaeretic tool* specifically mobilized *in the service of institutionalized power.*

1. *The dividing question is a diaeretic tool*.

There are blows, divisions, even *diaeresis* at work in a question. This is a familiar trope in Western philosophy, but it is also present within other traditions. We already met with Platonic *diaeresis* in Chapter Four. It is a philosophical method whereby a definition is developed through extended bipartite analysis, an analysis which, moreover, cuts one thing from

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[47] By way of example, take Simone de Beauvoir's introduction to *The Second Sex*. There, she shows that the question, "What is a woman," presupposes an already granted distinction between men and women but also presses us to make that distinction afresh, in a different way: "And the truth is that anyone can clearly see that humanity is split into two categories of individuals with manifestly different clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, movements, interests, and occupations; these differences are perhaps superficial; perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way. If the female function is not enough to define woman, and if we also reject the explanation of the 'eternal feminine,' but if we accept, even temporarily, that there are women on the earth, we then have to ask: What is a woman" (4-5).

another through insistent questioning.[48] Zhuangzi describes a similar process through the figure

of Ding the Butcher. Ding is less a butcher than a philosopher who, already understanding the

joints of a whole, merely follows them. As he attests, "I go along with the natural makeup, strike

in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are."[49] His

knife acts precisely as an incisive, revealing question.

The question itself divides—that is, this work of cutting already exists within the

structure of the question. We can see this, for instance, whenever a question is asked concerning

life or death. In that moment, the question already parses between the proper and improper

subjects of life or death. The right to life or death is therefore restricted in the question even

before it is restricted by law. For example, the question "what is the death penalty" includes the

question of penality, civil law, and, ultimately, the citizen-subject. To ask this question, then, is

also to ask who or what is the appropriate subject of the death penalty or the appropriate object to

which the death penalty might be applied? Traditionally, this requires one to ask, "What is a

human?" What is this organism with a right to life so sacred that its violation justifies the

sentence of death? And, just as much, which organisms in this or another species do not

properly hold this sacred right? As Derrida puts it: "[…] this question of the death penalty […] is

indispensable today for reading […] the question of man or the human, of human rights and of

what ultimately a human is, of what is proper to the human—for example, if one distinguishes it

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[48] Foucauldians will quickly cite the line in which he states, "Knowledge […] is made for cutting" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 154). Some may even cite the passage in which he writes, "I would like my books to be like lancets [*bistouris*], Molotov cocktails, or siege tunnels [*galeries de mine*], and that, after use, they burn to cinders like firecrackers" (*Dits et Ecrits* I, 1593). Despite these well-known references, it is not clear to me what sort of cutting Foucauldian inquiry effects. More research is required to contextualize these claims in the Western tradition.

[49] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 51.

from both the animal and God, other animals and gods."[50] The question of the human already

cuts away the nonhuman. Likewise, any question of organisms with a right to life cuts away non-

organic entities. While Derrida is aware that the right to life and to the death penalty have been

differently allocated across time periods—in some cases extending to animals and, in others,

withheld from slaves or other non-legal persons—these cuts begin in the very questions being

asked.

<p align="center">2. The dividing question is a diaeretic tool that works in the service</p>

<p align="center">of institutionalized power.</p>

Questions always cut. Questions, however, never cut in a vacuum. The very fact of their

mobilization and the structure of their formulation embed them within current configurations of

power. The cut is not innocent or objective. It is not without partisanship and debts. Take, for

example, the trial of Roger Bontems, over which Derrida pauses at some length. In 1971, a revolt

broke out at Clairveux prison, where prisoners are said to have taken and killed two hostages.[51]

Roger Bontems and Claude Buffet were held responsible for these deaths and, ultimately, put on

trial. In *L'Éxecution*, Robert Badinter describes the moment of sentencing, replete with definitive

questions that cleanly divide death from life and the guilty from the innocent, as follows:

> 'Is Bontems guilty of having, in the same circumstances of time and place, killed
> Mrs…?' Response: 'NO by a majority of votes.' […] 'Did Buffet kill Mrs …?' 'YES.'
> 'Is Bontems the accomplice of Buffet?' 'YES.' 'Are there any attenuating circumstances
> for Buffet?' 'NO.' Buffet was sentenced to death. 'Are there any attenuating
> circumstances for Bontems?' And the response came: 'NO by a majority of votes.' It was
> the death penalty.[52]

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[50] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 99.

[51] One hostage was a guard, by the name of Guy Girardot, and the other a nurse, Nicole Comte.

[52] Ibid., 56-57, quoting Robert Badinter, *L'Execution* (1973; Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1976), 158-160.

The legal process is an immensely complicated one, filled with physical evidence, expert

testimony, eye witness accounts, and, in some cases lies; framed by limits of law, money, and

time, not to mention intellectual resources; and composed of many stages both before and during

the trial. And yet all of this complexity is reduced in the final moments to one of two answers:

yes or no, guilty or not guilty. The questions, moreover, that prompt these answers are clearly

part and parcel of a sprawling juridical system that subtends institutions like the court, the prison,

parole, and expert testimony, just to name a few. These questions are, at some fundamental

level, the currency deployed by such institutions of power.

     We have seen Derrida suspend questions, even while critiquing the cruelty of typical

suspensions, just as we have seen Derrida pose deconstructive questions in a way that resists the

essentializing and indemnificatory impetus of classically posed questions. As one might expect,

Derrida also permits his questions to divide or to cut, but he does so in a way that works against

conceptual restrictions and institutional decisions. "Fundamentally," he writes, "it is by

answering the question 'when?' that one can divide, as with a knife blade, two deaths or two

condemnations, the condemnation to die and the condemnation to death."[53] This division allows

Derrida to investigate the calculative nature of the death penalty, in contrast to mere death.

Nevertheless, Derrida then multiplies the ways in which we understand natural death and the

modes of the death penalty.[54] In doing so, his questions cut to destabilize rather than to cleanly

separate. But his questions also work to trouble established rubrics of knowledge and systems of

power. It is from this source-point that his deconstructive questions fuel his abolitionism.

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[53] Ibid., 219.

[54] In *Death Penalty I*, Derrida's ruminations on lethal injection, hanging and the guillotine, paired with death of the lungs, the heart, and the brain expand these notions. In *Death Penalty II*, his analysis of age continues this work.

In this section overall, we have seen that there is indeed a structural relationship between the guillotine's three moments (the blade waits, falls, cuts) and the three modes of the question (suspension, position, division). In deconstructing both the guillotine and the question by emphasizing the indetermination of death and knowledge, Derrida deconstructs the death penalty and philosophy. His overtures to the abolition of the death penalty, therefore, are inherently also calls for an abolition of philosophical inquiry as such. In order to properly understand this call and its relationship to a Derridean account of curiosity, we must first take a step back and recall the structure of that account, as it was developed in Chapter Four.

The Abolition of Inquiry

After marking, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, that God's 'just to see' made him dizzy, Derrida correlates this dizziness to the vertigo he feels in the face of any divine or feline curiosity that is precisely non-sovereign, animal, or linguistic.[55] What will it or I be called? Who will call whom? What even is a word or a name? This vertiginous instability of the naming process is exactly what a non-sovereign curiosity highlights. It does so in two ways: first, it resists any clean dissection of terms one from the other. We can see this in *Beast and the Sovereign I*, where the mutual instability in the terms 'beast' and 'sovereign' induces vertigo.[56] Second, it resists any clear confinement of meaning to one term. We can see this in *The Work of Mourning*, where the very impossibility of 'forgiveness' induces vertigo.[57] This curious resistance to a kind of sovereign seeing-knowing-willing predicates a new form of inquiry: one without proper footing or destination. Derrida goes so far as to say such inquiry makes the head

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[55] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 17-18.

[56] Derrida, *Beast and Sovereign I*, 18.

[57] Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, 184.

spin. In fact, thinking with this non-sovereign curiosity must produce anything but level-headed philosophy.

Such curiosity proceeds not by way of the sort of question that steadies sense but by one that destabilizes it. Derrida develops an account of just this kind of question in his *Death Penalty I* seminar. Derrida offers several arguments for an abolitionist discourse. After elucidating the pro-penalty claims that a) the line between life and death is decisive and singular and b) a definitive break in that line defies finitude by assuring infinite survival, Derrida argues to the contrary that a) the line between life and death is un-decidable and multiple and b) a proliferation of breaks in those lines ensures a future by understanding survival as possibility rather than as preservation. In each case, Derrida describes the sort of question that solidifies or disturbs the line between life and death—or, by extension, the line between any other binary.

The sovereign question begins with an inquisition and ends with the guillotine. Both the inquisition and the guillotine ask and answer a question definitively, through the dissection and confinement of meaning. What is crime? This is crime. Who is guilty? This one. What is death? This is—and the guillotine falls. The inquisition mechanizes the trial, and thereby the line between truth and falsehood. The guillotine, in turn, mechanizes punishment and thereby the line between life and death. With the "automatic, autonomous functioning" of the juridical machine,[58] as Derrida attests, the trial performs the instant of truth, while the guillotine performs the instant of death. The sovereign can coolly calculate and cleanly execute truth/death only because the inquisition and guillotine objectively identify, scientifically grasp, and mechanically sever that single line between truth and falsehood, life and death. Insofar as Derrida aims to abolish the death penalty, he also aims to deconstruct this line and the question that creates it.

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[58] Derrida, *Death Penalty I,* 193.

Derrida's abolitionist discourse, however, does not avoid the question altogether. Rather, the question is proliferated and re-imagined. Here are just a few of the many questions to which Derrida repeatedly returns throughout the seminar: What is death?[59] What is the death penalty?[60] What is a *political* death penalty?[61] What is an exception?[62] What is cruelty?[63] What is the *meaning* of cruelty?[64] What is blood?[65] What is an indemnity, what is damnation, what is condemnation?[66] What is sur-vival?[67] Derrida employs the traditionally philosophical question (*what is*?), but he does so non-traditionally. Instead of presuming to have partially located the distinction which one might then try to *fully* locate,[68] Derrida's questions keep distinguishing until distinction itself turns proliferate and un-tethered.[69] The relentless 'what is' produces a

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[59] Ibid., 237 and 240.

[60] Ibid., 22.

[61] Ibid., 172.

[62] Ibid., 47, 69, and 236.

[63] Ibid., 69, 95-96, 147, 167, and 236.

[64] Ibid., 96.

[65] Ibid., 192 and 236.

[66] Ibid., 259.

[67] Ibid., 270.

[68] Derrida acknowledges this possibility: "I believe on the subject of death, the question 'What is death?' cannot let its vertigo make the head turn in a simple hermeneutic circle that would give us some pre-comprehension of the meaning of the word 'death'" (*Death Penalty I*, 237). It is a traditional philosophical problem also noted by Heidegger, in *Being and Time*: "Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness" (I.2).

[69] Elizabeth Rottenberg clarifies: "The vertigo brought on by these questions entails precisely the collapse of the guardrail or safeguard, the barrier, the rigorous oppositional partition that is supposed to separate the conceptual couples upon which all thinking about the death penalty has always relied (inside/outside, self/other, *poena naturalis/poena forensic*, auto-hetero-punishment, suicide/execution, condemned to die/condemned to death, cruel/non-cruel, act/non-act, active/passive, doing/letting be done)—and, ultimately, life/death" (192). See "The 'Question' of the Death Penalty," *Oxford Literary Review* 35.2 (2013): 189-204.

vertigo commensurate not with a hermeneutic circle but with deconstruction, by which nothing

comes out unscathed, unturned, or in place.[70]

Derrida's questions in *Death Penalty I*, therefore, resemble but ultimately undercut all

three forms of guillotinesque questions. They are not rhetorical questions, which are merely

answers masquerading as questions. They are not questions that reflect a 'simple' hermeneutic

spiral, assuming already the object in question, nor are they questions that require an immediate

and satisfying answer.[71] Instead, Derrida's use of the question, deconstructively, is to induce

vertigo and approach the abyss. He means his questions:

> to show, with their own inadequation, the vertigo or the abyss of their own impossibility,
> the vertigo above or around their own impossibility, what makes them turn on themselves
> until they make the head turn, namely, that to articulate themselves, to take shape, they
> would have to pretend to know at least what they are talking about at the very moment
> they seem to be asking about it.[72]

It is with this sort of question that Derrida practices a non-sovereign curiosity. And it is with this

question, in turn, that Derrida develops a resistance to the inquisitorial death penalty. As he

attests, it is the dream of deconstruction to "have done" with death, to "deconstruct" death, to

"come to blows" with death, to announce "death to death."[73] This work is done in service to

indeterminacy. By "dissolving the unity or the identity or the gravity of death," Derrida promotes

his dream of the innumerable.[74] The dance of the innumerable is not to negate or delegitimize the

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[70] Deleuze suggests we replace the question of *qu'est-ce que* with other questions: *qui*, *combien*, *comment*, *où*, *quand*, *dans quel cas*, etc. In doing so, we can demand other means of adjudication. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, "La Méthode de Dramatisation," *L'île déserte et autres textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, eds. Gilles Deleuze and David Lapujade (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), 131-163.

[71] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 236-239.

[72] Ibid., 237.

[73] Ibid., 240-241.

[74] Ibid., 241.Cp. Drucilla Cornell, "Where Love Begins: Sexual Difference and the Limit of the Masculine Symbolic," *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, eds. Mary Rawlinson, Ellen Feder, and Emily Zakin (New York: Routledge, 1997), 161-206; John Caputo, "Dreaming of the Innumerable: Jacques Derrida,

many gruesome ways in which death is lived, but rather to highlight the incoherent concept of death beneath death penalty discourse. This incoherence is significant not only philosophically but socially, for it simultaneously erases inter-subjectivity and privileges the other as the sole, sovereign power over my life or my death.

For Derrida, *déconstruction* is a sort of interrogation, a very particular sort.[75] It aims first to identify what is naturalized, taken for granted, and accepted without question, and then to denaturalize it, thus calling it into question. It aims, moreover, to find what is named, unified, and made self-same, and then to multiply it, thus keeping it in question. Deconstruction aims, finally, to take what is safe, safe from its other and most of all from itself, and demonstrate its contamination, thus casting it as a question. The most complete system always hinges on something that is not its own. Deconstruction, therefore, asks questions like, "What is justice," not in order to find the simplest and most sensible referent, but rather to denaturalize, multiply, and set at risk this concept which has been so deftly supported by the socio-symbolic scaffold. Deconstruction, then, inquires into the realm outside the current confines of possibility. It is the task of asking an impossible question. If such an enterprise is to be self-consistent—which is to say, if such an enterprise is to be *living*—it must be self-antagonizing. Deconstruction itself must be called into question, by more than one nature, in more than one name. Not only must deconstruction change, but, in its hands, the very tool of the question must also be put into question. For, in deconstruction, nothing, not even inquiry itself, comes out unscathed.[76]

Drucilla Cornell, and the Dance of Gender," *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 127-150.

[75] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 20; John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 61; John Van Buren, "The Young Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 33 (1989): 99-108; Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 245.

[76] Derrida, *Death Penalty I*, 241 and 254.

Conclusion

Many a journey has been fueled by curiosity. In this specific journey and across this particular landscape, there were a few steady climbs, several flights of fancy and, here and there, one foot placed quite gingerly after the other. I called upon a number of words which, across so many centuries, have come to populate the semantic field of curiosity: from the Greek *polypragmon*, *periergon,* and *eidenai oregontai* to the Latin *curiositas* and *cura*. I also met French *curiosité*, the German *Neugier*, *Kuriositat*, and *Wissbegier*, and even the Danish *nysgerrighed*. In some cases, I took up figures just momentarily and at other times accompanied them for long stretches. From Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Plutarch, through Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, into Beauvoir and Kristeva, Foucault and Derrida, I canvassed the terrain already surveyed and, in some cases, remodeled, by great thinkers. I drew especially on the methods of phenomenology, genealogy, and deconstruction to understand and extend historical accounts of curiosity. I even drew from an unusual variety of literary forms, including essays and seminars, books, interviews, untranslated activist pamphlets, and book length book reviews. Across all of these organisms, material formations, traces and ghosts, the reader will have crossed innumerable paths, possible trajectories, and a handful of remaining hypotheses.

Despite the riches of this terrain, I have developed, along the way, three distinct, but inter-related arguments. While I distinguish them as conceptual, historical, and political arguments, respectively, I take each of them to be philosophical arguments in their own right.

First, I launched a conceptual argument. I argued that the concept of curiosity warrants greater philosophical attention. This attention should be directed at two different levels. First, at the methodological level, curiosity should be utilized as a philosophical technique. Up until this point in history, curiosity has been predominantly dismissed from this role. Not only does that

dismissal reflect unjustified, dubious, and in some cases dangerous assumptions, but curiosity continues to have underdeveloped resources for philosophy today. Second, at the political level, curiosity should be a central axis along which we analyze political power, marginalization, and the practice of freedom. While curiosity has been taken as individualistic above all, I have shown it to be immensely and perhaps most basically social, inherent in collective formations and group exclusions.

Second, I offered a historical argument. I argued that Foucault and Derrida's respective reprisals of curiosity indicate a great debt to Nietzsche and an implicit critique of Heidegger. Heidegger gave a univocal account of curiosity as the distraction of everyday Dasein in its surrounding world. Rejecting this fundamental impetus to align curiosity simply with vacuity, Foucault and Derrida return to Nietzsche's earlier, bivalent interpretation of curiosity as, by and large, controlled by dominant institutions and, once in a while, expressive of an instinctive, anti-institutional suspicion. Both Foucault and Derrida begin by grounding their accounts of curiosity within analyses of power relations or sovereignty and then build their accounts of resistant or deconstructive curiosity from there.

Third, I made a political argument. I argued that when we take curiosity seriously as a philosophical technique and as a political axis, we are forced not only to address curiosity's relationship to language, on the one hand, and to punishment, on the other, but to reframe both punishment and language in relation to one another. Through the case studies of publicity and inquiry, Foucault's involvement with the Prisons Information Group and Derrida's *Death Penalty* seminars, we see that both the commendation and critique of curiosity has implications for how that curiosity is expressed in language and then deployed as punishment or against the penal system. Pushing Ilhan Inan's claim that curiosity is a mental state expressible by

inostensible terms—that is, by a particular linguistic performance—I argued that a curiosity for

what is possible (or impossible) demands that we revamp the use of questions and the practice of

investigations. Conversely, insofar as these questions and investigations have been deployed as

central mechanisms in the criminal justice system, our understanding of their function and our

ability to critique or resist those mechanisms grows only insofar as our account of curiosity

expands.

I began by setting up the philosophical and political stakes of curiosity. Observing that

curiosity is an impetus to experiment and to transgress, I demonstrated how curiosity is central

both to a philosophical enterprise that makes strange and to a politics of difference or of the

strange. Curiosity explains not only how philosophy develops and transforms, but also how

people are fetishized and in some cases excluded. Suggesting Foucault and Derrida can help

explain this ambivalence, I then offered two contextualizing accounts of curiosity: one from

Heidegger and the other from Nietzsche. Heidegger's account, which is deeply indebted to

Augustine, maintains the flavor of a certain religious phenomenology. Distinguishing curiosity

from knowledge, the question, and wonder, Heidegger understands it as a real alienation from

Being. Nietzsche's account, on the other hand, is eminently materialist. Locating curiosity

metaphorically on some faraway star and on the back of a tiger, he develops both the conscious

government and the instinctual resistance of curiosity. It is between these two stakes—the

philosophical and political—and these two figures—Heidegger and Nietzsche—that the drama of

this journey takes place.

In Chapter One, I developed a Foucauldian account of curiosity as a technique of power.

Drawing on Foucault's late essays and interviews, scholars predominantly understand

Foucauldian curiosity to be a practice of freedom. I turned to his early and middle work to argue

that Foucault's implicit account of curiosity is first and foremost not about libratory self-transformation but rather about the material and discursive effects of institutionalized inquiry, analysis, and management. By analyzing his key histories, including *History of Madness*, *Birth of the Clinic*, *Order of Things*, *Discipline and Punish*, *History of Sexuality*, and his *Abnormal* lectures, I identified four primary elements of this account. First, curiosity is a constitutive element of the socio-political space. What changes is merely who deploys it, where and how it is deployed, and upon what it is deployed. Second, the means and objects of its deployment are co-constitutive, so that each affects the other, methods and materials transform together. Third, curiosity is not primarily ocularcentric. Instead, it not only mobilizes every sense of the individual body but may in fact be located throughout the organs of the social body. Finally, curiosity, as a constitutive element of the socio-political space, is very often deployed against whatever is considered dangerous at the time. It may also represent a danger in its own right, due to its transgressive character. Interpreted in this way, Foucault's account of curiosity, as a technique of power, places curiosity squarely at the social, collective level.

In Chapter Two, I offered a revised account of Foucauldian curiosity as a practice of freedom. Many current interpretations of Foucauldian curiosity as a practice of self-care stay within the contemporary paradigms of naturalistic individualism. According to this paradigm, there is, somewhere deep inside of each person, an instinctive desire to be curious and it is that curiosity that, when mobilized as an ethos, allows someone to develop and transform as a particular slice of personhood. Having developed a denaturalized, collective account of Foucauldian curiosity in Chapter One, I turned, in Chapter Two, to revise these interpretations of curiosity as self-care in that light. I took up Foucault's most robust recommendations of curiosity, as they appear in "Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual," "The Masked

Philosopher," and the preface to *The Use of Pleasure*. In context, Foucault attempts in each case to reimagine his own social position, against classic figures like the individual moralist, universal intellectual, and writer genius. In contrast to these solitary figures, with their prophetic connection to transcendent truth, Foucault seeks to understand himself within the collective. The curiosity at work in his moral, public, and writing life is certainly one that relentlessly breaks things up and allows him to imagine things differently both philosophically and politically, but it does so through a social platform. Self-care, public speaking, and committing pen to paper occur with rather than without a community.

In Chapter Three, I analyzed a case study of this collective curiosity: publicity. Publicity is one of the modes in which collective curiosity is by turns expressed and mobilized. An analysis of the former will therefore illuminate the latter. Against the backdrop of the existential dismissal of publicity as a leveling of difference, especially in Heidegger and Kierkegaard, I developed Foucault's positive use of publicity in the Prisons Information Group as a technique of differentiation. This chapter therefore proceeds in four parts: 1) it contextualizes the Prisons Information Group within Foucault's life and work, 2) it identifies four specific modes of publicity utilized by the group, 3) it argues that, through these modes, Foucault embraces classically troublesome elements of publicity (like noise, superficiality, and anonymity) as expressly transformative, and 4) it develops a consequently positive account of Foucauldian leveling. I conclude that radical publicity—the sort that gratuitously proliferates information in the service of public intolerance for egregious injustices—both disrupts institutionalized ruts of curiosity and fuels curiosity as care, especially at the communal level. Moreover, insofar as publicity involves the collective transmigration of thought, word, and deed, it is a necessary precondition for both politics and philosophy.

Foucault's account of curiosity begins by recognizing curiosity's important role in political institutions and then extrapolates its discursive and analytic implications. His account then develops to include an embrace of curiosity as an essential element in philosophical practice and finally explores its material and activist reverberations. More than a heroic Nietzschean impetus to get beneath systems of dominance—whether language, consciousness, or judicial systems—Foucauldian curiosity proper is a diffuse social force capable of engaging our philosophical imagination and facilitating political change.

In Chapter Four, I turned to develop a nascent account of curiosity in the late work of Derrida. I began with *Beast and the Sovereign I*, where Derrida addresses two forms of curiosity: 1) scientific curiosity, which proceeds by way of objective dissection, and 2) therapeutic curiosity, which proceeds by way of observational confinement. Derrida argues that both are expressions of a violent sovereignty. Through a contextualized analysis of Derrida's treatment, I identified and developed a third, deconstructive form of curiosity, which I characterized, by turns, as linguistic, animal, and critical. Linguistic curiosity is a penchant for wordplay and a keenness for the unsteady reservoirs of signification. Animal curiosity resists all final teleology and instead emphasizes the meandering, precarious quality of knowledge. Critical curiosity combats the illusion of pure revelation and instead draws our attention to the conjuring trick by which every such illusion gets off the ground. Working against the structure of sovereignty, this third curiosity resists any clean dissection of meaning or the confinement of terms. I closed by suggesting that this analysis demands a re-evaluation of the Western philosophical tradition, given the latter's overt endorsement of *diaeresis* (dissection) and *epimeleia heautou* (self-care), but also its disavowal of rhetoric.

In Chapter Five, I analyzed a second case study: the status of the question in Derrida's *Death Penalty* seminars. Throughout *Death Penalty I*, Derrida links the different modes of a question to different forms of punishment or arrangements of justice. Following my schema of a curiosity that dissects, confines, and deconstructs, I made the following three arguments: Derrida links the death penalty to the sort of question that dissects, he links the prison to the sort of question that confines, and finally he links a justice-to-come to the kind of question that deconstructs and confounds us. I developed the first argument at greatest length. Both the death penalty and the traditionally philosophical question presuppose a limit. Derrida aims to destabilize what supervises this limit: sovereignty. It is by the guillotine that sovereignty may best be seen executing the death penalty. Likewise, it is by the question that sovereignty may best be seen executing philosophy. In this chapter, I argued that Derrida's deconstruction of the guillotine bears radical implications for how we understand the philosophical technique of the question. By developing this implicit critique of the question throughout *Death Penalty I*, I concluded that Derrida's abolition of the death penalty is, coterminously, an abolition of philosophical inquiry.

Derrida's account of curiosity begins by recognizing its collusion with sovereignty. Curiosity is not first and foremost a deconstructing impetus, but rather a powerful force by which, in various contexts and on various objects, severe limits can be imposed, policed, and solidified. For Derrida, however, there is a deconstructive curiosity that resists this predominant work of delimitation. That secondary curiosity is equally expressed at the discursive and material level. Through the careful proliferation of instability, it propels us, in the spirit of Nietzsche, to utilize language and understand punishment quite differently.

What this study overall brings to the fore is the intimate connection not only between philosophy and politics, or even philosophical techniques and techniques of punishment, but most fundamentally between discursive and material modalities of curiosity. It requires that we think further about how what we think—and, in particular, what we think about thinking—reverberates in what we do.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In *A Philosophy of Walking*, Frédéric Gros offers both philosophical reflections on the nature of walking and perambulatory reflections on the ethos of philosophy. For Gros, the two are symbiotic exercises. Good walking lends itself to philosophy and a vibrant philosophy, in turn, flourishes while walking.[1] This is not simply because some of the greatest philosophers—Rousseau, Kant, and Nietzsche among them—were dedicated walkers. It is much more fundamentally, as he argues, because walking is a practice of freedom that connects us both to what really is and to what could be. The most basic stratum of truth, or "the elemental," Gros writes, "is revealed as fullness of presence" and walking "lets you feel it," lets you "put in an appearance at the fullness of Essence."[2] How does walking do this? By releasing you from yourself, with all your social conditions and epistemological limitations, and linking you to the world, allowing you to imagine other possibilities. While walking, you are "disentangled from the web of exchanges, no longer reduced to a junction in the network," and instead free to "escape from the very idea of identity, the temptation to be someone, to have a name and a

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[1] According to Frédéric Gros, in *A Philosophy of Walking* (2009; New York: Verso Press, 2014), Wordsworth is said to be "one of the first to use his legs in the service of philosophy" (209). Gros, here, enthusiastically joins him.

[2] Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, 191 and 181.

history."[3] If philosophy is the search for truth and a practice of thinking differently, walking is, on both counts, an ideal vehicle for philosophy.

Throughout his account, Gros variously aligns the philosopher walker with the vagrant or vagabond, the pilgrim, and the rootless or homeless individual.[4] In *Manhunts*, Grégoire Chamayou analyzes these familiar figures from another vantage point. The pilgrim, of course, was a celebrated, even hallowed personage, throughout the Medieval Period and still is today. Given divine blessing through Church sanction, a pilgrim's wandering was legitimated, even if it was literally endless. Nevertheless, it was crucial to social stability that pilgrims be distinguished from vagabonds, mendicants, and other itinerant people. By the sixteenth century, guards would be stationed at city gates across Europe to identify travelers, welcoming the pilgrims but turning all vagrants away. As Chamayou notes, the guards "separated the desirables from undesirables on the basis of their faces, physiognomy, and clothes."[5] In the seventeenth century, tactics shifted from expelling the poor to hunting, capturing, and putting them to work in the General Hospital. The rationale here was to limit waste of human labor, but also to make poverty less visible. In the modern period, manhunts added to these traditional tactics of typing, expulsion, and confinement, a concern with particular ethnicities or national identities. Anti-Semitic hunts, for example, were directed at a perennially "rootless" people.[6] Current hunts for illegal immigrants

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[3] Ibid., 4 and 6.

[4] Ibid. For references to the vagrant or vagabond, see 40, 109, and 131; for the pilgrim, see 9, 107-128, 204-205, 211, and 215; for the rootless or homeless, see 132 and 138.

[5] Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 79.

[6] This language of the "rootless" and "uprooted" is used by Heidegger to refer dismissively to the Jews in his recently published *Black Notebooks*. See Paul Hockenos, "Release of Heidegger's 'Black Notebooks' Reignites Debate Over Nazi Ideology," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 24, 2014. These are the same terms Heidegger uses to modify curiosity in *Being and Time*: curiosity marks a mode of being that "constantly uproots itself" (161). As already mentioned, Adorno sees an inherent link between Heidegger's "hatred of curiosity" and his "hatred of mobility" (*The Jargon of Authenticity*, 110). It is no great leap to consider migrants from there.

in the US target "stateless" persons, especially of Chicano/Latino heritage.[7] In each of these

cases, it is the wanderer—the itinerant walker—who is the object of political expulsion, capture,

and domination.[8]

      Gros offers a romanticized image of the walker, a person with no history and no identity,

who wanders about, experiencing the palpitation of the world and hurdling into new vistas of

thought. Chamayou reminds us that many types of wanderers have historically been the object of

repeated discrimination and violence. This is because walking takes its place within a

constellation of affects, concepts, and practices—intimately linked to curiosity—that contravene

longstanding socio-political expectations. Extended walking has long been a mark of social

instability, inspired by curiosity. In the Medieval Period, mere walking, or curious walking, was

contrasted with the true pilgrimage, replete with its holy destination.[9] The term 'curiosity' has

since appeared "with almost mechanical regularity" in modern travel narratives.[10] Walking, as a

curious act, re-arbitrates and re-frames the world without institutional permission or oversight. It

is for this reason that walking is consonant with philosophy, or even mimics the work of

philosophy, but it is also for this reason that walking is threatening politically.[11] It is

transgressive and ambitious, reaching beyond one's proper purview or home, moving within a

frame that is not cleared for you in advance. In fact, it might be said of walking, as it is of

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[7] Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 135-136.

[8] At one point, Gros aligns slow walking with women and fast chases with men (199). More attention to the gendered relations between these two activities—and philosophy and politics more generally—is warranted.

[9] Christian Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: the Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 42-59.

[10] Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840* (2002; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

[11] In fact, the reason walking, as a practice of curiosity, is consistent with philosophy but threatening politically, is also why walking, as well as curiosity, may in turn be threatening philosophically. This impetus to leave a defined space or identity and to pass unknown into as yet unforeseen territories jeopardizes the stability of any discipline.

curiosity, that it "signals the ambition to escape public categories or established truths," it is "the violation of role, of species, of a public self; it is an invitation to elude identity."[12] This is why some walkers are regularly targeted for political discipline.

The case of walking is one timeless and yet recently poignant example of why we cannot embrace a particular method or characterization of philosophy without also addressing the political issues embedded in that endorsement. In this work, I have sought to demonstrate this deep and abiding co-implication of philosophical method and political practice through a large scale analysis of curiosity. While this issue has been historically powerful and remains currently relevant, its future requires further analysis. In 1345, Richard de Bury's apparent obsession with book-collecting had compromised his standing in the church and as a public figure.[13] He wrote a treatise entitled *Philobiblon* as a defense of his curious, life-long pilgrimage to acquire and peruse various manuscripts. Today, the terrain has changed significantly. With the incredible development of modern media, particularly the explosion of the digital age over the last several decades, what is the future status of curiosity, the nature of philosophy, and its political effects? Where is curiosity today, in a neoliberal state saturated in big data? How is Google affecting philosophy? What are the digital humanities? And how is infopower affecting exclusion and confinement practices?

Certainly the locus of the question has shifted in contemporary society. From ask.com and Wikipedia to Google Scholar and the Google search bar itself, the internet is the first and, increasingly, only place people raise their questions. Through their personal computer and now smart handheld devices, people pursue their curiosity through virtual networks. Just like its

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[12] Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 254.

[13] He is said to have amassed about 1,500 books, far outstripping any other personage in his time. For the full tale, see Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 60-86.

material counterpart, however, a virtual network is not inherently objective or merely 'there.' As Ben Gomes, a Google Fellow, reports, "Our goal is to make it so that the improvements we make is so much what you wanted and fits so cleanly in the flow of what you're looking for that you almost don't notice that it's happening."[14] Not only are the algorithms subtle or even opaque, but the ghettoization and stratification of information is almost invisible.

It is not simply that we use information services that constrain, confine, discipline, and direct our curiosity in advance, but that we have indeed become informational persons. Gros uses the term "homo digitalis,"[15] Daniel Solove "digital persons,"[16] and Koopman "infopersons." What makes us persons and in fact increasingly justifies our treatment as persons, rather than subpersons or nonhumans, is our legal name, our fingerprint, our passport, and other informational identifiers. What determines our experience of personhood, moreover, are increasingly our personal computer, smart phones, Facebook, and Twitter. To quote Koopman again, "We don't like to think of ourselves as bits and bytes," but we are, and if we fail to rethink the self and subjectivity in this way, "we leave it to others to do it for us."[17]

If we live in an information age in which our curiosity is always already over-determined by virtual network algorithms and our very person is refashioned in the image of a database, surely philosophy itself is already infopolitical. Whether we understand philosophy as this or that, the means and motivation of philosophy have shifted. If philosophy is a way of navigating

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[14] Google, "The Evolution of Search in Six Minutes," *Official Blog*, November 28, 2011, http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/11/evolution-of-search-in-six-minutes.html.

[15] Jordan Skinner, "Foucault's Legacy: An Interview with Frédéric Gros," *Versobooks Blog*. July 14, 2014. http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1653-foucault-s-legacy-an-interview-with-frederic-gros.

[16] Daniel Solove, *The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Information Age* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[17] Colin Koopman, "The Age of Infopolitics." For more on the development of infopersons, see Koopman, "New Media, New Power? From Biopower to Infopower," Frontiers of New Media Symposium, University of Utah. September 21, 2013. http://foucaultnews.com/2014/07/29/biopower-to-infopower/.

our present and our person, it has already changed. If philosophy is a unique way of posing the question of our existence, especially in relation to existence itself, it has already changed. If philosophy is a particular mode of interrogating our forms of knowing or our criteria for ethics in the world, it cannot but be transformed in an Information Age where the experience of knowing and doing have shifted dramatically. Even if we understand philosophy somewhat reductively as a mere university discipline, it has become more public and digital than it was before, irrespective of the Public Philosophy Network or the Digital Humanities movement.

This fast growing media platform of curiosity, investigation, and identity has critical implications not only for philosophical method but also political practice. Virtual information is now the grounds of employment or dismissal. It increasingly feeds global capitalism, as well as national and international surveillance systems. One can be counted dangerous by their physical patterns in space or mere web presence. It is now practically impossible to outrun or lose one's criminal record, change one's name, or outlive one's history. Today, communities are policed more based on demographic and criminal data than anything else. Although this has vast repercussions for already criminalized communities of color, it also penalizes trans and gender non-conforming people for mismatching documents in the process.[18] Now, more than ever, we have to analyze the state of curiosity with philosophical and political sensibilities.

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[18] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011). See also Eric Stanley & Nat Smith, *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Baltimore: AK Press, 2011). To compare and contrast transformative justice with other classical and contemporary theories of punishment, see Thom Brooks, *Punishment* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

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