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April 9, 2019

Sex and Truth

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Abstract

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If sex has become a “problem of truth,” then what is truth, and what is sex? This thesis reevaluates the status of *truth* in both the methodology and the object of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. In chapter 1, I analyze the still-unpublished challenge to dialectical philosophies of truth that a young Foucault develops (in 1955-1956) through Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of the Eternal Return. In Foucault’s hands, eternal recurrence is no metaphysical concept, but rather the foundationless iteration of iterations through which alone any metaphysics of truth is constituted. Repetition figures truth’s condition of (im)possibility, as this constitutive iterability, groundlessness, or contingency of truth is disavowed by the dialectical pretense to Absolute Knowledge, with its eternally deferred ideals of stability and self-identity. I argue that Foucault’s later genealogies, as “political histories of truth,” may be read as “experiences of the Eternal Return”; pace charges of historicism, genealogy estranges the Absolute truths of the present to themselves, less by pinpointing their emergence on a chronological timeline than by showing up the haunting return of aleatory relations in the present. In chapter 2, I read *History of Sexuality: Volume One* “from the point of view of the Eternal Return,” to examine how Foucault’s Nietzschean problematization of truth destabilizes the “problem of truth” that is (post)modern sexuality. If truth is never finally Absolute, and if the truth/fiction of Absolute Knowledge (un)grounds the (bio)power-knowledge of sexuality, then the truth of sex is perpetually threatened by its own iterability. This is to say that the construction of sexuality through a differential repetition of haphazard forces, hailing from the 13th through 20th centuries, promises (in the same breath) both the (bio)political *violence* required to synthesize/secure stable régimes of truth, and the possibility of *resisting* hegemonic iterations, reiterating norms differently. Insisting that the borders of modern sexuality and subjectivity are equally rigidified and ruptured through such historical repetitions – which (un)found historical time itself – *Sex and Truth* offers an original Nietzschean rereading of Foucault that hopes to contribute to discussions of identity and temporality spanning continental philosophy, queer theory, and sexuality studies.

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Introduction

Sex and Truth takes its name from the initial, unpublished title of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality: Volume One*. There, Foucault famously asserts that modern biopower has constituted sexuality as "a problem of truth." This assertion has led my present project through the following questions in philosophy and sexuality studies: If power "demands that sex speak the truth," then what is sex, and what is truth?

In chapter 1, I approach the latter inquiry by revisiting a number of unpublished manuscripts from Foucault's first reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, which began in 1955. These handwritten documents now survive only in the recently opened Foucault archives at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in Paris, which I visited in the summer of 2018 with funding from the FCHI Global Fellowship. I found that, roughly two decades prior to publishing "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," and still half a decade before authoring his first book, Foucault formulated an original Nietzschean critique of the prevailing dialectical tradition of truth as Absolute Knowledge. Against the dialectical optimism that truth will triumph at the end of history, Foucault revisits Nietzsche's Eternal Return – the hypothesis that, given a finitude of matter and an infinitude of time, all differences would recur eternally rather than resolving themselves in a final balance of stasis. Foucault reformulates eternal recurrence, no longer as a positive metaphysical concept, but as the iteration of difference upon which the metaphysics of truth is founded. On the one hand, this means that presence, self-identity, and teleology can only cohere through repetition, with the terminal consequence that no régime of truth is Absolute, always remaining open to being reiterated otherwise. On the other, a groundless truth can only ground itself in a perpetual, violent denial of its own groundlessness, and so repetition is in the same measure that which stabilizes and that which destabilizes power-knowledge. Repetition equally enables resistance and power. I argue, contra historicist and liberal readings of

Foucault, that it is only this foundationlessness of power-knowledge, and not any positivist pretension to truth, that grounds Foucault's later account of power-knowledge as well as his genealogical method, which he once described as history retold "from the point of view of the Eternal Return."

As chapter 2 moves to reread *History of Sexuality* as an experience of the Eternal Return, I critically rethink the way it is most commonly understood: as charting a linear historical progression from a juridical, sovereign operation of power in the 17th century which *repressed* sexuality and acted upon *death*, to a normative, dispersed modernity of "biopower" which *produces* sexuality and acts upon *life*. I argue, firstly, that this linear chronology only characterizes the official history of sexuality: this internal history, narrated dialectically by the repressive hypothesis, locates sexuality's origin in a natural state of freedom prior to its repression, and reproduces the future as the recovery of the implicit truth of this origin. "Tomorrow sex will be good again." Foucault effectively turns this chronology against itself, firstly by dissociating the truth of the present into a disparate medley of past differences, alien forms with no common essence: under the calm medical certainty of *scientia sexualis* lurks the Middle-Age Christian confession which it repeats differentially, alongside disparate economic, political, psychiatric, juridical, pedagogical, and penal forces. Far from a self-enclosed presence, biopower is only produced relationally, as the "haunting" resurgence of contingent forces hailing from the 13th through 20th centuries – forces among which repression and exclusion continue to figure prominently, if no longer primarily or exclusively. But as the power of truth, biopower is legitimated through the fiction of Absolute Knowledge, and similarly engenders the violent abjection of that which would expose its own foundationlessness. Seeking to actualize its "artificial unity," yet threatened by its own fragmentary and always-reiterable character, biopower constructs both time and identity as dialectical reproductions of an imagined purity of origin. Whence the necessity to kill in order to go on living: biopower can only secure life by *annihilating* that which threatens its vital

telos, namely, that which exposes its production or reiteration, as well as the reiteration of death in and through this power of life. Thus, if sexuality is produced as the essential “truth” of the Western liberal subject, Foucault’s Nietzschean questioning of truth reveals that sexuality and subjectivity must be produced through violence; “perverse” and peripheral, queer and racialized, sexualities are produced only to be repressed: conjured up only to be expelled from subjectivity. Through their forced iteration, these identities become stabilized, as if they had been natural and originary; but “perhaps one day,” Foucault always concludes, their forces might be reiterated differently and enter into still-unimaginable relations. From within and against the linear time of metahistory, Foucault opens the queer temporality of the Eternal Return. Shall we join him?

Ch. 1: *Ceci n'est pas une Histoire* : Genealogy as an Experience of the Eternal Return¹

Sex and Truth begins with a proposition that will be far from popular in (post-)Foucaultian circles: History repeats itself. No doubt, the expression immediately appears to be inimical to Foucault's genealogical method of historical investigation. Firstly, because the expression, already in its grammar, locates History as a subject, one whose essence would be to "repeat itself." Repetition would then name the essence that determines – always and forever – a no-less transhistorical subject or substance of History. Yet this expression is also commonly associated with another: "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it."² Both expressions would understand the repetition of history as essentially undesirable: it is the repetition of wars, of genocides, of senseless atrocities. In the latter expression, this repetition is not only *to* be avoided; it effectively *can* be avoided, provided that the rational subject of history "learns" from these "mistakes" so as to repeat them no more. A universal History whose (un)necessary repetition can(not) be resolved only by a transcendental subject: in either its deterministic or its salvationist iteration, the theme that "history repeats itself" could not seem further removed from Foucault's purpose. For is it not the most enduring and acclaimed purpose of Foucault's genealogies to problematize supposedly transhistorical truths? To show that a given truth – particularly, for my purposes, the truth of sexuality – is historically contingent, a product of specific relations of power and knowledge that could always (have) be(en) otherwise, rather than a necessity of fate or reason? Historical contingency, to be sure, seems difficult to reconcile with historical recurrence.

¹ "This is not a History." The reference is to *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, a painting by Henri Magritte which has been translated as "The Treachery of Images" and on which Foucault wrote a book-length essay by the same name, in 1973.

² This latter expression is attributed to 20th-century American philosopher George Santayana, though his original formulation was: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (Santayana 284)

Unless (H)istory is said to recur in the style of the Eternal Return. This is the thesis that I extract from a number of unpublished manuscripts in which Foucault describes genealogy as (H)istory (re)told from the “point of view of the Eternal Return” (Foucault, “Gai Savoir” 2). From this Foucaultian-Nietzschean point of view, (H)istory is repeated in at least two different ways, in line with two correspondingly distinguished senses of (H)istory and of repetition. On the one hand, universal History repeats itself; on the other, so too does Foucault’s own “political history of truth” recur, given a radically different sense of recurrence. In the first instance, History names the history of the historians: the teleological story of a “hidden meaning that little by little advances toward truth and reaches it once all meaning has been illuminated” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 9). As in the expressions I have been analyzing, this History narrates the progressive revelation of truth through time. To say that *this* History, or metahistory, repeats itself (eternally) is firstly to problematize the possibility of such a telos of truth, an end of History in which “all meaning” would finally have “been illuminated”; it is to suggest that, as such an end could only be formulated as a repetition of History’s – contingently – designated origin, the straight line of historical time cannot avoid bending into a torturous curve, a vicious circle.³ Tracing this critique from Foucault’s initial reading of Nietzsche, in 1955, through *History of Sexuality*, the first aim of this chapter is to analyze the underexplored role of *repetition* in Foucault’s challenge to metahistorical narratives which ground truth – and especially the “truth of sex.” If “‘truth’ is linked in a *circular* relationship with systems of power,” this circularity betrays that truth is grounded only in a repetition of the Same: a repetition which violently freezes over the Same “systems of power which produce and sustain” truth, and which truth in turn “induces and ... extend[s]” (“Truth and Power”). I will argue that this repetition of the Same opens onto a new understanding of how the mobile relations of power that produce

³ Cf. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, by Pierre Klossowski. Foucault was fond of Klossowski, and particularly of this 1969 work on Nietzsche; the unpublished materials from Foucault’s second phase of work on Nietzsche, in the 1970s, attest with references from *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*.

sexuality “[harden] into an unalterable form,” the form of truth, “in the long baking process of history” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 79). But this repetition of the Same through which truth constitutes its Absolute authority is only as grounding as it is *un*grounding; if the identity of the Same can only be constituted by repeating itself, then the Same is never self-same, as any given presence, or present, is not but the strange and disparate repetition of past differences. Here the second, more affirmative sense of historical recurrence surfaces: from out and under the inadvertent repetition of the dialectic, Foucault teases a singular reading of Nietzsche’s Eternal Return, wherein history is repeated only in its discontinuity, in the constantly-renewed singularity of its forces, and in the infinite openness of its future. Foucault’s “Eternal” Return is not outside History, but is that constitutive element, inside History, which at once renders it possible for régimes of truth to congeal in their identities, *and* renders it impossible that any régime could finally attain Absolute authority. Thus repetition is as good as it is bad: as much the necessity for perpetual violence as the potentiality of resistance. I will argue that this repetition, running within and against History as well as the truth (and the truth of sex) grounded in History, opens up the possibility of Foucaultian genealogy, as an experience of the Eternal Return. Finally, I hope to problematize the status of both truth and of history within Foucault’s thought; against a long legacy of historicist interpretations of *History of Sexuality* and especially *History of Madness*, I want to suggest that Foucault’s genealogies render the truths of the present strange to themselves, not simply by provincializing them as fixed points on a chronological timeline, but moreover by shoring up their eternal fragmentation and non-self-identity, as recursive repetitions of discontinuous forces structuring identity and time themselves.

My choice to read Foucault’s histories in this Nietzschean light of the Eternal Return may seem particularly bizarre as not one of Foucault’s scant publications on Nietzsche appears to explicitly reference the concept, central though it was to Nietzsche’s philosophy and particularly to Nietzsche’s legacy in France. In fact, I will return, throughout this chapter, to a certain number of

published references scattered across interviews, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Order of Things*, and Foucault’s 1970-71 course (*Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*). Nonetheless, reviewing these references, it would remain difficult to deny that the Eternal Return does not initially seem to figure among the more prominent elements in Foucault’s reading of Nietzsche. And then, why should it? The cornerstones of Foucault’s interest in Nietzsche are now well established: as Michael Mahon writes in his seminal study, *Foucault’s Nietzschean Genealogy*, “Foucault is not, contra Deleuze, a devotee of Nietzsche, herald of the Overman and Eternal Return; rather ... The Nietzsche who is so important to Foucault, first, is Nietzsche the genealogist, the one who problematized truth as intimately entwined with relations of power, who sought a multiplicity of relations of force at the origin of our taken-for granted values ... Foucault’s Nietzsche, secondly, is the one who saw our prized and apparently given individuality as a historical construct” (Mahon 2). Truth is produced politically, and (the truth of) subjectivity is produced historically: in locating these theses as the central stakes of Foucault’s Nietzsche, Mahon is strictly following Foucault’s insistence, in his first “Truth and Juridical Forms” lecture, that these contentions constitute Nietzsche’s principal breaks with philosophical tradition (cf. “Truth and Juridical Forms” 9). If Foucault’s chief use of Nietzsche is to historicize truth and subjectivity as contingent products of power relations, what possible use could he have for the Eternal Return? What is the Eternal Return if not the last vestige of metaphysics? (This was essentially Heidegger’s critique: that the Eternal Return tries but fails to overcome metaphysics, reversing without revising its traditional conception of being.)

But perhaps the Eternal Return is not so far removed from Foucault’s concerns about truth and subjectivity, or history and power relations, as it would initially seem. In a 1971 lecture, Foucault suggests that it is precisely “the affirmation of the Eternal Return” which “excludes the affirmation of truth” (*Leçons* 213, footnote 41). And if it is through the Eternal Return that Nietzsche ruptured the dominant philosophical tradition of truth, it is equally the Eternal Return that bursts open

subjectivity; in a 1978 interview with D. Trombadori, Foucault poses the following rhetorical questions: “Might there not be experiences in which the subject might be able to dissociate from itself, sever the relation with itself, lose its identity? Isn’t that the essence of Nietzsche’s experience of eternal recurrence?” (“Interview with Michel Foucault,” 248) How are truth and subjectivity lost, severed, undone in the Eternal Return? The rest of this chapter is devoted to this “experience of eternal recurrence.”

But first, what is the Eternal Return? For Nietzsche, the essence of the Return was this: “Everything becomes and recurs eternally – escape is impossible!” (Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §1058) The principle has been taken in numerous senses, already by Nietzsche himself. For Foucault, we can largely set aside the concept’s ethical and cosmological dimensions – however much Nietzsche himself intended eternal recurrence as an ethical test of one’s *amor fati* (love life, even with all its suffering, to such an extent that you would will your life to recur eternally), and however much Nietzsche did turn to physics for scientific proof that all in the universe recurs eternally, given an infinity of time and a finitude of matter. Rather, it is the *ontological destabilization* effected by the Eternal Return that accounts for its prominence in 20th-century French philosophy. Here the Eternal Return works to challenge what Jacques Derrida calls a “metaphysics of presence”: if everything becomes and recurs eternally, then any given presence of being is incomplete, as it is immediately contaminated by its past and future recurrence. Constituted through eternal repetition, the identity of the Same is already no-longer-present and not-yet-present at the moment in which it presents itself – it has already been there, and will be there again, all the while it is there. The presence of the present fractures into a repetition of differences which can be neither escaped nor subsumed into an underlying fiction of identity. Particularly in a mid-20th-century intellectual context dominated by the dialectical legacies of Hegel, Marx, and Freud, the Eternal Return opened up new ways to challenge

the self-sameness and -coincidence of the Self (Klossowski) as well as the logic of identity in relation to language (Derrida) and truth (Deleuze).

Foucault's innovation is to read the Eternal Return in relation to history, as that which ruptures "continuous history [which] is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject; the guarantee that everything that has eluded him" – namely, truth – "will be restored to him" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 12). Although, again, his comments on eternal recurrence were rarely published, I found in the Foucault archives that eternal recurrence was continually critical to his reading of Nietzsche, and so to his Nietzschean understandings of truth and of history. In Foucault's hands, eternal recurrence comes to name the repetition of difference that is the (im)possibility of Absolute truth: truth is "fabricated in a piecemeal fashion" through a strange repetition of past differences, but régimes of truth must violently mask this constitutive repetition in order to claim Absolute authority (NGH 78). Thus repetition founds and unfounds History, as the rational process of truth's progressive revelation, and this (de)stabilizing repetition opens the possibility of rereading Foucault's "counter-histories," no longer as positivist historical projects, but as recursive, non-linear histories of history. At the risk of jumping the gun, I'll return once more to Foucault's most startling conclusion: "the return is what founds genealogical analysis," at the same time as genealogy "is that which permits the return to be thought" ("Histoire et généalogie" 3). How so?

§1. *Coup de Marteau, Coup de Foudre*: Foucault's First Engagement with Nietzsche⁴

To approach this question, it will help to revisit Foucault's very first reading of Nietzsche, which began in 1955-6 – six years before the publication of his first book, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge*

⁴ Literally, "the strike of a hammer, the strike of lightning." But the expression "*coup* de foudre" also means "love at first sight," resonating rather nicely with Nietzsche's "*coup* de marteau," particularly as Nietzsche's famous philosophizing with a hammer counted among the expressions of his thought that Foucault loved first and maybe most.

classique, and sixteen before his first publication devoted to Nietzsche, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (henceforth abbreviated “NGH”). The handwritten manuscripts from this period of Foucault’s life remain unpublished, under the domain of the Foucault estate. They were only opened to public scrutiny in 2012, and are now housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in Paris. Foucault archival box #65, the “Nietzsche box,” reveals that Foucault essentially read Nietzsche in two phases: from 1955-6, and again from 1967-1973. It is only in the latter period that Foucault explicitly inaugurates the key concepts – genealogy and power relations – most commonly attributed to his interpretation of Nietzsche. If it is precisely history and truth in question here, one might reasonably question why this first encounter is still relevant – particularly to queer theorists who may be wary to resuscitate now well-worn philosophical debates. But in fact, it is this very concern with *truth* that unites Foucault’s two encounters with Nietzsche; Foucault’s later “political histories of truth” – and especially his history of the truth of sexuality – are consistently (un)grounded by the critique of truth that he begins to develop there. Leading through the Eternal Return, the critique essentially seeks to show that truth is grounded in an element that equally ungrounds it. Repetition is that element, in Foucault’s earlier and later Nietzsches; while the latter tends to locate relations of power as the forces repeated, always differently, throughout *history*, the former had already attributed similar qualities to discourse. In lengthy 1955 commentaries on Nietzsche’s *philology*, Foucault posits discourse as the inescapable medium that is differentially, productively repeated so as to (de)stabilize truth. Specifically, Foucault’s early Nietzsche uses eternal recurrence to destabilize three pillars of Absolute truth, as instantiated by the dialectical tradition of philosophy: its telos (truth as the end of history), its origin (the lost ground of truth, which history progressively recovers), and its determinate negation (the progress of reason through trial and error, the straight line connecting origin and end). This section reviews the surviving manuscripts from this 1955 interpretation, while the following section considers how this early argument plays into Foucault’s later work. In each

case, it is repetition which gives presence only in and through its absence, such that, finally, truth is “destroyed by the move whereby it is constituted as a world” (“Wahrsagen et Wahrnehmen” 1).

To back up even further, we must firstly ask what, exactly, *is* this dialectical tradition of truth against which Foucault turns to Nietzsche – the same tradition of truth whose history Foucault never ceases to trace, and also the same that structures the modern “truth of sexuality.” As I have mentioned, the dialectic would become, in the second half of the 20th century, the chief target of French philosophers’ appropriations of Nietzsche and eternal recurrence. Already in 1955 – well before Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), Klossowski’s *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969), or Derrida’s *Spurs* (1978) – this was Foucault’s aim. But, again, what is the dialectic? And what is truth?

Briefly, dialectics names a long philosophical tradition that Foucault, in these 1955 documents, tends to distill into two essential figures: Socrates and Hegel. In each instance, the dialectic deploys a discourse of reason in its search for truth; it aims to reestablish an “original kinship which wisdom discovers between truth and the human” (“Dialectique et tragédie” 7). Whence the significance of the *origin* for Absolute Knowledge, as that lost ground which truth would have to recover. For the Socratic as for the Christian dialectic, the origin is Ideal; the sensible world which we experience daily would be no more than a copy, a simulacrum, of the pure Ideas that existed originally. What we see as a chair (or, say, a homosexual) would only mimic the Ideal essence of the chair which would exist, in itself, even if there were no material chairs (or homosexuals). With Hegel – and so with the modern notion of truth that informs sexuality – things become more complicated: now the origin is the notorious “night in which all cows are black,” a condition of absolute indeterminacy void of any meaning or individual identity (Hegel 362). But whether the origin is absolutely valorized or feared, the dialectical procedure always ascribes to it an originary freedom, the truth of which would have been lost at the opening of human history. “The origin always precedes the Fall.” (NGH 79) “Historical time,” inaugurated by “the Fall” from the

truth that would still have been present in the origin, whether consciously (Socrates; Christianity) or unconsciously (Hegel; modernity), would be essentially characterized by forgetting: we would be entrenched in a merely incomplete, covered-over simulacrum of the truth. For Hegel, this originary truth is nothing other than the unity of the human subject and their exterior world, a unity said to have been shattered by the introduction of human discourse, whereby the human would have mediated and thus “alienated” or distanced themselves from the world. Yet the truth of this unity, the transcendent identity of all immanent identities and differences, would have remained only implicit at the origin, as “natural consciousness” would not yet have mastered the dialectical power to reflect its self-same identity back to itself. Reassuringly, the dialectical path promises to lead us out of the cave of historical time and back into the solid light of Truth. Here *negation* enters our purview, as it is through “determinate negation”—which preserves in superseding, and does not annihilate completely—that the dialectical subject finds its path, but only by losing it, by erring and learning from its errors. After Hegel, the same distance installed by discourse (in its negation of nature) is, no less, equally to be *effaced* by discourse: having “alienated” itself from the world through discourse, the dialectical subject aims to “reconcile” itself with it, essentially by making the world over in its image. The “end of history,” as both its coda and the absolute meaning of its progression, would mark the final reconciliation, finally expunging all distance between knower and known, as the subject of knowledge would consciously realize the lesson of the origin: that there never was any separation between human and world, knower and known, beyond that distance which the subject had itself created, and could therefore eradicate. Finally, at the end of this straight line progressing progressively from origin to end of history, the world would stand before knowledge in its full, absolute presence – and newly differentiated into true identities, so as to prevent the free-license *violence* of the “night in which all cows are black.” The dream of every dialectic is “to manage to have

being itself in its hands, in effacing the distance of the human from its homeland, of the Earth from Life, of the thing from the light” (“Dialectique et tragédie” 7).

Readers of *History of Sexuality: One* should already recognize several key traits of Absolute Knowledge. For it is the dialectic which establishes that truth is “by nature free,” and “error servile” (*HoS* 60). In the dialectic, error, as determinate negation, is the servant that guides master Reason toward the originary and final truth of history. As chapter 2 argues, these dialectics of truth manifest in the modern understanding of sexuality as an originating force whose prediscursive freedom is to be reclaimed. As a discourse of truth, sexuality is given over to a teleological future that destines it to “end” in recovering its origin. Foucault’s destabilization of this discourse requires him to show that “truth is *not* by nature free – nor error servile” (60), for perhaps in the end, “there is no *truth* where the human and the world might find their common homeland” (“Le Théâtre et la mort de Dieu,” 2).

So, how does the Eternal Return counteract the dialectic? Allow me to begin at the end. For what is this end of history, if not a *repetition* of its “origin”? For Foucault, the dialectic “establishes as the end of history what it had *itself* already accomplished in its first philosophical effort, offering the curious example of a philosophical trajectory that finally manages to assign the soil on which it operates, but giving it as the result undertaken by this trajectory itself.” (Manuscrit sans titre #3) If the end of history was envisioned as pure presence, why can it only be defined in relation to, or as a repetition of, history’s origin? Does this repetition truly reveal the buried truth of that origin, or does it only inaugurate, as the end of history, what had already been accomplished in its first moment? This initial aspect of the critique may seem most applicable to Hegel himself, who purported to *have himself brought about* the end of history, in positing that its whole progression had led up to his revelation of Absolute Knowledge. Thus, Hegel would have “[assigned] the soil,” the ground, “on which [he operated]” precisely “as the result” of the very dialectical trajectory of history supposed to have followed from this same soil. Yet this “end” of history would make no new or positive

contributions to knowledge, contenting itself to repeat the “truth” it would locate behind its own first move. By determining the origin of history, from within the confines of the present, the dialectic consolidates the absolute authority of truth: its origin is determined as the identity of the Same that will return as/at the end of history. The status quo, the Same, is absolutely justified as the point to which history was always aspiring. The contemporary reader can easily imagine Foucault anticipating the critique of origins that has become so (anti-)foundational for queer theory: “the law produces and then conceals the notion of ‘a subject before the law’ in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law’s own regulatory hegemony” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3). The “origin” is projected retrospectively, from the present into history, as a fiction (e.g., the fiction of the originating subject) that naturalizes the present as history’s telos.

There is, then, a repetition which is proper to the dialectic, even as the dialectic claims to progress in a straight line toward the end of history. As Deleuze would later put it, “the straight line of time forms a circle” (*Difference and Repetition* 115). This circular repetition, which the dialectic necessitates in spite of its linear ideals, always circles back to the *Same*, back to the identity of the Same located as absolute, originary and final. The closed circle of the Same also shapes Foucault’s reading of the dialectic, as that dialectic purports that only the “ultimate can come to hear/understand (*entendre*) the first. As though there could only be absolute understanding of language in the perfect and impossible form of the *circle*, and from one extreme of time to the other” (Foucault, “Périr par la connaissance,” 5-6; emphasis mine). At the extreme point of the dialectic, which Absolute Knowledge had marked as the end of history, history cannot help but curve backward toward its origin. Thus “philosophy has become for us a thought that is by vocation delayed, a thought which finds itself on the return of itself, and thereby implies, even from its first

moment, the pretension of Absolute Knowledge” (“Métaphysique de la volonté,” 6). Whence, no doubt, Western philosophy’s endless return to the Greeks.

However, this circular movement alone does not yet contest the positive claim of Absolute Knowledge to *truly* mark the end of history. What if this curve *is* the truth of history? Moreover, however much import this critique might bear against Hegel and so-called “Old Hegelians” (united by their belief that Absolute Knowledge has *presently* been found, or that it was already found by Hegel), what is its weight against the “New Hegelians,” who – echoing the temporality of sexuality as a discourse of truth – maintain that Absolute Knowledge is *not* present at present, but remains forthcoming? More radically still, what is the force of Foucault’s critique given that those Hegelians in the vein of Foucault’s mentor Jean Hyppolite, such as Slavoj Žižek or Judith Butler, claim that the progression of history *is* in itself Absolute Knowledge – that the “end” does not exist as a positive moment but only as a dynamic movement? If Absolute Knowledge is not yet here, or perhaps never will be here but in the partial movement of its realization, how relevant is Foucault’s Nietzsche?

But this is only the first stage in Foucault’s argument. Having questioned the *telos* of truth, he turns to this *origin* that *telos* repeats. The dialectic would locate this origin as a fixed point, a point which would have been forgotten and would need to be repeated in its identity. But Foucault, again anticipating Deleuze’s philosophy, will say that the origin lacks all identity and fixity, since any given “origin” is always already repetition. The end repeats the origin, but the origin was repetition. In the first instance, the dialectic betrays this repetition insofar as it grounds its truth claims – claims concerning the truth of the origin – in the pretension to have secured their truth already. Try as it might, the dialectic cannot rid itself of all presuppositions: what is always presupposed is not only the ultimately moral *value* judgement that truth saves (which may be Nietzsche’s most consistent and best-known thesis on the will to truth), but also the metaphysical presupposition that the subject of knowledge once possessed the “truth” of the origin, before losing it all. The end of history “knows”

that the meaning of the whole historical sequence amounted to the principle of identity latent in the origin, but we know identity to be the truth of the origin only because it was, allegedly, already (partially) present in the origin. “One cannot see [the world] but in having seen it” already (“Périr par la connaissance,” 2). The origin then repeats the presupposition of the Same incessantly; to justify knowledge, the origin must take Absolute Knowledge, or at least its possibility, as a *fait accompli*.

At this point, it is worth quoting a passage from Foucault at length:

Repetition is finally the founding act and in this measure the return to the founding act. The founding act does not exist primarily, then [becoming] repetition of itself. It is in the measure that it is founding that it is designated as having already been accomplished and effectuated. It is not because the foundation was effectuated that it can repeat itself: it is because repetition is founding, that it shows itself as the reiterated founding act. Repetition is that in the founding act which permits it to define the temporality of what is thusly founded. This is to say that repetition as return across the centuries is only a surface phenomenon of what founding repetition is in its statement: the original sense of the founding act that only unveils its truth as the truth of what is already accomplished.

For example in math: the founding act of the axiomatic which is indicated as repetition.

For example in philosophy: the unveiling of being.

For example in music.

Whence the theme of forgetting, as the eventual dimension of history. Historical time is the time of forgetting moreso than of manifestation. Cf. Plato. (“Métaphysique de la Volonté,” 11)

As I will elaborate later, the second sentence of this passage points toward a crucial corrective to historicist readings of Foucault: “The founding act does not exist primarily, then [becoming] repetition of itself” (« *L’acte fondateur n’est pas d’abord, puis répétition de soi* »). What Foucault learns from Nietzsche is that the “origin” never exists “in itself,” as some pure, self-identical presence separate/separable from its later repetitions. Not that the founding act or origin is *not* repeated later; Foucault has just shown that the “end of history” effects precisely such a repetition of an originary event. But what is critical is that this dialectical repetition, or “repetition as return across the centuries,” e.g. the modern return to the Greeks, “is only a surface phenomenon of ... founding repetition.” We are thus faced with two repetitions: the dialectic’s cyclical repetition of the Same, and then this “founding repetition” already present within the origin (of the Same). The latter, “founding” repetition begins to point us, though still from afar, toward (Foucault’s reading of)

Nietzsche's eternal return. *This* repetition is expressed (and repressed) in the dialectic insofar the "founding act ... only unveils its truth as the truth of what is already accomplished" (11). "Before" repetition can repeat the identity of the Same, repetition is a recursive movement intrinsic to knowledge, to a knowledge that knows only by presuming it has already known. This is the significance of Foucault's reference to Plato in the final line, for whom "historical time," as I have shown, commenced with the forgetting of that Ideal knowledge humanity was supposed to possess prior to its fall into the sensible world. Foucault's examples earlier in the passage may want for explanation – or completion, as in the third "music" example, which indeed terminates after its introduction ("For example in music") – but nevertheless, the second example, at least, may prove instructive for readers of 20th-century continental philosophy. In a likely allusion to Heidegger, the example suggests that all philosophies of truth presuppose the *being* of truth, presupposing therefore the presence of being to knowledge. In our context, the allusion suggests that this presence of being, like Plato's Ideas, is taken by philosophies of truth as the presupposed "truth of what is already accomplished." This necessary presupposition marks the reiteration that animates the founding act.

Significantly, this repetition that constitutes the founding act determines both the identity as well as the "temporality of what is thusly founded." Identity will henceforth be determined on the basis of this founding repetition, much as every dialectic repeats, as/at its end, something like Plato's Ideas, Hegel's (un)differentiated night, or the Judeo-Christian Garden of Eden. Or, again, like the presumption that founds the "truth" of sex: that sex is naturally free – unveiled, present, like being. This presumption is rarely if ever called into question, but nevertheless repeated throughout the history (e.g., the history of sexuality) that it founds, in the form of identities which (c)overly refer back to it as the ground of their truth. Identity will cohere through the constant renewal or indeed repetition of this founding presumption. Thus the "founding repetition" constitutes, by delimiting, the presumption(s) or better the value(s) constitutive of all that is to come in their lineage – but in

order for this lineage to become *identical* to itself, Absolute, it must disavow that it is founded on values, myths, repetitions. “What knowledge, indispensably, designates as anterior to itself is what repeats the repetition of the theater, without having ever been manifested there for the first time, in its originary purity, without ever being able to accomplish it” (“Périr par la connaissance” 2). Enter identity as the repetition of the Same, newly consolidated as a positive truth “designated as already accomplished and effectuated.”

In modern (dialectical) régimes of truth, every identity is opened onto a temporality which is proper to it, but which inevitably returns it to the Same. Its origin then “opens an entitled dialogue in the career of history, of memory, of exegesis which finally forms the space of philosophical reflection, and which assigns as its trajectory to *recover* the truth from which proceeds the Δόγος [*door*; in context, likely: threshold, origin] by/with which one deciphers: the circle of truth and of the Δόγος [*door/origin*], where, again, the εἶδεναι [*future*] and the διαλεγασθαι [*dialectic*] necessarily submit all thought to its destiny in history in giving it the task of recovering in the future of the εἶδεναι [*future*] the past anterior of the διαλεγασθαι [*dialectic*].” (“Métaphysique de la Volonté,” 5) Here we find Foucault’s second major departure from historicism: rather than rest faith in the linear continuity of historical time, Foucault holds that this seeming linearity masks its repetition of the Same, which subordinates the future to the reproduction of the alleged origin (whether or not this historical origin ever “really” happened). “Tomorrow sex will be good again.” (*HoS* 7) This is why it matters that the dialectical end of history repeats its “origin”: if the linear time of history bends into a “circle,” so too does temporality in modern régimes of truth, which Nietzsche and Foucault after him distinguish by modernity’s (dialectical) “historical sense.” And here again, we encounter two repetitions: the overt repetition of the Same, and then the founding repetition which effectively selects the Same to be repeated, by positing the latter as an originary truth, “already accomplished and effectuated.” Behind the linear veneer of progress, we find masks – “masks of masks,” as

Foucault and Deleuze were both so fond of saying. The mask of the dialectic effectively masks eternal recurrence, all the while bearing the latter at its heart; thus, the repetition that founds meaning equally ruptures meaning's claim to permanence, transcendence, or self-sameness. "Truth" is founded to arrest this repetition from which its own identity and temporality were extracted, leaving us finally with "this profound nature of time which makes it so that it is not flux, running, vital water of a lost source, – but a ring made of metal, whose inflexibility recommences at each point" ("La Fête Rolandsheck" 2). With the ring, the circularity of historical time returns, as a cast-iron circle of destiny whose rigid inflexibility allows only the Same to "recommence at each point."

Is it (still) possible to return to this founding repetition, to revive this "flux, running, vital water of a lost source"? But again, it is not simply that the founding act once took place, in a primary moment only repeated afterward; this "founding" act is incessantly repeated so as to found and re-found truth such that its "inflexibility recommences at each point." Insofar as the founding act consisted essentially in repetition, the repetition *of* the founding act *is* the founding act. All the more so as "this beginning can only be stated, and as a novelty, at the moment that it ends, that is, at the moment that knowledge attains this point of the perfect curve that leads it to pure reflection ... this *constantly uninterrupted* and absolutely originary event by which knowledge was rendered possible" ("Périr par la connaissance" 2). Why is it that the beginning can only be stated at the moment it is ending? If the end again repeats the beginning, is this not the effect of the same distance which made it so that knowledge cannot see the world but as it has already seen it? Is this not the same distance, the same old distance of knowledge from being, that the dialectic had set out to close? In which case, finally, is this distance – recurring as it does at the end of history – *ever* effaced? Or does that distance rather remain to haunt knowledge perpetually, necessitating that its "absolute origin" be repeated, endlessly and without interruption?

Not only does the infinite distance of the night swallow up any light seeking to dispel it, not only can Plato never make it out of the cave, but the Sun is blinding. Here we arrive at the most pressing of Foucault's concerns: that truth is absolutely groundless; that Absolute truth is grounded only in this perpetual disavowal of its own groundlessness. For the infinite repetition of the founding act is inspired in turn by the infinite repetition of this distance, the distance of knowledge from being, that it never finally overcomes. The founding act is repeated in the constant effort of Absolute Knowledge to dispel this distance, or to appear to have dispelled it already. Yet the very necessity for the act to be repeated, without interruption, indicates that the distance never does vanish, as knowledge only emerges in a historical time and in a discourse which it has already denounced as forms of absence.

Along with the founding act is repeated the *fear* which inspires it: the fear of death, the terror of finitude, that Absolute Knowledge set out to transcend. The origin is mined for its implicit truth, but in the same measure as this truth would have remained unrealized, the origin also *terrifies*, figuring as a prediscursive state of nature whose absolute indifferentiation and lawlessness represent the threat of unlimited violence. The founding act, or the introduction of human subjectivity, of reason, and especially of discourse, would then provide the necessary solution to this originary violence, by adapting the world to human society in differentiating its chaos into stable identities. Thus, for instance, sexual difference is taken as both natural and positively knowable in its originary state, yet simultaneously feared as "animal sexuality" whose proper taming requires the intervention of human morality and technology. By repeating this fear that justifies the founding act, alongside that act itself, Absolute Knowledge legitimates itself as the rational and inevitable progression of human society. "Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us to know?" (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* §355) The dialectic's origin narrative is always a self-justifying ruse, a deferral of the question of its foundation

(for knowledge is foundationless) in favor of this its justification: “Interrogated about its foundation, [the dialectic] responds with its justification.” (Foucault, “Métaphysique de la volonté” 2)

At the same time, though, the perpetual repetition of this fear no sooner justifies the necessity of the dialectic than it undercuts the dialectical pretension to Absolute Knowledge. Beneath the repetition of fear, beneath all the repetitions of the dialectic, “rumbles another, Nietzschean repetition: that of the eternal return” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 95). At this phase in Foucault’s reading, the eternal return marks above all the incessant, ineffaceable repetition of *death* – of this absolute distance of knowledge from being, the distance which alone opens being to knowledge. This thesis is beautifully compressed in one of Foucault’s favorite Nietzsche quotes, which he borrows as the title of a most lyrical piece of his own: “To perish from Absolute Knowledge could belong to the foundation of being.” (« *Périr par la connaissance absolue pourrait faire partie du fondement de l’être.* »)⁵ Absolute Knowledge, as I have shown, is precisely that which claims to rationally master the “foundation of being.” However, this also means that being is only knowable as it has already perished in the grasp of a truly *sanguine* knowledge (sanguine, in the double sense that knowledge is *optimistic* in its Absolute pretensions, and that it is *bloodthirsty*, killing the being it claims to recover). While power relations are not yet at the fore of Foucault’s reading, already knowledge is essentially characterized by a *violence* that follows necessarily from its groundlessness: to know being, knowledge must arrest its movement, freeze over its difference in the form of static identities. Yet knowledge itself perishes in the course of its cyclical movement, as it can only grasp being in its absence, in its mediation – *repetition* – through discourse and historical time: Absolute Knowledge “does not appear but through the turbulence wherein it vanishes into thin air. It is given and withdrawn, brought absolutely close and summoned in an absence with no recourse.” (“Périr,” 7-8)

⁵ The quote, which also appears on page 96 of NGH, is taken from §39 of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, though the most popular English translation, by Walter Kaufmann, reads: “it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who know it completely would perish.”

Whence the necessity to endlessly rebirth its founding act along with its justificatory fear. Whence the Eternal Return, which for Foucault *is* this unremitting absence that is like the condition of (im)possibility for presence, this presence it unceasingly gives and withdraws. For this reason:

The true meaning of this experience [the experience of the Eternal Return] is difficult to extract: it is sharply opposed to the theme, – which was “the religion of civilized peoples” – that time is the space where progress deploys its reprieves, that history is the gospel of progress. But its actual positive meaning is no better defined; and the *vital* emergences of this theme did not exclude misinterpretations, on the contrary they [the emergences] summon/appeal to them [the misinterpretations], as if to use them as evidence: the pejorative theme of a world which is going to loss, submerged in its own technical universe, or else its “occidental or civilized” destiny is engulfed by the flood of barbarism; the theme of a world which must return to its young, naïve, and healthy forms of its experience, which requires a supplement of youth to become truth anew, as Bergson’s world requires a young supplement to recreate its purity, a virginity (read: a vision); the theme of a world which comes to an end in history itself, which can be no more than the reflective vision on the path of truth, a walk in the imaginary flood: the world that finally ends in this crystal sphere where its history lies. It is not certain that the Nietzschean theme of the Eternal Return did not favor certain of these misinterpretations.

But what it means to repeat does not concern the end, nor the immediate, nor catastrophe. The solemnity of repetition is graver than all myth, for it is the destruction of myth.

Repetition is very much the return, but the return to the very foundation of truth... (“Métaphysique de la Volonté” 11) [This is where my earlier block passage picks up.]

If Foucault’s eternal recurrence, as I have been arguing, is hardly a positive metaphysical concept, this is because it appears more so as the other side, or better the *underside*, of metaphysical tradition: that within its own tradition which metaphysics was already refuting – namely, the possibility that “there is no *truth* where the human and the world might find their common homeland” (“Le Théâtre et la mort de Dieu,” 2). No such homeland exists because its foundations are no sooner laid than destroyed, in and through the act of their construction. For not only is the construction mired in the very language and historical time which it decries, but its foundation rests upon the sinking soil of eternal recurrence. Thus eternal recurrence is inscribed within the tradition, as within those “misinterpretations” of itself that it favors and amasses as its evidence, in the passage above: it is only through “misinterpretations,” absences, masks that repetition appears at all. Beneath the repetition of knowledge, *within* and *against* this cyclical repetition, rumbles the repetition of difference that eternally ruptures the calm certainty of knowledge. This repetition announces the impossibility that knowledge will ever attain its telos, and consequently the possibility that each

régime of truth may be resisted – perhaps repeated differently – but, in equal measure, it also yields the necessity for the perpetual repetition, and the perpetual *violence*, of the founding act seeking to absolutize itself. Further, this repetition of the Same will inhibit, with violent force, the possibility of differential repetition, hard-baking the metal ring whose inflexibility recommences at each point. As Foucault says in the 1970s, this Nietzschean repetition is “at the same time sickness and cure” (“Gai Savoir” 4) – perhaps recalling, for readers today, Derrida’s pharmakon, an iterability only as good as it is bad, as it unceasingly destabilizes or deconstructs the truth it grounds. According to Geoffrey Bennington, “It turns out that what makes our work a priori impossible is precisely what simultaneously makes it possible” (Bennington 15).

So too with Foucault’s favorite Nietzschean phrase (“to perish from Absolute Knowledge...”): “it is in the space that it spares itself with respect to this phrase that [the Absolute] deploys its discourse in all its breadth” (“Périr” 1). The statement is already inscribed in the tradition it negates, as that tradition already negates it. It does not then communicate any “actual positive” knowledge of being so much as the “knowledge” of that knowledge, sifting through the sediments of knowledge to reveal that it assassinates the being it proclaims to illumine. “The phrase can only ever rest at the end of philosophical language, turning at its confines – or rather showing that it is philosophical language which turns around its stubborn piety.” (1) Similarly, eternal recurrence opens the possibility of inhabiting this “end” of philosophy – the inescapable condition of a modernity defined by its historical sense – but inhabiting it differently, in discovering that its end was only ever turning around the “stubborn piety” of an unceasing repetition of difference. “Such that, to know what this phrase [‘to perish from Absolute Knowledge...’] means, knowledge would have to attain this foundation that founds precisely its death, and to be there in this point that illumines its own disappearance, where acceding to that which founds it, knowledge dies by the blow/force/stroke [*coup*] and by the law of this foundation proper to knowledge itself.” (1) Read

from this same “point that illumines its own disappearance,” Foucault’s eternal recurrence is less the metaphysical assertion about the cosmos that it still was, in part, for Nietzsche, than it is a dynamic internal to knowledge itself, albeit in spite of itself. This dynamic movement is not posited as a prediscursive flux existing in itself, but only traced, in necessarily partial maps, as it emerges on the discursive surface of knowledge, as though in its fracture lines. We could even speculate that this “Eternal Return” might only be as “eternal” as the régimes of truth which it animates and ruptures, perhaps eventually opening onto something beyond itself.⁶

In Foucault’s early interpretation, *discourse* is above all this surface space of repetition, and accordingly *philology* is the method whereby Nietzsche is said to have illumined this surface. For it is discourse which the dialectic had designated as the measure of the distance separating knowledge from being. If that distance is never, in fact, abolished, it is because discourse rebounds or recurs endlessly, as all of the dialectic’s discourse on overcoming discourse multiplies rather than banishes the distance, receding further and further into the eternally groundless terrain of discourse.

This is the lesson that a young Foucault extracts from the circumstance that “Nietzsche’s philosophical experience begins with philology, as if it found its native soil in commentary” (“Philologie et exégèse philologique” 1).⁷ As “a radical experience of language” in its groundlessness, Nietzschean philology, on this initial interpretation, occupies the place that genealogy will later usurp: a differential experience of that very point, inside the *dispositif* of knowledge, which the dialectic would designate as its end; but an experience of the *repetition* that (de)constructs the end, as the soil sinks away endlessly from under our feet. In the first instance, philology, as a study of

⁶ Although we should note that, while Foucault’s 70s reading of Nietzsche specifically restricts the dialectical model of truth to a post-Hegelian modernity, the 50s reading does suggest more of a continuity from Greek to modern conceptions of Absolute truth. On a similar note, the 50s manuscripts do affirm Nietzsche’s “metaphysics” on occasion, though always on the sole condition that metaphysics is reconceived, after Nietzsche, as pure metaphor. The later reading jettisons metaphysics altogether, as the very philosophical project of truth ruptured by eternal recurrence.

⁷ Significantly, the 1955 manuscripts provide strong support for Joseph Westfall’s otherwise surprising contention that “Foucault’s Nietzsche is always a philologist and Foucault’s Nietzscheanism is thus always going to be a philological aspect of Foucault himself, both as thinker–writer and as human being.” (Westfall 1)

(classical) language in its historical development, might seem to be a “sober” knowledge of linguistic structures in their “continuity,” tracing a straight line connecting “what [language] has not ceased to be up to our day” back to “an originary audition, as though it were speaking for the first time in an absolutely unheard-of purity of meaning” (“Périr” 5). In this sense, the classical philologist finds themselves on the same extreme point of the curve as the dialectician, that point of the “ultimate” end attempting to hear and to understand its origin. Lodged within this point, Nietzsche’s philology leads him to make two critical discoveries.

First of all, the manifest impossibility of “this absolute presence of the distant, its extreme proximity in a naked truth”; looking back on the Greeks from the late 19th century, Nietzsche immediately finds that the distance, of his present knowledge from its past object, is irreducible, for “there is no regard sans perspective,” nor is there any “hearing/understanding [*entente*] that would no longer indicate, even obscurely, the point from which it was heard/understood” (6). Through philology, Nietzsche experiences the irreducible repetition of *perspective*: “The philologist who seeks absolute audition of a language may very well know that he has his prejudices, his modes of attention; that he belongs to precisely this time that listens and not that which speaks; and that his very language as a philologist will one day be heard as if it were originary . . . all these reduplications of critical consciousness will never efface the soil from which he listens and speaks, and will never slip away under his feet.” (6) While classical philology no doubt acknowledged the difference of present knower from past object of knowledge, Foucault maintains that it sought (whether dialectically or critically) to efface this distance, through such “reduplications of critical consciousness” which would identify and root out the biases of the present so as to attain or at least approximate objective, (A)bsolute knowledge of the past. Nietzsche, on the contrary, both experiences and respects this irreducible distance, and notoriously celebrates it in his *perspectivism*: “for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own

perspectives, and *only* in these” (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* §374). Whence the province of more psychological readings of Nietzsche, given that this perspectival perspective led Nietzsche himself boldly to proclaim that “every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unselfconscious memoir” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §6). No doubt Foucault took Nietzsche’s perspectival framework to heart, once declaring, in an unpublished interview with Roger-Pol Droit, that “after all I have never done anything other than my autobiography” (Interview with Droit, 29). But the stakes here extend far beyond perspectivism, as a negative limitation obstructing the path of objective knowledge. To begin, we might align this inescapable repetition of the philologist’s, the knower’s, perspective, with the perpetual repetition of the founding act: one cannot see but in having seen it already. In each case, this founding repetition points beyond itself; here, the repetition of perspective indicates the following:

that there will always be something that is absolutely solid (the same which resists all consciousness) and precarious (the most submitted to time, always the most ready to change); which is primary (that from which all understanding/hearing is possible) and final (which is the most distant from primary language); which is indissociably open possibility and obstinate limit. ‘At the bottom of us, at the very bottom, there is something that cannot be rectified, a rock of spiritual fatality.’ It is there, in this rock which reveals and conceals itself, that there is buried, but at ground level, ‘the great stupidity/animality [*bêtise*] that we are ... the unteachable that is at the very bottom of us.’ (“Périr par la connaissance,” 6)

The human *bêtise* (stupidity/animality) is the pinnacle of Nietzschean philology’s first “discovery.”

Usurping the extremity of the curve, Nietzsche finds that this very same moment announced as the end of history is borne by a perspective forever unmoored from its world, and that this “unteachable within us” is inevitably announced in the language that mediates the knower’s perspective. Our “unteachable” *bêtise*, it would follow, condemns us to eternal recurrence in precluding us from “learning the lessons of history,” since the past’s lessons can only be delimited from the cruel mastery of a foreign perspective.

Philology’s second discovery follows from this *bêtise* but more so concerns language. It is “with his back against this *bêtise*” that “the philologist listens to what language says of/from the

foundation of time” (6). But perhaps this continuity of language amounts to nothing other than the repetition of a certain *bêtise*. The danger of perspectivism is that one might take the perspective of any given individual as a self-enclosed, self-made totality. The *bêtise* within any individual is however only a repetition of the *grande bêtise* which endlessly separates knowledge from being, in a pre-subjective plane wherein language repeats itself ad infinitum. Foreshadowing his influential (Nietzschean) insight that power is productive rather than simply repressive, Foucault here writes that language *produces* the fictions of truth. If for the dialectic language represented that instrument of mediation which originally alienated us from the world, what Nietzsche’s philology discovers is that language can no sooner reconcile this originary alienation than it scatters any dialectical unity anew. Let us return to that Absolute extremity of the curve: in their efforts to “summon for us what is most distant for us,” to unearth the truth of antiquity, the philologist “reveals as absolutely close (because within history) that which is beyond all distances, in a distance foundational of all possible spaces: the presence of gods among us, their kinship with our words, their birth there where we speak and in this space opened by language” (7). On the one hand, language alone grounds the philologist’s, much like the dialectician’s, access to that which is “most distant for us,” whether this distance is supposed to remove us from the truth of the classical past or the truth of being. While I have remarked, following Foucault, that one novelty of Nietzschean philology is its refusal to close this distance, it now appears that philology nonetheless experiences – in a very specific sense – the “absolute closeness” of “that which is beyond all distances.” But was it not Foucault’s principal point – the point of the *bêtise* – that this distance is impossible to abolish? As an avowed experience of a manifest impossibility, Nietzsche’s experience of philology is self-undoing or it is nothing at all; it is an “inner experience” in the Batailleian sense of an experience that shatters the interiority of the self, that releases an excess – a *bêtise* – which the self had sought unsuccessfully to contain. More concretely, the philological experience discovers that knowledge and truth only ever meet in the

fictions of language; further, Nietzschean philology characterizes truth as a fiction produced through the endless repetitions of language. For philology, the past is present only as its truths, and so too our own, were already forged in this language that nothing – nothing beyond its (and our) own *bêtise* – grounds in any external referent. Here language is not only that within the founding act which distanced knowledge from being; language equally underwrites, and *un*writes, the fictions of separation and of reconciliation. Thus the Absolute that proclaims such a reconciliation – as the authoritative site of truth which transcends mortal language and historical time, the position of God or again of the modern subject who has killed God – this Absolute is in any event no more than an optic illusion whereby humanity separates itself from this its own creation, by projecting that creation infinitely far above the world so as to give itself over to its authority as if from on high.

The first task of philology then appears largely negative, consisting in “philosophizing with a hammer” – with a Nietzschean hammer whose blows at once “make the faces of statues appear at the foundation of time and of language,” *and* “shape the clay of idols, which shatters for us the birth of gods, to leave us in the void” (7). If the foundationless “foundations of time and of language” are composed of idols forged in the clay of language and hardened through History’s “long baking process,” then philology’s “radical experience of language” becomes an experience of language in its eternal groundlessness. Foucault compares this experience of language to at least two antecedents. The first is drunkenness: however “sober” philological knowledge might initially have appeared, “Périr par la connaissance” proceeds to elaborate a lengthy comparison of Nietzsche’s philological experience of language to intoxication. “In drunkenness,” Foucault writes, “things are smashed to pieces in resting there where they are; – there where they are since the foundation of time, which manifests its obstinate solidity in this very flight, but also the impossibility that it ever be rejoined.” (4) For if this “foundation of time” is repetition, particularly the productive repetition of language, then things only ever reach language in their absence, as though “smashed to pieces in resting there

where they are.” Not unlike the drunkard, the philologist finds that the end of history returns to the “liquid element of the image” repeated endlessly in the play of language. At the moment each abolishes an absolute distance, they “discover little by little that [knowledge] is not supported by any base or rock, but that the absolute of distance is opened within itself, and ad infinitum” (4). In this respect, “perhaps nothing is closer to Absolute Knowledge than drunkenness, which offers the presence of the same things, but without the thickness of the mask, without the distance of the theatre. But equally, nothing is closer than intoxication to the (A)bsolute destruction of being, to its endless dispersal, its loss, for it feels being escaping it, in the same place where it is” (4). To take up another theme perhaps more familiar to Derrideans than to Foucaultians, the *end* of knowledge might just *end* knowledge, albeit in an “absolute destruction” more so than dialectical resolution.

The second figure of comparison is Socrates’ sophist. Socrates famously denounced sophists as shallow rhetoricians, speaking professionally but saying nothing, and so obscuring the path of truth. For his part, Socrates saw his own discourse as a mere instrument of expression, one whose object – Absolute truth – would lie essentially beyond it. Socrates sought to reduce discourse to his tool. In response, the sophists retorted: “You say nothing. And whatever this young man, Socrates, said, he will be refuted.” (3) Against Socrates, the sophists did not seek to make language say *anything*, to express any positive content; rather than an instrumental or expressive discourse, theirs is a discourse on discourse – much like philology. The sophist reveals, at the foundation of Socrates’ language, the same foundationlessness of language: “[the sophists] established the birth of philosophy at the crossroads of its impossibility. They seized language there where it was and did not seek to make it say anything but the fact that it says nothing.” (3) In exposing the disavowed repetition (the Nietzschean repetition of nothingness, of distance, of death) at the heart of representation, Nietzsche and Foucault after him are themselves repeating the sophistic “discovery” that “every word was equivalent to every other, and so to nothing” (3). The sophists, Nietzsche, and

now Foucault return to the “principle” of the return that (un)grounds knowledge “from top to bottom.” This principle is at once performed and described by *la parole sophistique*, which “leads to its own death, to the discovery that one says nothing, that this proposition does not lead anywhere, and that its contrary does not lead anywhere else.” (3)

It is worth lingering on this “death” both exposed and effected by the sophist’s discourse; in fact, it is this very nondialectical, quasi-sophistic sense of death that is repeated eternally, as well as the same “death tied to Absolute Knowledge” in Foucault’s favorite phrase (1). For death inhabits the sophist’s speech insofar as speech “perishes” in the same moment it is born. Foucault claims that, as soon as knowledge is posited in representation, it has “already entered into death – the death of what it knows and the death of what it is. But *this* death,” as distinguished from the dialectical conception, “is neither limit nor beginning, but the center around which all being pivots, which gives it and takes it away by turns, illuminating it in appearance” (8). The dialectic had confronted death only in order to transcend it: even death, as the finitude of meaning, was still pressed into the service of meaning. To render death meaningful, the dialectic had to determine death as one of its own finite moments, a delimited error from which knowledge could learn its lesson. The death that now recurs eternally, by contrast, resides at the very “center” of knowledge, and ceaselessly swallows up every effort to overcome it. It is not that (the subject of) knowledge “*will* perish,” in the future, “if one wishes to accede to Absolute Knowledge”; the effect of the sophist’s discourse is rather to make the subject “feel that [they] *are* perishing (currently, in the immediate present) from an Absolute Knowledge (not promised, but exercised, in effect, through the recall of language), and that this death belongs to the foundation of being (which is also founded in its necessary absence).” (8) The sophist opens a different temporality for death than that proper to the dialectic: here death is not an encapsulated eventuality on the road to Absolute Knowledge, but an (omni)present force which ensures that any presence, even the presence of the Absolute, is founded only in and through its

absence. Rather than progressing beyond this absence, the sophist, again like the drunkard or the philologist, reveals it as “the weak and unfounded ground” into which one’s “feet sink slowly,” on which “one rests/reiterates without rest (*reposer sans repos*), where one advances without progress or end, where one is born and where one dies” (4).

This nondialectical rethinking of death also opens onto a nondialectical rethinking of *negation*. Negation was of course the primary motor of the dialectic, which advanced toward truth by determinately negating its history. But precisely insofar as dialectical negation is *determinate*, it is already determined by its eventual access to Absolute Knowledge. In this metaphysical “optimism,” the dialectic never experiences negativity but as “already justified, already promised to reconciliation, already forgiven. It may take on the meaning of error; but it has never wept in the absolute horror of the crime.” (“Dialectique et tragédie” 1). The dialectical subject errs, but is always reassured that their errors are “already forgiven” as necessary steps on the long road to truth; their erring is a mere “forgetting in the reparative moment of dormancy” (1). On the contrary, the negativity that stems from Foucault’s Nietzschean rethinking of death evokes the “absolute horror of the crime.” This “absolute horror” responds to that present and bottomless death which inflects every presence and every present, marking its eternal repetition and therefore its irredeemable *absence* in representation. To “break through” “this distance of the human from what is closest to them,” the founding act necessitates “*not error*,” not determinate negation, but rather “crime: sans recourse, sans reconciliation, sans pardon” (1). This criminal negativity proper to the Eternal Return is groundless, but is no less *productive* for its absolutely ungrounding negativity; only, what is produced is not so much positive truth as the myths always reiterated beneath, within, and against truth, from its founding act through its whole History.

By way of example, Foucault turns to Prometheus, the tragic Greek hero who stole the fire of the gods for humanity, hoping to empower human civilization by illuminating it in the divine light

of progress. This antique self-justification of knowledge however betrays its mythic provenance, since it suggests that humanity did not progress beyond its originary ignorance through any intrinsic power of reason, but rather that reason's light hails from a foreign source. "Prometheus, – the anti-dialectician ... The first moment is not the fall, the banishment from the garden, – but the distant sun, the warmth that does not belong to our homeland." (1) To (pretend to) close this distance requires a criminal act that nothing reconciles with truth. Yet truth itself is founded through this crime. It is Prometheus' stolen light that "brings justice and modesty ... it permits the construction of the homeland and of the city; it constructs the dwelling of beings, as justice constructs law" (3). While the myth is widely read as a cautionary tale about hubris, a tale "wise" men tell themselves to prevent their wisdom from overreaching its proper (mortal) limits, the tale only assumes this moralizing sense when read retrospectively through the modest limitations imposed upon knowledge *by knowledge itself* – limits following from this Promethean founding act (whence those fruitless "critical reduplications of consciousness" which, Foucault insisted, never wholly efface the knower's bias). In yet another Derridean twist, the Promethean act that founds the law of truth necessarily violates this law it founds (CITE Force of Law).

Finally, we are in a position to fully analyze the affirmative *as well as* the negative dimensions of Foucault's eternal recurrence (including above all the affirmative dimension of the negative). No doubt, it turtles all the way down with Prometheus, as his crime is driven by repetition through and through. In the first place, the crime's *effect* – humanity's inheritance of divine truth – repeats the savant's pretension to already possess Absolute truth (the repetition of the founding act). Yet Prometheus' *act* equally repeats the "absolute horror" – the death, the distance – that provided its inspiration (the repetition of groundlessness or the Eternal Return). Truth (the repetition of the Same) is one such myth: a mask of veracity (the repetition of the founding act), which was already a mask of death (the Eternal Return). In its endless repetition of death, the Return ungrounds truth,

ensuring only that the self-identical will *not* return, that it will be swallowed up in the difference from which it was borne, and which still resides in its most obscured kernel. But it is not enough to say that death, reconsidered nondialectically, is always present as that which ruptures the totality of any presence. This ungrounding *negativity* is paradoxically affirmative: it creates truth in the same movement that ruptures truth.

An affirmation that calls as much for celebration as for tears, as I have been suggesting. On the one hand, Nietzsche and Foucault clearly set out to recover the creative freedom of the founding act. If Nietzsche's philology takes a hammer to the gods, by revealing the birth of the divine or the Absolute in "this space opened by language," Nietzsche nonetheless "does not destroy the chant; [his philology] enchants language, and hears [language] enchanted ... And in this distant light which crosses paths with our words, our rock of *bêtise* appears for what it is: the obscure and private ground of gods, borne however of dead gods, constructed of their skeletons, but turned away from their life and from their death by the death and the resurrection of a God who has an other truth, other essence or secret, than their absence" ("Périr" 7). To philosophize with a hammer, to smash the perpetually resurrected God of the Absolute, is only the first demand of the Eternal Return; the second, paradoxically coinciding with/in the first, is to re-affirm or re-imagine the divine differently, in recognizing and celebrating the infinite (re-)productions and repetitions necessitated by such affirmation. The destruction is already (re)creative. Such destructive (re)creation could not be content to simply fill the space of the Absolute with different content; it would have to fundamentally re-configure that space itself, in configurations or iterations of difference that doubtless can never fully be grasped (as repetition is precisely that which eternally eludes the grasp of reason). It is in this sense that Nietzschean philology anticipates the central motif of Foucaultian genealogy: "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (*HoS* 2, 9).

However, if no truth or régime of truth is final, then its instability not only permits it to be rethought differently, or resisted, but equally yields the Absolute violence that shuts down the thought of difference. Earlier, I asked how it might be(come) possible to reclaim the freedom heralded by the Eternal Return – time as “flux, running, vital water of a lost source” – in light of this blockage; for this running source may seem exhausted as Absolute Knowledge has hardened time into “a ring made of metal, whose inflexibility recommences at each point.” It is now clear that this flux of repetition coexists with/in the Absolute Knowledge that denies it; it is precisely this *repeated* denial which repeats repetition most vehemently. At its extreme point, the metal ring melts in turn, however slowly, in the Eternal Return. But as Foucault’s 70s reading of Nietzsche increasingly joins questions of knowledge and power, it becomes even clearer that repetition incurs the violence of power-knowledge as much as its resistance: firstly, because régimes of truth must efface their constitutive repetition to secure their self-identity; and secondly, because this concealing operation is never wholly completed, since both the revealing and concealing of truth themselves occur through layers of repetition (of the Same; of the founding act; of the Eternal Return). The terminal impossibility of Absolute Knowledge further announces that the violence of truth is as at least as eternal as its instability or indeed as its resistance; as repetition turned back against itself, truth can await no reconciliation or resolution of its violence.

If not reconciliation, what can we expect from this recursive movement that gives and withdraws knowledge? Perhaps the only hope is that all the present’s hopes will be ruptured, reiterated, and resisted differently in their own turn: that the same repetition whereby the historical present “recommences its inflexibility at each point” will iterate itself beyond itself, opening onto a repetition whose difference remains unintelligible to our historical present. That difference, to say it again, could bring the worst as well as the best; little doubt that régimes of truth could double down in producing forms of violence we cannot even imagine. But if Foucault’s avowed “pessimism”

nonetheless coexists with a certain hope, if the problem is to find a form of hope that “wouldn’t reintroduce the dangers [that one hopes to end] themselves,” then what the philologist-genealogist hopes for is a complete re-evaluation of our values, a repetition that takes us beyond good and evil (“Roundtable Discussion” 11). This hope returns eternally to its subject, endlessly rupturing and transforming the desired ideals as well as the desiring subject. Its only stable object? “To become again what we never were.” (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 95) No easy task, especially when the very potentiality of becoming is forcefully blocked by the identity and temporality of truth. But then in another sense, we are (always) already becoming again what we never were – the Same no sooner coheres than perishes in the repetition of difference that makes it up. Foucault’s Nietzschean hope, then, can be attained only in being performed – in repeating differently the many different repetitions which constitute the present. All that is certain is that no performance, even and especially Foucault’s own, will be final – or certain. But in undoing itself eternally, this hope continues to hope “to liberate thought from the limits where [dialectical] reflection has shut it away ... at the same time to restore to thought the freedom to be the absolute poetic commencement of the world, and to restore to the world the liberty, lost under the constellation of the εἶδεναί [*future*], to be at every commencement, the free recommencement of itself.” (“*Métaphysique de la volonté*” 6)

§2. The Return of the Return: Foucault's Second Reading of Nietzsche

The point of Foucault's Nietzschean hope is therefore "the point of view of the Eternal Return," the same extreme point of the curve from which Foucault will tell his own genealogies: "6000 feet above time itself, in an instant that is as future as it is past ... the point where history indefinitely recommences to commence" ("Gai savoir" 2). When Foucault returns to Nietzsche roughly a decade later, starting in 1967, eternal recurrence appears to take a backseat in his reading, leaving history and power relations to drive truth. This conclusion, voiced by the Foucault scholars I reviewed in the introduction to this chapter, seems evident enough from his scarce publications on Nietzsche during this period: first and foremost, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), but also his 1971 lecture simply entitled "Leçon sur Nietzsche" as well as his 1973 lecture in Brazil, "Truth and Juridical Forms." Every time that Foucault devotes an essay or lecture solely to Nietzsche, his focus is on Nietzsche's challenge to the philosophical tradition of truth; his contention is that Nietzschean genealogy shows up the historically contingent relations of power which produce even the most "neutral" forms of knowledge. But the question of truth returns us to the Eternal Return: if the first section of this chapter demonstrated that for Foucault, Nietzsche's critique of truth emerges through eternal recurrence, in this section I will show how this recursive critique continues to animate Foucault's turn to genealogy. Drawing in particular on the unpublished manuscripts from this later period (1967-73), I firstly argue that Foucault's interpretation of the Return, as an irreducible repetition that (de)stabilizes truth from within, opens the possibility of Foucaultian genealogy as a non-historicist history of history. Just as Foucault derived the Return from within and against the dialectic of truth, he derives genealogy from within and against the universal History supposed to ground truth. Without positing any positive, exterior, or metaphysical knowledge of History, genealogy recursively turns the instability that was already (re)iterating History back onto itself. In this, genealogy enacts the necessary performance of Foucault's hope. My own hope, here, is

that revisiting Foucault's genealogical method will also allow a new reading of its object: truth. While Absolute Knowledge (from the 50s) is largely exchanged as a target for power-knowledge (in the 60s and 70s), Foucault understands that the latter grounds or guises itself in the former's dialectical ruses. That is, modern régimes of truth absolutize their authority by disavowing their groundlessness, through perpetual violence; and though Foucault will somewhat reconsider the role of discourse, such that it is increasingly history (from the point of view of the Eternal Return) more so than discourse that (un)grounds truth, in each case a force of groundlessness is repeated, and *forcefully*. The groundlessness of truth, or again the repetition of death, becomes the contingency of history. And as violence and domination become focal points of Foucault's Nietzsche, the repetition of founding acts becomes the *repetition of power relations* that perpetually (un)ground knowledge. By tracing the three repetitions – of the Same, of the founding act, and of death – through the three cornerstones of truth upheld by dialectical History – telos, origin, and determinate negation – I hope to show, not only how Foucaultian genealogy breaks with History, but moreover how genealogy shows us, in its own regard, the (repetition of the) violence of truth.

That the distance between Foucault's early and late Nietzsches is far from absolute was perhaps indicated by Foucault's earlier characterization of philology. While philology's object was discourse, Foucault already understood discourse in a very specific sense: philology's radical experience of language was "not of language in its form. But of language as it has effectively been spoken by human beings, and as it has supported them through their history." ("Périr" 7) For Nietzschean philology, language is not a formal structure whose transcendental principles might be deduced rationally or objectively; properly speaking, philology seems more interested in *discourse*, qua "language as it has effectively been spoken." This iteration of speech constituted a *history* of discourse traced by philology – much as genealogy will trace a real yet fictitious history of truth, often as inscribed in discourse. Moreover, philology understood that discourse "*supported* [its

speaking subjects] throughout their history” – which is to say, discourse supported history itself. Discourse was always already historical.

This was also the central motif of Absolute Knowledge: discourse, as humanity’s means of alienation from and reconciliation with the world, was identified as both the origin and the engine of “historical time.” History was understood, dialectically, as the theatre of truth in which consciousness reconciles itself with itself. With genealogy, it is on this theatre that Foucault now trains his Nietzschean gaze. Nonetheless, if discourse and history each belong to the foundation of truth, it is clear that genealogy and philology, on a higher level, share a common object: truth. And indeed, throughout his last years, Foucault was wont to identify “a history of truth” as the project which he has persistently “tried to maintain for many years” (*HoS* 2, 6).

Against truth, their common enemy, genealogy and philology deploy a similar weapon (perhaps a hammer): repetition. In this, no doubt, they have little choice – each method exists entirely within the modern régime of truth it resists, and each appropriates certain tools of knowledge (discourse; history) for deviant purposes. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche diagnoses “historical sense” as the distinguishing “virtue and disease” of modernity – a “feeling” that swept over post-Enlightenment Europe, inspiring its passion for objective history, its search for the totality of its truth (*Gay Science* §337). For Nietzsche, modernity aims to position itself as the “end of history” by grasping – repeating – the Absolute “truth” of its own past. Our historical present constitutes itself around the dialectical time of History: the linear time of progress that inevitably curves back toward a fictive origin which is violently reproduced in the form of the future. Nietzsche’s chief concern regarding the historical sense was the *nihilism* it induced, as modernity, consumed by the simulacrum of History, would lose its capacity to create values at the hands of “herd morality” – an absolute domination of the Same that would efface all difference. To reinvigorate free creation, the genealogist must (re)turn against itself the historical sense of their

historical present; like the philologist, the genealogist seizes the extreme point of the curvature – modernity as the “end of history” – and reveals the ground collapsing eternally underneath it in an indefinitely repeated distance. This repetition of absence in presence finally permits each method to “dissociate the present; and to find, below the unitary consciousness that it tries to give itself, the masks of all the heterogeneous elements which are tangled within it” (Foucault, “L’usage de la généalogie” 7). A knowledge, a historical sense, made less for absolute *knowing* than for *cutting* (NGH 88).

Given this internally-disruptive position of genealogy, after philology, it is unsurprising that Foucault’s later Nietzsche manuscripts sometimes begin with remarks such as the following: “Nietzsche does not employ the terms ‘historical sense’ and ‘history’ in a univocal manner, nor at the same level” (1). “History” will refer to the “history of historians” whom Nietzsche (and Foucault after him) combat, no less often than it will refer to their own (counter-)knowledge – genealogical history as “the form of knowledge liable to oppose itself to traditional philosophy, to the metaphysics of eternity and to immobile being” (1). The latter (counter-)knowledge resists the former, but only by turning against itself the iteration of masks through which the former was constituted. Genealogy then emerges only by twisting and traversing the recursive folds of History. Note how Foucault describes their relation:

But we now see the necessary conditions for the passage from History to the second sense of the word, and this “rescue” of the historical sense. It is a matter of:

- liberating it from a metaphysics of memory: that is to say, access to the totality of being, become at the same time spiritual totality and transparent truth
- and of placing it under the sign of the Return, that is to say:
 - of indefinite discontinuity (in opposition to totality)
 - of perpetual repetition or of difference (in opposition to the indifference of Spirit)
 - of the indefinite reiteration of the Same, in its proper singularity (and not in its transcription in a true discourse or a consciousness of truth).

(“L’usage de la généalogie” 1)

The “passage” from (universal) History to (genealogical) history leads, then, through the Eternal Return. Specifically, this passage leads out, under, and away from three dialectical traits of History:

totality, indifferenciation (“the indifference of Spirit”), and the transcription of singularity into a discourse or consciousness of truth. We may immediately align these traits with the three pillars of the dialectic: telos (totality), origin (the undifferentiated night of the state of nature), and determinate negation (whose transcription of difference into identity would guide History’s subject from origin to telos). The ungrounding vantage point of the Eternal Return has already discovered the moving substrates underlying each pillar: underneath the end of history, Foucault’s Nietzsche found the repetition of the Same; under the origin (of the Same), the repetition of the founding act; under determinate negation, the repetition of death, that pre- or anti-dialectical negation that no less (re)produces than ungrounds truth. How does each of these iterations enable the passage from History to genealogy? Foucault’s itemized descriptions in the following passage do not follow quite the same order as above, but nevertheless point us toward the relation:

Genealogy is what preserves the historical sense
 - from all comparison (through the turn to individuality)
 - from all weakening (as a diagnostic of forces)
 - from all eschatology (as the recognition of the future)

That is to say [that genealogy is]:

- that which permits the return to be thought (because to think the return, it is necessary to think the singularity of the break and not suddenness; it is necessary to think the intensity of forces and not the objectivity of facts; it is necessary to think the infinity of the future and not totality).
- But inversely the return is that which founds genealogical analysis.
 - It is the return that founds the singularity of the dawn (because every instant is the infinity of all instants)
 - It is the return that founds the intensity of forces
 - It is the return that makes it possible that the future should be infinite

(« Histoire et Généalogie » 3)

Here Foucault appears to open each list with an element corresponding more so to the origin than to the end/telos. Firstly, the return founds “the singularity of the dawn” – a singularity, however, whose indefinite reiteration only guarantees that no beginning can coincide with itself. In the Eternal Return, each singularity exists only in its relations to, its repetitions of, every other singularity; in this sense, “every instant is the infinity of all instants.” Each instant is absolutely singular, provided its singularity is understood as the unique style whereby a given instant assembles

all the differences, all the other instants, that it reiterates. I would therefore align this “indefinite reiteration of singularity” with the repetition of the founding act, whereby the “origin” is shown to consist in repetition – the repetition of a singularity that always escapes a knowledge which presumes to have captured it already. In this movement, the Return “founds” genealogy’s rethinking of “commencement,” as “an event *indefinitely* preceded by other events,” and no longer as a metahistorical origin determining the progression of History as the rational differentiation, through objective “comparison,” of an originary “indifference of Spirit” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 4). From the perspective of the Return, to fix singularity in dialectical identity is to “weaken” singular forces – it is, paradoxically, to annihilate difference in the act of knowledge seeking to master it. But we have seen this mastery annihilated in turn; if History is a clash of forces, the Return declares that this clash knows no end, for much the same reason it lacks any absolute beginning: each ultimately repeats its own death. By rethinking death and negation beyond the dialectic, the Return also founds genealogy’s “diagnostic of forces,” a necessarily perspectival and never-absolute measure of the “intensity” with which differential forces *unground* any “objective” ground of truth. This diagnostic excavates the “endlessly repeated play of dominations” covered over by History’s progress narrative (NGH 85). Finally, in its insistence that this play never ceases to recur, the Return allows genealogy to destabilize the *telos* of History, understood dialectically as a “totality” of truth, an “eschatology” that promises salvation (from death or finitude) through the reproduction, in the future, of the origin’s lost truth. But if it is relations of forces that ultimately return with/in the *telos* of the Same, as the *return* of the Same can only betray its ideal of self-sameness, then the Return opens genealogy onto a very different future: no longer a totality determined or determinable by truth, but an “infinity” of (re)iteration, grounded only in truth’s (A)bsolute inability to ground or to totalize this clash of forces with/in it. The future is infinite insofar as History stubbornly refuses to end, since the fiction of its end – the fiction of truth – cannot avoid *ending*, in spite of itself, by returning to the

same play of forces it had set out to transcend. In truth, this futural “point where history indefinitely recommences to commence” is “as future as it is past,” since the ungrounding repetition now identified with Nietzsche’s future already disrupted the presence of History past, present, and future. And again, it is from this point – beneath and beyond Historical time, the foundationless “foundation of time” that nevertheless appears “6000 feet above time itself” – that genealogy is narrated. The Return, then, founds genealogy in the same measure as it unfounds History from beginning to end. The following diagram hazards a tentative sketch of the relations that ensue:

<u>History</u>	<u>Return</u>	<u>Genealogy</u>
Origin: <i>Indifferentiation</i> , covering over the unrealized truth / the implicit yet <i>spontaneous presence</i> of identity	Repetition of founding act: Perpetually repeated “origin” of identity in repetition – of <i>differences/singularities</i> that <u>H</u> istory posits as if already present before knowledge	Commencement: <i>Singularity</i> (difference beyond identity, not indifferentiation as still-unrealized identity) of each beginning, as an <i>instant</i> composed of and indefinitely preceded/succeeded by other aleatory singularities
Determinate negation: <i>Transcription</i> of difference into truth through the differentiation / <i>comparison</i> of identities, connecting origin to telos	Repetition of death: Eternal Return of the <i>discontinuity</i> / distance at the heart of knowledge, with the consequence that knowledge can only be (un)grounded by <i>force relations</i> – non-dialectical negations that create truth only to destroy it	Diagnostic of forces: Productive, <i>non-objective</i> measure of the <i>intensity</i> of aleatory forces as they (un)ground truth / knowledge, including the diagnostician’s (genealogist’s) own
Telos: Future as end of history / <i>totality</i> of truth – an <i>eschatology</i> of salvation	Repetition of the Same: Crystallized repetition of <i>truth</i> in its final identity, as already <u>founded</u> . Repetition no longer recognized as repetition.	Recognition of future: <i>Infinite</i> potentiality for differences to be reiterated differently, following from their eternally repeated <i>discontinuity</i> – opening the future beyond the Same, but equally drawing the violence of the Same

This provisional grid is far from assured in its coherence (like any grid, as Foucault’s introduction to *Order of Things* famously shows through Borges), not least because all the vertical and horizontal relations among its elements revolve around its most unstable center: the repetition of death proper to Nietzsche’s Eternal Return. It is in this sense that the Return “founds genealogical analysis”: just as the repetition of death (un)founds the repetitions of the founding act and of the Same, the same repetition allows genealogy to transform origin into commencement and telos into

infinite future. It does so by restoring History's determinate negation to the Return's pre- and anti-dialectical negation – that is, the (un)grounding iteration of forces or the force(s) of iteration which genealogy both describes and performs – the same iteration that opens every beginning and telos indefinitely beyond itself.

Before elaborating genealogy's recursive relations to each level of History (origin, negation, telos), we must explore one further dimension of genealogy's relation to the Return. For *this* relation runs both ways: *at the same time* as the Return finds genealogy's counter-history, genealogy is, inversely, “that which permits the return to be thought.” Why is this – particularly given that the Eternal Return is entirely absent from Nietzsche's main “genealogical” text, *Genealogy of Morals*? And then, *how* is this – how is it that the Return can be thought only on the basis of the genealogy that it finds? If the Return *cannot* be thought without recourse to genealogy, then how is it possible for the Return to found genealogy – to found its own condition of possibility, in effect, to found its own foundation? That the aporia is irresolvable, the circularity inescapable, is precisely the point (perhaps that same *point* where history indefinitely recommences to commence). For Foucault, the Return is founded in nothing but the foundationlessness of History – a foundationlessness which genealogy restores to thought. To be sure, this genealogical “restoration” of *foundationlessness* is paradoxically “*founded*” on the Return whose thought genealogy makes possible. But if the ungrounding “ground on which it rests is the one that it has itself discovered,” perhaps this recursive movement of genealogy testifies to the terminal impossibility, for knowledge, of any ground *besides* that same “ground ... it has itself discovered” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 16). And was this not what we saw with the repetition of the founding act: that the necessity for knowledge to ground itself condemns it to repeat itself, to repeat repetition?

At which point, however, “the question arises: from where does Nietzsche speak? What is his discourse? What supports it?” (“La connaissance et le désir,” 2) If the ground that genealogy

discovers for itself is the Eternal Return, which is grounded in turn in the groundlessness of History, we must ask, once more: what grounds *this* (Nietzschean) “knowledge” – of the groundlessness of knowledge? How is it possible to write the history of History, to trace the knowledge of knowledge, when History is as groundless as knowledge? Questions that would recur throughout Foucault’s own career as a genealogist: On “what, in the last recourse, does [Foucault] support this language without recourse nor support?” (Derrida, “Cogito et histoire...” 468) Foucault here responds: “if critique must be radical, it should not leave the grounds which it comes from solid and unshakable; it is necessary that it trouble its own grounds. It is necessary precisely that it cannot found itself.” (“La connaissance et le désir,” 2)

As I have been arguing, the contingent “grounds which [genealogy] comes from” are inextricable from the modernity in which genealogy is written, a modernity that has been characterized by its historical sense. On the one hand, we have seen that these grounds can never be wholly escaped, if only because the founding act of knowledge repeats the knower’s perspectives and presumptions. Further, the very desire for escape constitutes the ideal of objectivity that typifies historical sense and History: “Historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy – the unavoidable obstacles of their passion.” (NGH 90) In this finally impossible erasure of bias – doubly impossible as the bias against bias remains a bias, just as the will to truth remains a will – historical sense structures the prevailing perspective of Foucault’s and Nietzsche’s historical present as a perspective that denies it is one, in order to legitimate its knowledge as Absolute truth. To trouble this present(ist) perspective will therefore require the genealogist, however paradoxically, to *embrace* the perspective from which they write, to celebrate it *as a perspective*. For this reason, “Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice” (90). Like Nietzsche the philologist, Nietzsche the genealogist does not acknowledge the “injustice” of his

ineffaceable “perspective” in hopes of eliminating his bias. It is not a question of those Kantian “reduplications of critical consciousness” whereby modern knowledge attempts to raise itself to objective truth (“Périr” 6). On the contrary, the genealogist, following the philologist, “listens to what language” – and now History – “says of/from the foundation of time,” only “with his back against this *bêtise*” that he himself is (6). Discovering his own perception to be “slanted ... a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation,” the genealogist seeks to maximize the slant: not to straighten knowledge out in a linear continuity, but to (never finish to) trace the multiplicity of perspectives whose singular recurrence already “slants” any perspective (NGH 90). Earlier, I noted that this role of perspective might explain why Foucault, for all his misgivings about the confession, was forced to admit that he had never written anything besides his own autobiography (cf. interview with Droit, 29). He is quick to add, however, that “this is not interesting, as everyone knows this and *everyone does this*” (Droit 29; emphasis mine).⁸ But perhaps what is most interesting, above and beyond the idiosyncrasies of Foucault’s own perspective, is precisely that “everyone does this” – that, at least in a historical present defined by historical sense, everyone seems condemned to repeat, not only their conscious perspective, but the innumerable repetitions that (de)construct the consciousness of the present. For this reason, the implications of the Eternal Return extend far beyond simple perspectivism: the subject’s inability to transcend their perspective is only the surface manifestation, the late repetition, of the different *force relations* that return within their identity, which these forces preexist and produce. In which case, perhaps it is a strength and not a weakness of genealogy that its “history of the present,” as the phrase already suggests, can only be written *from* the perspective of

⁸ Although, as a brief aside, I am tempted to insist that the specific passions and perspectives – personal-political sympathies with the “excluded ones” (25) – which inspired Foucault’s histories of sexuality and of madness should be of some interest to his readers. And in the context of the Droit interview, it will become particularly interesting, in chapter 2, that the perspective Foucault admits to repeating, the perspective from which *History of Madness* might read as an autobiography, is the following “idiosyncrasy”: “the fact that, from the moment of my sexual awakening, I felt excluded, not so much rejected, but belonging to society’s shadow. It’s all the more a problem when you discover it for yourself. All of this was very quickly transformed into a kind of psychiatric threat: if you’re not like everyone else, it’s because you’re abnormal, if you’re abnormal, it’s because you’re sick.” (Droit 29)

the present. To estrange that perspective to itself, the genealogist will follow the dialectician up to a certain point, in situating the present in a larger historical context; but the whole movement after this founding act will be reversed: rather than descend *to* the present's metahistorical origin in order to progressively ascend to its pure truth (the Same), the genealogist descends *from* a present that gives itself as a coherent unity in order to sink still further into the innumerable repetitions that (un)ground its "truth," and finally to retrieve its groundlessness.

This is why the thought of the Return requires genealogy: a genealogical "counter-history" is needed to counteract History's repetition of the Same, to break History open onto the iteration of forces that (un)found it. As Foucault famously reverses the critical project of post-Kantian philosophy, his aim is not to establish the necessary conditions of contingent experience, but to creatively discover the contingency of that which is thought most necessary. The Return cannot be thought unless these "necessary" conditions of History are shaken. Yet we have just seen that it is no more possible for the Return to be thought *outside* those conditions. If the Return can be thought at all, it is only through this recursive movement (un)grounding the very conditions of History – the movement of pre- or anti-dialectical negation that genealogy describes and performs. In this rather inebriated movement, genealogy "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (NGH 82). As genealogy disrupts History by recording "the *singularity* of events outside of any monotonous finality," the genealogist becomes "sensitive to their *recurrence*, not in order to trace the gradual *curve* of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles" (76; emphasis mine). Events are singular, yet recur – in their singularity: is this not already, on the first page of "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," the surface of the Return? Genealogy is the thought of the Return in motion, in the same motion whereby this very thought (of the Return) finds the possibility of genealogy. Genealogy and the Return co-ground each other only insofar as

each is perpetually *ungrounded*: their sole grounds are the groundlessness of their (H)istorical present – the situation that its perspective is constituted through a sedimented recurrence of singularities. In effect, groundlessness is “known” only in the movement whereby it ungrounds the knowledge seeking to know it.

We come now to the ultimate consequence of genealogy’s performative aspect, which opens the Return: genealogy allows for a resistant reorientation toward the historical present, a resistance consisting less in escape than in “sacrifice.” Returning anew to his favorite quote of Nietzsche’s (“to perish from Absolute Knowledge...”), Foucault explains in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” that the passage “does not mean, in terms of a critical procedure, that the will to truth is limited by the intrinsic finitude of cognition, but that it loses all sense of limitations and all claim to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge” (96). Which is why it is not enough to stop at the perspectivism of knowledge: in an episteme that defines “man” by his “intrinsic finitude” (cf. *Order of Things*), the finitude of perspective easily becomes reintegrated into a critical or dialectical procedure that works to minimize its bias. On the contrary, genealogy deploys the Return so as to (re)fracture the perspective of the present into the “alien forms” that (de)stabilize its identity – forms that perpetually escape the totality of knowledge. In a certain sense, such a “sacrifice” was already “unavoidable”; but History had covered over its own perishing in constantly reviving the “monotonous finality” of the Same. Genealogy is needed to seize the “gradual curve” of History and restore it to the recurrence of difference that opens it up.

But as the 1950s manuscripts already understood, this recurrence of difference, or better still of discontinuity or discord, is also the “endlessly repeated play of dominations” (85). It is easy to romanticize “differentiation,” as more utopic queer theorists have been wont to do, in more-or-less implicitly *identifying* difference as a positively defined alternative to the (hetero)normative violence of identity. Even when this outside is read, proto-deconstructively, as inscribed within the norms which

it resists, its resurgence sometimes becomes something of a new telos: a presence wholly *beyond* identity, a new harmony which would finally express the “whole of our masses” that (hetero)norms of identity had repressed (Muñoz 55). Every time that “difference” is referred to the prior presence of the “whole,” we are returned to the Same – as though even queer futurity, so positively defined, had to bend back toward an originary unity whose “freedom” might still be restored to truth. The difference and the futurity of the Return, on the contrary, are far from utopic; if anything, they are “heterotopic,” working to “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 8). The ruse is to believe that this illusory nature of identity, in its iteration of masks or of differences, will *save* us. “It would be false to think that total war exhausts itself in its own contradictions and ends by renouncing violence and submitting to civil laws” – or even by submitting to a utopia beyond law (NGH 85).

To be sure, resistance depends upon the restoration of contingency, the repetition of repetition. But that contingency is shut down in advance by the eschatology of salvation, which becomes problematic precisely because it presumes a basic principle of harmony, of *identity*, as underlying difference’s “endlessly repeated play of dominations.” And if identity, in such an eschatology, is indeed ruptured by difference, this is precisely in the measure to which the iteration of difference condemns identity to pursue its telos of unity only by endlessly repeating such dominations. As the truth of identity perishes in its groundlessness, knowledge finds that “if there is no relation between knowledge and the things to be known, if the relation between knowledge and known things is arbitrary ... *it is a relation of power and violence.*” (“Truth and Juridical Forms” 10) On the one hand, the impossibility for knowledge to master difference suggested that no knowledge is as final as it claims. But difference is no more final than knowledge – which is why it was so important to think of the Return as strictly immanent to genealogy’s movement. For in turning

knowledge against itself, in finding that “there is nothing *in* knowledge that enables it, by any right whatever, to know the world,” genealogy finds too that this groundlessness which hollows out knowledge from within incurs its *violence* (9). Lacking any dialectical continuity with its world, “knowledge must struggle against a world without order,” and “there can only be a relation of violence, domination, power, and force, a relation of violation” (9).

It is this struggle of violent forces that genealogy discovers as that “disparity” which already tears open the “inviolable identity of” any given “origin” (NGH 79). Foucault’s more famous Nietzschean critique of origins, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” follows the logic he developed, through the Return, in the 50s. Like the founding act, History’s “search” for the origin “is directed to ‘that which was already there,’ the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature ... it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity” (78). In its discursive “disclosure” of “original identity,” the founding act of knowledge was said to only reiterate that which it presumed to have known already. And just as the necessity of this iteration pointed back to the repetition of death that inspired the act of founding, so too does History point back to the groundlessness, the repetition of forces, already present in the origin. In the same measure, the founding act did not take place once and for all; to ward off this perpetual un-founding, knowledge had to re-found itself just as perpetually. Further, insofar as the origin was always disclosed “in a false recognition due to the excesses of [knowledge’s] own speech,” such excessive reiteration of this “origin,” which already consisted in (excessive) iteration, effectively *recreates* the origin (79). Knowledge inadvertently multiplies its “numberless beginnings” in its drive to recommence the inflexibility of the Same at each point of its metal ring (81). And we now see that each fresh founding is accompanied by fresh violence: “Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces

warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.” (85)

In NGH, this repetition of (violence in) the founding act is most closely associated with *Entstehung*, “emergence, the moment of arising.” (83) It is “the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage” (84). But to leap from the wings to center stage is already to be *on stage*; this initial “emergence” consists more in a productive reconfiguration of masks than in a spontaneity of presence, whether as originary or as final. What is key is that any given emergence never ceases to (re)emerge, but “is always produced through a particular stage of forces,” in the “struggle these forces wage against each other (83-4). In this sense, even when genealogy speaks of a “beginning” (e.g., when *History of Sexuality One* notoriously locates the “beginning” of modern homosexuality in 1870), that “beginning” is never a pure origin. It is rather the triumph of a “new domination,” itself constituted “fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (78). Which is to say that each new emergence, every beginning, is already an iteration of other iterations, which can only be recreated – as another new beginning – in its reiteration. Each domination installs a new meaning in the elements it reiterates; as *History of Sexuality* and *History of Madness* show so well in tandem, “what was for many centuries thought of as *madness*” – that is, sexuality – has now become the source of the subject’s “intelligibility” (*HoS* 1, 156). Emerging through such reversals, reinterpretations, and reiterations, each new commencement *produces* the meaning it posits as originary through its “violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will” (NGH 86). In genealogy’s analysis of emergence, the ongoing emergence of truth as (re)constituted by perpetual reinterpretation demonstrates that truth “is not rooted in any origin, and it has no truth, nor teleology: and because there is not this absolute entrance of the origin – on the one hand all is

beginning; each instant is absolutely new – and on the other hand is commencement recommencing. We are in an indefinite repetition.” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 10)

If *Entstehung* marks “commencement recommencing,” as the origin of truth fractures into its “numberless beginnings” in “the *perpetual* instigation of new dominations and the staging of meticulously *repeated* scenes of violence,” then *Herkunft* – which Foucault translates as « *provenance* » (in NGH), a French term that Paul Rabinow translates in turn as “descent,” though “provenance,” “the source/place where something comes from,” or indeed “origin” might be more literal – *Herkunft*, in any event, names the other dimension of genealogy’s rethinking of the origin, whereby “all is beginning” (NGH 85; emphasis mine). *Herkunft* traces those “alien forms” whose singular reiteration in each beginning renders “each instant ... absolutely new,” as it reveals that the self-identical presence of any instant descends from “subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that ... form a network that is difficult to unravel” (81). Thus Foucault’s genealogy of sexuality will show the descent of its present “truth” (as the truth of the subject, their point of intelligibility) from a disparate medley of Christian (confessional), political, psychiatric, and moral force relations whose present constellation forms only an “artificial unity” (*HoS* 1, 154). Beneath this “fictitious unity,” genealogy seeks out “the masks of all the heterogeneous,” “distinct elements, strange to each other; and if they are joined together/if they are in accord [*s’ils se sont rejoints*], this is not because they have found a common form, but because they have fought against one another, because they have inflicted violence against themselves” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 7). In this respect, *Herkunft* can never be strictly separated from *Entstehung*; the two rather mark two critical aspects of every beginning – the descent of its identity from difference, and the emergence of identity through the discord of this difference. Each founding act fractures into multiple repetitions – the iteration already present in the origin, and its indefinite reiteration. As descent and emergence contaminate each other, their pairing ruptures History’s metaphysical origin narrative (*Ursprung*). *Herkunft* points

above all to its contingency: it shows that the “origin” lacks any essence or identity proper to itself, and that truth has its “humble beginnings” in a host of errors. Through *Herkunft*, genealogy “permits the dissociation of the self” – that is, the dissociation of the self-identity of History’s rational subject – “its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events” (NGH 81). And as *Entstehung* shows up the violent domination through which the present forges its self-identity, by capturing and unifying this contingent dispersion or profusion of events, it highlights the necessary role of *power relations* in grounding or guarding truth against its contingency. Genealogy then shows up both the *contingency* of truth (*Herkunft*) as well as its perpetual (*re*)production by power (*Entstehung*).

But this also explains why the return of groundlessness and of difference is necessarily tied to the return of power relations, which should already warn us that genealogy’s “dissociation of the self” may not be as “liberatory” as Foucault sometimes appears to imply. For if “becoming is never totalized in a present that would have the unitary and spiritual form of memory,” if this present “is always divided against itself, indefinitely plural, made of multiple crossings of multiple series,” then this is “the sign of a real struggle, in the great precarious sense of dominations” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 9). Power relations fabricate the identity of History’s subject through violence – the violence of appropriating or effacing singularities, the violence of excluding or disciplining those who defy the “analogies” or metaphors of identity, and the violence of naturalizing truth (9). Even as every founding act is already marked by such violence, *Entstehung* equally becomes the repetition of the Same, by closing History’s curve around a given constellation of difference which power violently *identifies* as originary and final. *Entstehung* thus “constitutes a point of stabilization or in any case of fixation” (9) for the “unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers” of *Herkunft* (NGH 82). “Truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history.” (80)

As a “political history of truth,” genealogy is a history of truth’s “long baking process of history” – it is, in this sense, a history of history. Truth be told, it was truth that constructed History. But as power-knowledge (re)writes its “internal history of truth ... that rectifies itself in terms of its own principles of regulation,” it must produce these same principles for whose ground it turns to History; and this process of truth’s construction, the repetition of the Same, leaves material traces of its violence, repeated anew in each founding act (“Truth and Juridical Forms” 4). It is on the basis of these heterotopic “places where truth is formed,” these “games through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, certain types of knowledge come into being,” that genealogy can write its own history (4). On the one hand, Foucault sometimes (as in “Truth and Juridical Forms,” and much earlier in *History of Madness*) refers to his project as an “external, exterior history of truth” – but only insofar as genealogy refuses to tell the history of truth in terms of the principles which would rectify or reconcile truth to itself, by reinstating the present as the end of History (4). Yet it is precisely the production of those principles, of truth, that permits this “exterior history of truth” to be written; moreover, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” understands the archive of this production as the “history *within* history” that truth has had (80). The “exterior history of truth” then appears, above all else, as History’s expelled or expunged residue: it repeats the repetition, those numberless beginnings, that have now become “irreparably less than history” (*History of Madness* xxxi). No doubt one must *bend* one’s ear to hear the muted violence of these beginnings, silenced under the monotonous finality of History; and no doubt they leave no hope for absolute audition, as “any perception that aims to apprehend them in their wild state necessarily belongs to a world that has captured them already” (xxxii).

Which offers, if nothing else, a caution against reading historicism into genealogy. Not only is historicism constituted around a telos of truth that refers back to the origin which grounds its unity; further, historicism supposes the possibility of positive access to, Absolute Knowledge of, the

past it narrates. It aims to reinstitute or reproduce the truth of the past as it was, objectively. On the contrary, genealogy starts with the recognition that, not only does its own perception irredeemably separate it from such a truth of the past, but the very fantasy of unity can only be imagined through such an “act of separation” (xxxii). It is separation, distance, groundlessness that genealogy shows recurring in History past and present; and in effect, “nothing is further” from genealogy’s Nietzschean movement of *return* “than the metaphysical theme (so frequent in the XIX and XX centuries) of a return to the originary or of the originary” (“L’usage de la généalogie” 5). If what returns, underneath this Historical repetition of the Same, is a groundless and violent production of masks, then it follows that the genealogist’s own ear can only hear artfully – and that it can never be pure of its own violence or “injustice” (90). “I have never written anything but fictions,” Foucault famously said. (As an aside: Is all autobiography fiction?) But fictions, as we have seen, have very real truth-effects; and so the truth-effect of genealogy is to allow resistance to, though never quite resolution of, present régimes of truth.

In the final instance, genealogy does so not simply by provincializing the identity of the present as a fixed point on a given linear chronology, but by attuning the sensibility of the present to the recurrence that violently (un)grounds History’s linearity. Read through the Return, genealogy is anything but linear: at every “beginning,” a multiplicity of forces recur, and constitute time itself in their recurrence. As they indefinitely commence to recommence, power-knowledge relations bring alien forms into every present: forms whose “unity,” unanchored in any logical continuity, coheres only through the unending violence of prevailing force relations. For instance, as I will elaborate in chapter 2, modern categories of sexual deviance repeat, differentially, the rationalist-moral exclusion of the mad, which in turn repeated the exclusion of the leper. As though we were in the (non)presence of ghosts: “Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the *haunting* memory of ‘contagions’, of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and

disappear, live and die in disorder.” (*Discipline and Punish* 198; emphasis mine) This recursive haunting of *personnages*, produced through their exclusion at the hands of power-knowledge, is silenced under the linear progress narrative of History. Bending an ear, the genealogist shows that History’s violence has never ceased to recur – a discovery perhaps made not in order to finally resolve History’s violence, so much, perhaps, as to do violence to History. Thus genealogy tears open History’s chronology: although periodicity is, notoriously, far from absent in Foucault’s genealogies, chapter 2 will read some of Foucault’s own periodizations as forms of mimesis, artful and ungrounding reiterations of Historical time. For if this Historical time of modernity can never be wholly escaped, its fictions (of truth) are nonetheless shaken by Foucault’s own fictions, which not only gesture toward the instability and non-self-identity of historical periods, but their (un)grounding through the recurrence of that which is “untimely” within them.

Finally, below this recurrence of alien forms and figures, genealogy returns one last time to the repetition of death, or of repetition itself. In the final instance, this repetition opens the future of the Same onto that infinite future of the untimely: a future whose heterotopic difference can only be dissolved as soon as it is named as a positive state of identity. For this future, that point infinitely above and below time, (not) present in the present and in the past, can be voiced only in the stuttering speech of the “Perhaps one day...” This speech that so often closes Foucault’s genealogies gives voice to the hope of the Return which genealogy performs: that hope that the present will return only as strange to itself. Can we still be saved from the eschatology of salvation? Perhaps never absolutely – but then, who is to say? Unless that unimaginable saying were to “bring an œuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life” (“The Masked Philosopher” 323).

Chapter 2: Eternal Recurrence in *History of Sexuality*

What might it mean, then, to re-read Foucault's *History of Sexuality* from the point of view of the Eternal Return? In leading with this question, I begin once more at the end: on the final page of *HoS 1*, Foucault urges his reader "to consider the possibility that *one day, perhaps*, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex" (159; emphasis mine). As chapter 1 sought to demonstrate, this gesture toward the "perhaps one day" – as open possibility, as a futural point designated only in its infinite distance from a present that will have been utterly estranged to itself – most explicitly denotes the "experience of the Eternal Return" in Foucault's writing. To rethink (H)istory as such an experience is to summon up the iteration that (un)founds its metanarrative, so as to open its "truth" up to the possibility of an unimaginably different reiteration. Yet even this experience, which must by definition exceed the rational discourse of knowledge, nonetheless proceeds from within and against the present and its (meta)History. Therefore, this chapter will reconsider *History of Sexuality's* genealogical methodology through eternal recurrence. In contrast to historicist and liberal readings that have gained traction among Foucault's friends and foes, I will argue that Foucault's is no positivist history; for all appearances, *HoS 1* does *not* chart a linear progression from a 17th-century sovereign power that essentially *repressed* sexuality and acted upon *death*, to a 20th-century "biopower" that *produces* sexuality and acts upon *life*. I will counter that *HoS 1* unfounds the truth of the present, not so much by pinpointing its chronological emergence, as by showing that this emergence is only a dispersed reiteration of other iterations: in effect, turning the "official" (repressive, metahistorical) chronology of sex against itself.

Once again, revisiting Foucault's method will allow me to rethink his object: truth, qua the truth of sexuality. For the power-knowledge of sex – and this is my second major contention in this chapter – is founded through the fiction of Absolute Knowledge, and similarly engenders the violent abjection of that which would expose its foundationlessness. When biopower formulates sex as “a truth every bit as precious as the one [men] had demanded from the earth, the stars, and the *pure forms of their thought*,” it defines sex by those same old “pure forms” of dialectical truth: origin, determinate negation, and telos (*HoS 1*, 56; emphasis mine). It is for this reason that linearity and chronology characterize the “official” history of sexuality more so than Foucault's; this former History, narrated dialectically by the repressive hypothesis, locates sexuality's origin in a natural state of freedom prior to its repression, and reproduces the future as the recovery of this originary freedom. As biopower, the power of truth, produces temporality by *reproducing* this originating fiction of identity, its linear progress narrative bends into a *curve* whose point of “inflection” would be the present – that time, *our* time, supposed to liberate sexuality. Positioned at the extremity of his (H)istorical present, Foucault's first move is to reveal that its “unitary consciousness” of sexuality is but a late rigidification of its disparate force relations, a repetition of the Same that alone founds the illusion of its self-identity. The “origin” of the Same is then dissociated into “numberless beginnings,” iterations of iterations: Under the calm medical certainty of biopower's *scientia sexualis* lurks the Middle-Age Christian confession which the former repeats differentially, alongside an incoherent medley of economic, political, psychiatric, juridical, pedagogical, and penal forces – alien forms with no common essence. Far from a self-enclosed presence, biopower is only produced relationally, as the “haunting” and non-linear resurgence of contingent forces hailing from the 13th through 20th centuries – forces among which repression and exclusion continue to figure prominently, if no longer primarily or exclusively. Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, for all its misreadings, never implied the end of repression; on the contrary, the critique insists that

(the identity of) the repressed is firstly *produced* by relations of power whose positive operations are absolutely irreducible to repression. As (post)modern power shifts toward *producing* sexual identity, it succeeds only in commencing to recommence – in proliferating its origins and identities, firstly by excluding difference (the leper model) and subsequently by assimilating difference to identity (the plague model). Returning to Foucault’s Nietzschean rethinking of negation, I posit that biopower structurally *requires* the perpetual staging of such “meticulously repeated scenes of violence” in order to assemble the alien forces that make it up into the “fictitious unity” of identity (NGH 85). On its quest to realize this fiction – on the quest for the Absolute – biopower is perpetually threatened by its own fragmentary and always-reiterable character. Whence the necessity to kill in order to go on living: biopower can secure life only by *annihilating* that which threatens its vitalist telos, namely, that which exposes its constitutive (re)production or (re)iteration, as well as the recurrence of death in and through this power of life. If biopower differentially repeats the “ancient” sovereign violence beyond which it claims to progress, a number of related dualisms in *HoS 1* are also dissolved. Most significantly for queer theorists, the biopolitical homosexual only seems to cleanly succeed the sovereign sodomite; in fact, the rationalist bourgeois family morality which excluded the sodomite returns in and around the homosexual, in several ways. After contrasting my interpretation with historicist as well as deconstructive readings of *HoS 1*, I conclude that Foucault’s genealogy opens both the homosexual and his biopolitical milieu to resistance, by returning to their constitutive repetition.

Repetition is powerfully inscribed in the form of *History of Sexuality: Volume One* itself. Foucault too begins at the end, and ends with the beginning: *HoS 1* opens and closes with the question of the future. Of course, this is not at all the same future; the future that returns in *HoS 1*’s final pages returns differentially. This is to say that the open potentiality of Foucault’s “perhaps one day,” the height of contingency from which genealogy is told, only exists as a subversive repetition

of the hegemonic vision of futurity which *HoS 1* starts by describing. It is *this* biopolitical futurity that proclaims: “Tomorrow, sex will be good again.” (7) Such is the *telos* that defines modern sexuality: to reproduce, in/as the future, an *originary* free state of sexual identities and desires. Foucault can only break open this telos insofar as his own position is (un)grounded by a historical present defined by teleological power-/Absolute-knowledge. I will return to the question of how Foucault’s own genealogical narration becomes possible toward the end of this chapter. Here it suffices to observe that his narration does not commence with anything like a positivist account of recovered empirical events, intended to contest the hegemonic telos/History of sexuality. On the contrary, *HoS 1* opens with that very telos, and proceeds to ventriloquize its core claims for some five pages, to such a maddening degree of resemblance that the hasty reader risks mistaking this “story” for Foucault’s own. “For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime...” (1) It is within and against this “official” (Hi)story of sex that Foucault develops his own story. To read the latter, I therefore return to the former’s teleology.

As the hegemonic History weds the end of sex to its “origin,” it dreams up a primordial purity of sexual identity and desire, prior to sexuality’s repression by society. Sex would have existed positively in this natural state; resting firmly upon its foundation, science would ground its ability to know, absolutely, that there have always and by nature been two complementary sexes, whose intercourse initially knew no taboo. Subsequently, sexuality’s garden of Eden would have been brusquely interrupted by the introduction of society: enter *negation*. Especially after (the French philosophical take-up of) Freud, society tended to be theorized as the negation or the repression of this free state of sex. In the late-20th century French humanities, as in psychiatry, medicine, and anthropology, sexual repression was generally seen as foundational for the smooth functioning of

society, on the grounds that sexual taboos⁹ enable peaceful social relations. Particularly in Marxist, Freudo-Marxist, or at least anti-capitalist circles, this negative repression was provincialized to modern societies; theorists in the vein of Herbert Marcuse, for instance, tended to see sexual repression as the condition of possibility for industrialized capitalism, as workers' libidinal energy would be sublimated and channeled toward labor productivity (cf. *Eros and Civilization*). Marcuse thus exemplifies what Foucault famously terms the “*repressive hypothesis*” – the modern faith that power only ever acts upon sex by negating or repressing it, such that over the course of the 18th century, “modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence” upon sex (5). The repressive hypothesis is more readily apparent than ever today, every time (which is perhaps to say *all the time*) we give in to the notion that what is repressed by power – queerness, for example – is somehow prior to, independent of, or cleanly extricable from, those same relations of power. It would then follow that, to liberate “ourselves,” it would suffice to simply *include* this sexuality of ours so long *excluded*. Political freedom could be secured by restoring presence, existence, and free discourse to that (homo)sexuality which had for so long been tabooed, excluded, and silenced. To overcome this constitutive repression of sex, we would have to negate its primary negation through something like a *determinate negation*, allowing us to revolt or transgress our repressive present and advance toward a freer future for sex. “[S]ex too is placed on the agenda for the future,” as “we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making.” (6) Whence that futurist *telos* toward which the whole historical sequence aspires: that is, the recovery, in the future, of sexuality's originary freedom. This coming day promises to fully recover the natural truth of sexual difference, unshackled from any restraints. No matter whether the present obstacles to sexual liberation are conceived of radically, or

⁹ Taboos, that is, not only against violence in both its sexual (rape) as well as its non-sexual (murder, theft, etc.) forms, but also taboos against incest (so as to enable the exchange of women among patriarchal communities, and so the constitution of families: cf. Levi-Strauss)

liberally, or conservatively, or still otherwise; whether sexuality's original repression is attributed to the falsifying violence of capitalist, heterosexist, racist social norms, or else to the unwelcome encroachment of "abnormal" sexualities upon a true, natural(ly binary) sexuality; whatever the particular ends it is consigned, the hegemonic "discourse of sexuality" marries its all-too-dialectical, all-too-human "revelation of truth" to "the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of a certain felicity" (7). In effect, power-knowledge works through its own overcoming; for it is the violence of biopower that finally comes into play, as the means of realizing this future reproduction of the origin, over and against the (queer, racial, sexual, class, etc.) differences presently obstructing its dialectical path. Through the repetition of such violence, and the violence of such repetition (of the Same), real subjections and subjugations are borne of a fictive origin. Repetition of the Same, repetition of the founding act, repetition of death; telos, origin, negation; truth, natural identity, and (re)production. Thus, the queer significance of (Foucault's Nietzschean problematization of) the problem of truth: truth's Absolute problematics now produce sexuality as a "discourse of truth," as the biopolitical knowledge of sex is legitimated through the fiction of Absolute Knowledge.

Once again, the problem of truth is a problem of power. No simple ideological illusion, lie, or error to be dispelled by Foucault's history, the repressive hypothesis – the truth of sex – is integral to the operations of modern power-knowledge. Let us follow Foucault's provocation: "Suppose the obligation to conceal [sex] was but another aspect of the duty to admit to it." (61) Suppose the repressive hypothesis is indispensable to a (bio)power that must conceal its far-reaching *production* of that (sexuality) which appears merely as a repressed, ergo recoverable, identity. Suppose "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms ... For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation." (86) Suppose the repressive hypothesis requires, on a

higher or more Absolute level, a *repression* of its own: the repression of power's productive dimension(s), the rejection of what repeats the (re)production or repetition of power-knowledge. After all, would power be "accepted" by its subjects "if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom – however slight – intact?" (86) Biopower becomes "tolerable" through the repressive hypothesis, not only because the latter's discourse of truth conceals biopolitics' productive powers, but equally insofar as that concealing operation itself *produces* the promise, or better the bind, of the future. If sex *was* free before *becoming* repressed, it might very well be freed anew. Liberation: the panacea for all your sexual troubles. The repressive hypothesis permits the temporality of power to harden into the metal ring of the Same, as its sterile reproduction installs the telos/truth of sex in ever more identities and institutions. Under the cover of the repressive hypothesis, sexual relations ossify into terminal forms.

In effect, Foucault's is less a question of the truth *value* of the repressive hypothesis, than of its characteristic *will to truth*. In one of *HoS 1*'s most recognizably Nietzschean lines, Foucault clarifies: "I would like to explore not only these discourses [of sex-as-truth] but also the *will* that sustains them ... The question I would like to pose is not, Why are we repressed? but rather, Why do we say, with so much passion and *resentment* against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed? By what *spiral* did we come to *affirm* that sex is *negated*?" (8-9; emphasis mine) And significantly, *HoS 1*'s French subtitle is "la volonté de savoir": "will to know." As the will to truth/knowledge is always already a will to power – which, for Nietzsche, was precisely that irreducible force of differentiation which returns eternally – so too, for Foucault, the will to produce sex as the truth of a repressed secret refers us back to power relations. Foucault's is no longer the positivist inquiry, "Why are 'we' (not) repressed?," but rather the Nietzschean question: Which force relations compel modern subjects, themselves (re)produced by relations of power-knowledge, to view power-knowledge as *solely* repressive? The point is not that sex is *not*

repressed. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has emphasized, to deny that sex is repressed would not only overlook present forms of sexual repression, but reproduce the dialectical logic of the repressive hypothesis, in negating sex's negation – as though sexuality had finally been liberated from repression (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 2). A most “sterile paradox,” as Foucault himself recognized (*HoS* 8).

Far from asserting the end of sexuality's political – or psychic – repression, Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis might be re-read, through the Eternal Return, for its careful attention to the haunting resurgence of repressive violence in a biopolitical modernity which now *produces* the repressed. To state the obvious, Foucault's critique is directed toward those (e.g. Freudo-Marxist) analyses of repression as the primary or exclusive mode of power. Yet if it is precisely through the mythos/“truth” of sexual repression that (bio)power solicits discourse on sexual desire and identity, then to point to power's productive character is by no means to deny that power persists in *producing the repressed* – creating “lowly lives reduced to ashes in the few sentences that struck them down” (“Lives of Infamous Men” 158). In fact, Foucault's Nietzschean interrogation of the repressive hypothesis highlights not only productive power, but the *productive power of repression*. Reviewing the evolution of his historical career, Foucault describes his work as shifting from the strictly negative question of exclusion – “Through what system of exclusion, by eliminating whom, by creating what division, through what game of negation and rejection can society begin to function?” – toward the following problem: “to find out what role capitalist society has its penal system play, what is the aim that is sought and what effects are produced by all these procedures for punishment and exclusion?” (Foucault on Attica, Simon interview) This quote may help us rethink the progression of Foucault's historical work, typically conceived in terms of a clean break between a repressive model of power still operative in *History of Madness*, to be succeeded by a disciplinary biopower from *Discipline and Punish* onwards. Foucault himself re-orientes this discontinuity around his

increasingly refined attention to the *productive work of exclusion*: what relations are generated through the repression of madness, or of sexual deviants? Repression, then, does not disappear any more so than violence or exclusion; their relations return throughout the History whose time and identity they produce.¹⁰ “It’s this positive function of the negative,” Foucault muses elsewhere, “that has never ceased to interest me.” (*Speech Begins After Death*, 59)

The positive function of the negative – an ungrounding, Nietzschean negation – is manifest in biopower as the repressive hypothesis serves to *repress* power’s production of the repressed. For power, we have seen, “fears the effects and proliferations of” its own “technologies and attempts to recode them in forms of law” (*HoS* 109). Foucault understands this originating function of the repressive hypothesis through the same Nietzschean critique of origin which has been so (anti)foundational for post-Butlerian queer theory, as chapter 1 noted in passing. Specifically, the repressive “principle of explanation [that] emerges after the fact” (6) works by “forcing [sexual-pleasures-constituted-as-secrets] into hiding so as to make possible their discovery,” by “tracing them back to their source, tracking them from their *origins* to their effects” (42; emphasis mine). Sex’s origin – a positive and retrievable state of sexual freedom – represents a fiction which the present retrospectively projects back onto the past, as the designated grounds of its authority. That originary act of hiding returns us to the founding act, and so to Nietzsche’s rethinking of negativity – particularly as the repressive hypothesis pronounces “the affirmation of [sexuality’s] *nonexistence*” (4). As this affirmative negation “reactivates” “some of the ancient features of *prophecy*” (9;

¹⁰ While Foucaultian genealogy clearly insists upon *discontinuity*, it equally shows up the surprising persistence, the non-linear *continuities*, of certain modalities of violence. As Foucault says of madness: “Of course people are going to say all that is over and done with, or that it is in the process of being finished with, today...” [Recall that this supposition – that repression is “in the process of being finished with, today” – is precisely the position of the present according to the repressive hypothesis: that inflexion point which overcomes sex’s repression.] “But all this is no proof that the old division is not just as active as before; we have only to think of the systems by which we decipher this speech; we have only to think of the network of institutions established to permit doctors and psychoanalysts to listen to the mad and, at the same time, enabling the mad to come and speak, or, in desperation, to withhold their meagre words; *we have only to bear all this in mind to suspect that the old division is just as active as ever, even if it is proceeding along different lines and, via new institutions, producing rather different effects.*” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 217; emphasis mine)

emphasis mine), the discourse of sexuality follows Prometheus' prophecy in producing a groundless mythos of truth; power's constant reiteration produces both what is repressed and, by consequence, a "steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex" (18).

These (repressive) discourses that consign sexuality's natural origin inadvertently contaminate its purity, as the discourses' proliferation inscribes sexuality's emergence in history. To justify the history of its development, sexuality turns to History; determinate negation intervenes to secure its meaning. Sexuality's origin becomes doubly *natural* and *historical*; just as, in the dialectic, truth emerged *from nature through history*, we have seen Foucault's historical present suppose that sexuality's natural truth is distorted and recovered over the course of an empirical process. Enter Freudo-Marxism. And if the dialectic founded the "traditional theme of philosophy" that truth, here the truth of sex, is alienated and then reconciled with its originary freedom through History, then Foucault's anti-dialectical analysis of the Eternal Return should illustrate how genealogy's "political history of truth" fractures History's official "origin" of sex into a multiplicity of "political" – violent – founding acts (60).

To begin with, this "official" "history of sexuality supposes two ruptures if one tries to center it on mechanisms of repression" (115). Foucault identifies these two supposed ruptures as: (1) the 17th-century moment when the free license of sexuality would have been broken by the "advent of the great prohibitions," and (2) the 20th-century present, whose inflexion would at last allow these repressions to

be overcome through sexual "liberation" (115). More specifically:

The first [rupture], occurring in the course of the seventeenth century, was characterized by the advent of the great prohibitions, the exclusive promotion of adult marital sexuality, the imperatives of decency, the obligatory concealment of the body, the reduction to silence and mandatory reticences of language. The second, a twentieth-century phenomenon, was really less a rupture than an inflexion of the curve: this was the moment when the mechanisms of repression were seen as beginning to loosen their grip; one passed from insistent sexual taboos to a relative tolerance with regard to prenuptial or extramarital relations; the disqualification of "perverts" diminished, their condemnation by the law was in part eliminated; a good many of the taboos that weighed on the sexuality of children were lifted." (115)

The (17th-century) negation of sex, and then the (20th-century) negation of the negation. Primitive, *then* determinate negation. Sovereign, *then* biopower. Beginning/origin, *then* end/telos. Before, *then* after. Is this periodization or sequencing properly Foucault's own, or rather a reflection of that History he resists? We readily remarked this linear/cyclical sequencing in the latter History: chronology essentially structures that *History* through which (the) truth (of sex) is supposed to reconcile telos to origin. The "natural" "origin" of sex would then develop historically – and equally develop *History* itself – as it is transcribed, first repressed and finally liberated, in discourse. Together, these two ruptures form that dialectical curve of "the great repressive cycle" (115).

On my reading, Foucault effectively ruptures these "ruptures," as well as the origin which they firstly *rupture* and finally recover, by twisting the internal (H)istory that they tell of themselves – and (only) so teasing out his own *quasi*-"external" history of truth ("Truth and Juridical Forms" 4). In this light, it is somewhat misleading that Foucault chooses "Periodization" as the title for the fourth "chapter" of part four ("The Deployment of Sexuality") of *HoS 1*: the periodization in question is not so much, or at least not only, Foucault's own, as this periodization proper to the repressive hypothesis, with its great cyclical polarity of ruptures. However, the distinction is never pure: since the former (Foucault's history) develops within and against the latter (repressive/official History), neither term ever appears uncontaminated by the other. For the same reason, *History of Sexuality* cannot abandon the norms of its contemporary present/of (H)istory wholesale – which may help explain why certain readers have been able to remark a number of constitutive features of (H)istorical tradition that survive within Foucault's history: periodization, for one, and so also chronology, for another. (The end of this chapter will return to these issues more closely.) If Foucault still "attempt[s] to trace" this particular – however peculiar – "*chronology*," his becomes a non-linear chronology of iteration, as it incessantly reiterates those "multiple datings" of the hegemonic *dispositifs* or "devices" of sexuality concealed through the (repressive) hypothesis of

History's cyclical unity (*HoS* 115). Taking up their historical position within the latter fiction of unity, Foucault's "multiple datings" return sexuality's "devices" not only to their dispersed "inventions ... instrumental mutations, and ... *renovations* of previous techniques," but further, to "the calendar of their utilization ... the chronology of their diffusion and of the effects (of subjugation and resistance) they produced" (115; emphasis mine). It is as though Foucault's own datings were purely mimetic, "parodic *repetition[s]* of what a serious scientist" – or positivist historian – "might confidently assert" (Huffer 75; emphasis mine). Rather than abandon the linear/cyclical chronology of sex's History wholesale, Foucault starts from its official ruptures, only to rupture them in turn by returning to their "numberless beginnings."

Which particular beginnings or founding acts does Foucault find when he trains his genealogical gaze upon that 17th-century point demarcated by History as the primary negation or repression of sex? The "proliferation of discourses" on sex, far from cohering in a homogenous and repressive unity, spans – at least – the following fields of difference: Christian religion (*HoS* 1, 18-20; 60-61; 116), politics and esp. the politics of population demographics (23-25; 116), medicine and medicalized eugenics (24; 118; 149), psychiatry (30), prisons (30-31), as well as economics and pedagogy (116). Foucault's first step, or "series," consists in showing that when the 17th-century French state takes up sexuality as a "secular concern" vital for the reproduction and commitment of the labor force, it is "modifying" and "renovating," or even *reiterating*, its "humble beginnings" in confessional techniques developed by the very Christian religion which the state's "secular" rationality had claimed to transcend (116). In the process, the traditional religious significance of confessing to sex(ual activity, desire, *identity*...) is transformed by the diverse confessions demanded of sex by demographers, economists, teachers, psychiatrists, doctors, police officers, and others. The "essence" of sex, as produced by the repressive hypothesis, is assembled piecemeal from such alien simulacra. It also follows that any apparent linearity of this "series" soon slips away, as the 13th-

century Christian confession, the 17th-century asylum, and the 19th-century prison all linger, most hauntingly, around the present. Since each element appears solely through the iteration of others, the discourses on sexuality never cease to proliferate their numberless founding acts. But this is still only the first of those two series of “datings” into which Foucault split sex’s “chronology” – that of devices or instruments, the other series belonging to their use or instrumentalization. As the two series endlessly exchange elements, the (religious, political, medical, penal, etc.) techniques of confession are both formative of and formed by the uses to which they are put; by consequence, each series continually loses coherence. Sexuality, finally, becomes a state affair only as these confessional “devices” are *used* – used firstly, in Foucault’s account, by the bourgeoisie, and then by the state, for the explicitly “racist” affirmation of one group’s sexuality over and against others. If the *Herkunft* of the truth of sex marks the multiple (re)inventions and reiterations of its confessional techniques, its *Entstehung* would denote the deployment and development of these techniques to classist and racist ends.

Is the Christian confessional, then, the “true” origin of modern sexuality? On the one hand, Foucault claims that “the confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex.” (63) This confessional continuity is apparent today insofar as “for us, it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret.” (61) Biopower produces sexuality as the hidden truth of the modern subject by reiterating, always differentially, the discursive techniques first developed by Christianity to wrest from the confessing subject his most secret sexual desire. And it was in this Christian context that Foucault asked us, above, to “suppose the obligation to conceal [sex] was but another aspect of the duty to admit to it” (61). Confessionally expressed, the truth of sex assumes familiar dialectical traits; sex is to advance toward its truth through determinate negation, whereby History translates its prediscursive origin into discourse. Likewise, the confession that posits “truth

... as [the] medium for sex and its manifestations” does so through “the transformation of sex into discourse” (61). Speak your every last sexual desire; to redeem your desire, bring it to discourse: the principal demands, first of the Christian priest and then of the psychoanalyst. The discursification of sex represents, for History, sex’s progression toward truth, and for Foucault, the eternal forgery of truth by power-knowledge. The former supposes, further, that sex “was constituted in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke, it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it.” (66) The night in which all cows are black, in which the truth is present only implicitly; and the Absolute telos of truth’s conscious realization. By inscribing both “stages” of truth within the sexuality of every subject, the confession *produces* confessing subjects, subjects whose confessions of desire not only feed the networks of power-knowledge which produce them, but also and in the same act construct their subjectivity. For the confession is *productive* of both the sexuality confessed as well as the confessing subject(ivity), particularly since “it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the *truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated.*” (61-2; emphasis mine) Through confession, the old dialectical origin narrative of sex – and so even the repressive hypothesis – is engraved in the modern “psyche” itself.

On the other hand, this “visible continuity ... did not prevent a major transformation” (117) – which is why the Christian practice may be understood as the “origin” of sexuality’s discourse of truth only in Foucault’s special senses of *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*, and not in the metaphysical sense of *Ursprung*. As we have seen, *genealogy allows no origin or absolute beginning*; only iterations, singular assemblages of force relations, that recur and reverberate as they act upon one another. Founded

through an (A)bsolutely ungrounding iteration of iterations, no period, presence, or present of power-knowledge is ever totally self-contained or unitary in its identity, and so any “origin” quickly dissipates into an indefinite multiplicity of mobile power relations which can never be grasped in their totality, but only depicted creatively, or perhaps violently. If this holds for confession, then its Christian techniques cannot have been reiterated without thereby becoming other to themselves.

After all, the Christian confessional cannot be conceived, even “in itself,” as anything beyond a reiteration. This is the central lesson of Nietzsche’s *Anti-Christ* and *Genealogy of Morals*: that Christian morality, as the code prescribing what one is to confess, is assembled haphazardly by repeating historico-political forces of domination. Foucault takes Nietzsche’s lesson to heart as he scrutinizes the iterations of this Christian iteration. In the first place, *HoS 1* underscores the force of repetition already (not) present within the founding confessional act by briefly tracing a certain number of discontinuities internal to the Christian history of the practice. Christian truth is dispossessed of its mythos of unity as its (H)istory is riven by discontinuities such as those instated by the 16th-century Council of Trent; at the same time priests agree to pose questions about sex in a *less* explicit vocabulary, they vastly *expand* the scope of the confession: “According to the new pastoral, sex must not be named imprudently, but its aspects, its correlations, and its effects must be pursued down to their slenderest ramifications.” (19) Repression returns otherwise at Trent, as sex proliferates in discourse, but on the terms of an *authorized* discourse. This discourse of sexuality demands “the nearly infinite task of telling – telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts which, through the body and soul, had some affinity with sex.” (20)

It is the confession’s “continuous incitement to discourse,” through which “sex was constituted as a problem of truth,” that follows sexuality from church to state (56). However, the Christian confession, itself an iteration, did not transcend its religious provenance without

generating several different reiterations. While confession long “remained firmly entrenched in the practice of penance,” “with the rise of Protestantism, the Counter-Reformation, eighteenth-century pedagogy, and nineteenth-century medicine, it gradually lost its ritualistic and exclusive localization; it spread; it has been employed in a whole series of relationships: children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists, delinquents and experts.” (63) As confessional techniques were applied to new objects and subjects, neither (object nor subject) remained the same; and, finally, the basic techniques of confession itself were profoundly altered. Most importantly, as the confession of sex unfurled through families, schools, clinics, and prisons, the subject soliciting the confession (e.g., the psychiatrist or the police officer) no longer did so in hope of *saving* the confessing subject’s soul, so much as in hope of *recording* and measuring the dimensions of their (ab)normality.

Still, sexuality’s passage from Christianity to state is not quite so simple, and not only because the “old” form of Christian confession stubbornly persists, albeit differently, in innumerable and very real churches today (such that its “origin” is not squarely past). “During the same period – the end of the eighteenth century,” Foucault claims, “there emerged a new technology of sex; new in that for the most part it escaped the ecclesiastical institution without being truly independent of the thematics of sin” (116). This “new” technology of sex which is (not) independent of ecclesiastics effectively introduces sexuality into the state by extending the confessional examination of sex into pedagogy, medicine, and economics. The 17th century, in this move, “went back to methods that had already been formed by Christianity, but of course not without modifying them” (117) – making of sex “a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (116). Foucault maps sexuality’s dispersion through pedagogical, medical, and economic milieus, as each proliferates its respective discourses upon the sexuality of children, of deviants, and of the population (i.e., national birth/death rates). Through its discursive

proliferation, sexuality is multiply marked, as each discipline imparts its singular imprints. Within the “unitary consciousness” of sexuality claimed by the present, Foucault attends to the remaining traces of the aleatory forces that have made up, and been made up by, the confession as well as confessional sexuality. Hailing from such alien times and places as church, state, psychiatry, and prison, these transformations still float on the surface of sexuality, however thoroughly they have been concealed. As their iteration hardens teleologically into the identity of the Same, their constellation works to bring the immortal Christian “flesh” “down to the level of the organism”; sexuality’s confessional surveillance would now be ordered, at both the individual *and* population levels, “in relation to the medical institution, the exigency of normality, and – instead of the question of death and everlasting punishment – the problem of life and illness” (117). The measuring stick of normality figures here as the disciplinary instrument of power-knowledge, in its will to smoothly synthesize all its constitutive iterations.

If Foucault’s analysis of the *Herkunft* or descent of sexuality dissociates the purported unity of its present, then his analysis of sexuality’s *Entstehung* shows that its thorny passage of secularization was largely led by the bourgeoisie. From out and under the Marcusean repressive hypothesis – that the 17th century witnessed the bourgeoisie’s repression of the *proletariat’s* sexuality, coinciding with the industrialization of capitalism – Foucault shows that the bourgeoisie first applied this freshly secularized, confessional surveillance of sexuality to its own body. “If one writes the history of sexuality in terms of its repression, relating this repression to the utilization of labor capacity, one must suppose that sexual controls were the more intense and meticulous as they were directed at the poorer classes ... On the contrary, the most rigorous techniques were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes. The direction of consciences, self-examination, the entire long elaboration of the transgressions of the flesh, and the scrupulous detection of concupiscence were

all subtle procedures that could only have been accessible to small groups of people.” (120)

Affirming the superiority of its blood, the bourgeoisie “began to [consider] that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs” (120-121).

This bourgeois scrutiny of its own sexuality becomes apparent above all in two of the four *personnages*

Foucault identifies as the focal points of biopower: the nervous woman and the masturbating child (the other two “great lines of attack” being the Malthusian couple and the “perverse adult”: 147).

Both *personnages* emerge from markedly bourgeois milieus; the “hysterization of woman found its

anchorage point” in the “figure” of the stereotypically bourgeois “idle” woman, while “the

adolescent wasting his *future* substance in secret pleasures, the onanistic child who was of such

concern to doctors and educators from the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the

nineteenth, this was not the child of the people, the future worker who had to be taught the

disciplines of the body, but rather the schoolboy, the child surrounded by domestic servants, tutors,

and governesses, who was in danger of compromising not so much his physical strength as his

intellectual capacity, his moral fiber, and the obligation to preserve a healthy line of descent for his

family and his social class.” (121)

In spite of critics’ fervor that “Foucault relies on an interiority that is not universally

applicable,” it now rather appears that Foucault’s history of interiority’s construction, by way of

sexuality, insists subjective privileges have *never* been universally applicable to all subjects (Warren

123). The point is precisely that the *supposed* universality of liberal/biopolitical norms of sex is only

“decreed, as an *ideal*”— a normalizing ideal whose authorized axiomatic arises through exclusion (*HoS*

20). The bourgeoisie is persistently reinscribed as the “hegemonic center” from which that ideal is

generally deployed (127). Already in reviewing the Council of Trent, Foucault readily recognized that

its exhaustive “ideal” for sexual confession was most likely limited in practice to bourgeois

Christians (20). When this Christian ideal returns as the bourgeoisie bring sex to state – a new scene

in an endlessly repeated domination – it follows that “this deployment [of sexuality] does not operate in symmetrical fashion with respect to the social classes, and consequently, that it does not produce the same effects in them” (127). Foucault goes further: “We must *return*, therefore, to formulations that have long been disparaged; we must say that there is a bourgeois sexuality, and that there are class sexualities. Or rather, that sexuality is *originally, historically bourgeois*, and that, in its successive shifts and transpositions, it induces specific class effects.” (127) As the “truth” of sexuality seems, to Foucault, to have been defined by the 18th century, the proletariat *had no sexuality*: far from concentrating its upon proletariat sex, the bourgeoisie found that “it was of little importance whether *those* people lived or died.” (127)¹¹

It is true that the deployment of sexuality, on Foucault’s account, perpetually pursues its universalization, in order to surveil and to discipline ever more subjects. For this reason, doctors and demographers would soon scrutinize the sexuality of the entire non-bourgeois social body, though only after many conflicts and oppositions (by the bourgeoisie, who wanted sexuality all for themselves, as well as by the proletariat, who had no special desire for intensified surveillance). Nonetheless, the point bears repeating that exclusion does not thereby disappear. Rather, a “new dividing line is drawn” between upper- and lower-class sexuality (128), once more echoing *History of Madness*’ demonstration that “the old division” between madness and reason “is just as active as ever, even if it is proceeding along different lines” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 217). This new “line was not the same as the one which founded sexuality, but rather a bar running through that sexuality”: now the bourgeoisie’s sexuality is distinguished less by its sheer existence than by the singular intensity of its repression (*HoS* 128). In yet another reversal or return, “the discourse which at the

¹¹ In radically different registers, many feminist as well as Black studies of sexuality have argued that feminine or Black bodies are still denied a sexuality today, as their “social death” bars access to normative sexual identity/subjectivity. Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*; Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”; Calvin Warren, “Onticide.” My suspicion is that Foucault’s genealogy of sex/subjectivity may be less incompatible with these theories of “constitutive exclusion” than commonly assumed, even if *HoS 1* does not directly advance any such conclusions.

end of the eighteenth century said: “There is a valuable element within us that must be feared and treated with respect; we must exercise extreme care in dealing with it, lest it be the cause of countless evils,” was replaced by a discourse which said: “Our sexuality, unlike that of others, is subjected to a regime of repression so intense as to present a constant danger.” (128) To be sure, this “replacement” can easily look like a linear supersession if we are not careful. But in view of the complex iteration through which that replacement comes about, the replaced term (bourgeois sexuality as the only sexuality) *returns*, transformed, in its successor (bourgeois sexuality as the most repressed sexuality). Even as the new deployment of sexuality is generalized, it “has not ceased to operate in conjunction with a system of alliance [i.e., the old, exclusionary *dispositif* of sex, centered around the bourgeois family] on which it has depended for support,” effecting less a complete succession than an “interpenetration of the deployment of alliance and that of sexuality” (108; emphasis mine). It is this process of interpenetration or return which yields the violence of power-knowledge: if bourgeois sexuality is threatened by repression, this internal threat must be redressed, either by elimination (like the leper, or perhaps like the proletariat’s initial asexuality) or by normalization (like the plague, like the proletariat’s increasingly universal subjection to sexuality and surveillance). We will return to the “interpenetration” of these two modalities of power presently.

First, however, we would do well to anticipate a reasonable objection here: who are the “bourgeoisie” and the “proletariat”? Does this class coupling assume unmarked and universal, hence implicitly un-racialized, identities? *History of Sexuality*’s sparse pages at times risk inducing this illusion. Recalling as ever, though, that Foucault’s history passes within and against History, what if we were to read these classes as “given” only immanently, iterated within the power-knowledge constitutive of Foucault’s historical present – and not, therefore, given transcendentally to the “objective” historical consciousness of the genealogist? Foucault’s history would then dissociate rather than regroup the unity of the bourgeoisie/proletariat, by showing that each contingent

assemblage only “rigidifies” as the terminal effect of violent force relations. In this sense, the bourgeoisie is co-produced by the modern state which it helps produce through sex; new figures emerge, and constantly refigure the contours of the bourgeoisie’s family lines. Whence the return of the madman in and through the sexual deviant:

From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, pretty to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime. They were children wise beyond their years, precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses; they haunted the houses of correction, the penal colonies, the tribunals, and the asylums; they carried their infamy to the doctors and their sickness to the judges. This was the numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and *akin to madmen.*” (40; emphasis mine)

The bourgeoisie’s self-identity is destabilized as its demand to know the truth of its sex is answered by psychiatry’s proliferation of abnormal: mad sexualities, deviant *personnages* – homosexuals, sodomites, masturbators, prostitutes, queers – split off from bourgeois ranks to join poorhouses, prisons, and asylums. Gradually, the proletariat’s ranks too will split, muddying any clean class distinctions. And in effect, (the effects of) these distinctions are never left behind neatly in the past. Even in sexuality’s contemporary “universalization,” the telos of universality does not cease to be destabilized by its constitutive iterability. Power-knowledge responds by perpetually (re)drawing new dividing lines that differentially repeat the past and rupture the present. Through such dividing lines, (bio)power responds to the abnormal “threat” of the naturally occurring unnatural – a threat, lest it be forgotten, produced by (bio)power – with a two-forked “defense”: that is, exclusion and normalization.

As the proliferation of perversions refigures the limits of bourgeois identity, it also destabilizes any firm line between repressive and productive power. Not only does Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis avoid fixing an end to repression, but when he (Re)turns to the two “ruptures” that hypothesis inscribes in History, he finds that ever-different, now extra-legal relations of “hounding” – repression – recur continually in that very moment ascribed to sexual

liberation. As sexological scrutiny is displaced from the heterosexual couple which however remains at the center of sexuality's deployment, as the confessional gaze closes in on sexual perversions, power does not *only* discipline its newfound abnormal like plague victims (cf. 127); according to *Discipline and Punish*, "all the mechanisms of power which, even today, are disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand him and to alter him, are composed of those two forms [leper and plague] from which they distantly derive." (*DP* 199-200). If the abnormal recalls the *leper* as much as the plague model, this is to see, under its calm scientific production, a hidden repetition of that Middle-Age banishment of lepers from the sacred life of the polis; this exclusionary, leprous pole of abnormalcy now coexists with the apparently contradictory "plague model" of power, which deploys surveillance and discipline to contain its citizenry *within* city walls. "They are different projects, then, but not incompatible ones." (199) Indeed, how could the leper's exclusion fail to return in the proliferation of perversions, when leprous violence already inflected the Classical-Age interment of *madmen* that *HoS 1* traces through the sexual pervert's modern, psychiatric, bourgeois, rationalist-moralist foundations? The abnormal's link to madness will allow me, ultimately, to argue that repressive power is no more opposed to, or succeeded by, productive power in history than in the progression of Foucault's historical work, from *History of Madness* to *History of Sexuality*. With the Eternal Return, we can destabilize several chronological dualisms which (only) appear in Foucault: inclusion-exclusion; leper-plague; sovereignty-biopower; sodomite-homosexual. We will also be led, perhaps most hauntingly of all, to rethink any simple binarism of power-resistance, and even History-genealogy.

HoS 1's (in)famous account of the modern homosexual, who is one such perverse production, illustrates most clearly the relations among these different levels of repetition, particularly as they relate (the "truth" of) Foucault's method and object. In relation to *HoS 1*, the charge of historicism – the charge that Foucault's approach to history reproduces the dialectical

problems of truth it sought to resist – has often targeted its seeming presentation of modern homosexual *identity* as a neat supersession of sodomitic *acts*. Particularly in queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her many followers have accused Foucault’s “historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift” of presuming that the sodomite’s *repression* is originary or at least absolutely past, and that the truth of homosexuality “today” is universally *produced* as gender-inverted identity; Foucault would then neglect both the present persistence of anti-sodomy legislation and, moreover, *renaturalize* the (homo)sexual identity he sought to *denaturalize* (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 44). He would reproduce the positivist continuity of history. What happens, though, when we reread this fiction (or truth) of homosexuality as an abnormal, a perverse *personnage* whose psychiatric production *reproduces* the exclusionary violence of the leper and the madman, and so also the sodomite? The Return reveals the haunting, violent repetition of forces which contaminates the (“present”) presence of Foucault’s homosexual, a repetition that however permits this deviant homosexual identity to be resisted, reappropriated, reiterated for deviant purposes.

So yes, this *personnage* is, notoriously, “borne” in 1870, and generally constituted through gender inversion: “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (*HoS* 43) But as Lynne Huffer has rightly pointed out (and as even Madhavi Menon acknowledges in her otherwise scathing critique of “historicism” in Foucault), the homosexual’s emergence does not necessarily imply the sodomite’s total disappearance. Moreover, that emergence is far from originary: Foucault’s/Westphal’s gender-inverted homosexual is but one iteration among others, one of many founding acts established, contingently, through power’s proliferation of perversions. Foucault, unlike some critics, is not concerned with chronologically defining the universal truth of homosexuality “today,” whether as gender inversion or, still less, as either “minoritizing” or

“universalizing” (i.e., Foucault expressly does *not* say whether a small subset of people are “really” gay, or whether homosexuality’s constructedness points, psychoanalytically, to the universality of homosexual desire). Rather, the homosexual invention is a specifically psychiatric *subject*: the question is how Westphalian psychiatry constructed homosexuality in a particular, albeit particularly important, episode. Psychiatry did so, as we have just seen, by producing the truth of (homo)sexuality through the secularized return of the Christian confessional, which alone made “the nineteenth-century homosexual ... a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood” (43). As the confessional, in its modern psychiatric iterations, produces the totalizing truth of the *homosexual* “soul,” as the psychiatrist puts the truth of homosexual desire into discourse, this modern homosexual reproduces those very Christian technologies of truth and of morality which constructed and repressed sodomy. Even as the science of sex purports to transcend religious myths, it repeats their violence as it persists, however differently, in “hounding” homosexuals and other perverts, and in measuring them against the bourgeoisie’s nuclear norm.

As for himself, the sodomite was already an iteration, a *relaps*: this word which Robert Hurley translates as “temporal aberration” more precisely denotes “heresy” – not only leading us back to the return of the Christian context, but moreover connoting a “fall *back*” (whence the recursive prefix, *re-*). What does the sodomite fall back into? What relapses or returns in the sodomite? An earlier version of this chapter included a lengthier approach to these questions through *History of Madness (HoM)*, where Foucault’s history of sodomy/homosexuality really begins. Most essential in that history is that the homosexual and his abnormal peers become “akin to madmen” (40) precisely because their psychiatric construction reproduces the Classical-Age confinement of madness, and particularly of “unreasonable” forms of love like the (mad) sodomite’s. As the real internment of (esp. sexual forms of) madness *outside* subjectivity is internalized *within* the modern rationalist subject, psychiatry continually, covertly continues to produce the truth of (homo)sexuality along the

unstable, bourgeois, quasi-Christian dividing line between ir/rational, ab/normal forms of sex(ual) love, desire, and [non]subjects; or, if we prefer, “acts” as well as “identities”). If the sodomite and homosexual alike tend to fall on the “unreasonable,” mad, abnormal side of this divide, it is also significant that the sodomite’s 18th-century condemnation, in *HoM*, already owed to a certain “homosexual element” (*HoM* 88). In fact, *HoM* claims that “from [the eighteenth century] on it was the homosexual element that became the chief matter of the accusation” against the sodomite (88). The first conclusion we can draw from *HoM*, therefore, is that not only is the sodomite never purely present or originary, since his madness is *produced* through a recombination of once-separate “sacred prohibitions concerning sodomy, and the amorous ambiguities of homosexuality” (88); more specifically, the sodomite’s identity is contaminated by a homosexual difference which is not yet *present* in the 18th century. How *untimely*, in Enlightenment time: (anti)sodomy, which *is* repeated in the modern homosexual, *itself* repeated a certain homosexuality.

Certainly, this “whole culture of lyrical homosexuality” that “began to disappear” with the 18th-century sodomite cannot, necessarily, belong to that homosexual species which did not exist prior to 19th-century psychiatry (88). Here, however, we come to the second conclusion to be drawn from *HoM*: the 19th-century homosexual *personnage* is distinguished from this “lyrical homosexuality” (no longer and not yet) present in the sodomite precisely in the measure that the former’s rationalist, self-same identity served to efface the latter’s lingering “amorous ambiguity.” As Lynne Huffer has argued in *Mad for Foucault*, the modern homosexual is produced as a psychiatric *object* of knowledge, a gender-“inverted thing pinned down by science,” the better to erase the unreasonable excess of lyrical homosexual relations – that ambiguous, “affective dimension of erotic experience” which *began* to disappear with 18th-century (anti)sodomy (Huffer 77). We now see how, exactly, modern psychiatry and its homosexual persistently reproduce Enlightenment morality and its (exclusion of the) sodomite. In effect, the homosexual is separated from the sodomite only in the measure that his

psychiatric construction deepens, differentially repeats, this “entirely new dividing line in the field of emotions” whereby the 18th century first united sodomitic act and homosexual relation as mad sexualities: a “new moral unity ... already close to modern forms of guilt” (*HoM* 88). Though new dividing lines will be founded, though homosexuality and sodomy will split again, what recurs perpetually is the “great confiscation of sexual ethics by family morality” that gradually purged homosexuality of its lyrical halos, still tolerated by Renaissance art and society even as it burned sodomites at the stake (89). Inversely, as biopower comes to recognize the most normatively abnormal – gender-inverted – homosexual subjects, albeit to recognize them as deviant/inferior, this disciplinary inclusion of (some) homosexual acts and desires depends upon the intensified exclusion of flamboyantly homosexual – mad, queer – relations and ways of life. Which explains Foucault’s controversial comment that “what makes homosexuality ‘disturbing,’ in his contemporary French present, is “the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself.” (“Friendship” 2) For the erotic homosexual “mode of life,” from this perspective, threatens to implode the nuclear norms that hold together biopower’s whole rationalist-moral infrastructure; because their *relations* resist the heterosexual “origin” or identity of the Same, many who openly or lyrically live “the homosexual mode of life” will be “hounded” by and beyond the violence of the State. Cue the leper – or the madman. As exclusion re-enters through modernity’s backdoor, its excessive residue is continually expunged by the “normative” production of homosexuality we find in Westphal’s gender-inverted *abnormal*, who surfaced above all in those bourgeois families scrutinizing their own blood line. Yet the resulting “slantwise position” of homosexuals – inside and outside power, leper and plague – is itself contingent, liable to change (3); indeed, many in queer studies have shown that this position *has* changed since Foucault’s death in 1984, such that homosexuality’s “homonormative” expressions today permit even the most lyrical flamboyance, so long as they are divided (by the latest line) from those “perverse” forms of queerness now displaced onto a

racialized, often non-Western periphery (cf. Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*). Be that as it may, what Foucault, together with Nietzsche, may help us see is that neither the homosexual nor his biopolitical present are wholly *undivided* in their presence.

To turn now to this biopolitical milieu of the homosexual, we have just seen why “sovereign power and biopolitics are not simply opposed,” as Penelope Deutscher rightly underscores (Deutscher 20); modern (bio)“power over life” does not oppose the “ancient” “sovereign power over death” any more than the disciplinary *production* of homosexual, or plague victim, simply succeeds the *exclusion* of madmen or lepers. Not only does exclusion in general persist in late biopower, but these particular excluded *personages*, as well as the exclusionary force relations which produced/repressed them, do not cease to *return*. In effect, biopower continues to recenter the characteristically sovereign relations of the bourgeois family – however surreptitiously covered over by a quasi-Christian rationalist morality, however concealed even *this* moral foundation becomes in the scientific “truths” of psychiatry. So doing, it reproduces sovereign violence to secure that family’s identity against the array of threats which now arise (though arise, as it were, *within* the family). Yet even as this family returns, its identity differs from itself: on the one hand, State racism reproduces the bourgeois desire for the purity of its bloodline; on the other, the blood to be purified is now that of the *population*. As the bloodline of the bourgeois family becomes the life of the population, those deviant *personages* singled out from the bourgeoisie (e.g., the homosexual) are figured as “degenerates” whose heredity jeopardizes the life or “existence of everyone” (*HoS* 137). “They are threats, *either external or internal*, to the population and for the population.” (*SMBD* 256; emphasis mine) As I have argued, power is not restricted, in its dealings with such threats, to inclusion any more than it is to exclusion; not only are some abnormal individuals assimilated, molded into properly disciplinary identities, but others – who are sometimes the same – remain subject to the leprous logic of elimination: “The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are

eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I – as species rather than individual – can live, the stronger I will be” (255). Vitaly endangering the “species I,” History’s universal subject, some such “inferior” (e.g., homosexual) species” are snuffed out like viruses, *identified* rather as biological threats than as mutual subjects. Massacres become vital; and genocide, the dream of modern power. And in this regard, even the emerging sciences of sex are perhaps more *purifying* than genuinely *pure* pursuits of knowledge; “in the name of a biological and historical urgency,” the proliferation of perversions “justified the racisms of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in ‘*truth*.’” (*HoS* 54; emphasis mine)

Biopower, then, is the power of truth as much as the power of life. Therefore, the ultimate stakes of reading *HoS 1* as an experience of the Eternal Return are twofold: firstly, to attend to the haunting recurrence of sovereign forces in modern biopower; and secondly, to analyze how this constitutive iterability incurs power’s instability no less than its violence, as it (un)grounds our modern régime of truth. Like Absolute Knowledge, modern power-knowledge undertakes to repeat the Same; we have seen biopower project, into the future of its universal subject/species I, a purportedly primordial purity of sex and now of life itself. Tomorrow sex will be good again, *pure* again of its impurities today; tomorrow, too, life will be cleansed anew – not only of the prospect of *species* death presented by sexual/racial deviants, but even of *their* perverse death at the hands of (sovereign/bio) power. The Absolute truth of the repressive hypothesis: tomorrow, life will transcend death. At the same time as Absolute/power-knowledge “turn away from death,” however, neither can help but *return* to death (138). We have just examined the most immediate reason that “one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living”: the liberal subject constantly finds its life endangered by a specter of death *internal* to its collective existence (137). With Foucault’s Nietzsche, we see that what is at stake in this internal death is, by the same token, the species’ literal, “biological” death as well as the pre/anti-dialectical death of the species’ *identity*. (The former

prospect seems threatening because it erodes the latter's continuity.) And finally, we now see *why* neither level of death ever vanishes: the identity of the Same, because it is perpetually re-established through a repetition of founding acts, collapses onto the repetition of death. The central lesson of Foucault's Eternal Return was that truth is always already *dying*, as it is founded through (the denial of) repetitions that *unfound* its telos of self-identity. Biopower's truth, whether of sex or of life, is likewise (un)grounded through such self-denying iterations: the identity of its global liberal subject is assembled piecemeal as it is divided, through ever-new lines, from proliferating perversions.

Therefore, the idealized total presence of that subject is never quite total; though such founding acts are instituted to defend life *from* death, their iterability simultaneously manifests this death *of* life, or of truth. If "death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it," this is firstly because the power of life/truth itself dies an endless Nietzschean death (*SMBD* 244). My point is that it is *this* death, this internal instability of biopower resulting in/from its iterability, which yields the perpetual targeting *for* death of populations now associated *with* death's threat. In its drive for political stability – truth – the power of life perishes and is resurrected by rejecting its own repetition of death, even as this rejection itself displaces, conceals, and (re)produces the many surviving forms of death.

Once again, however, this repetition of death, pointing as it does to the potential death *of* biopower, equally permits its violence and its resistance. Which explains why "where there is power, there is resistance" (*HoS* 1, 95): like Nietzschean death(s), resistances "are inscribed in [power relations] as an irreducible opposite," an "odd term" that destabilizes coherent political identity as its "mobile and transitory points ... [produce] cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings" (96). Most simply put, resistance mobilizes the contingency of power shut down by its terminal rigidification. Resistance does so, moreover, by differentially *repeating* the terms of power within which it is irreducibly inscribed; against biopower, for instance, "the forces

that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being” (144). As new demands for life are voiced by those folded, biopolitically, unto death (e.g., as proletariats demand health care, or as gays demand rights), what they repeat is not only “life as a political object”; when life is “turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it,” what is ultimately repeated is the *death* or the contingency of life (145). Because (bio)political stability is eternally ruptured by the many repetitions of which it is made, the hegemonic repetitions can always be repeated, resisted, in new relations. But if resistance repeats a power which was already repeating itself, then is Foucault’s “resistance” really only the latest ruse of (determinate) negation? (Cf. Jean Baudrillard’s *Forget Foucault*.) To be sure, resistance is never any purer of power than power is of resistance, and as each repeats the other, there is hardly any relation of resistance which does not risk being reintegrated, (re)assimilated in power’s strongholds. Nietzsche’s non-determinate or better *indeterminate* negation may help us imagine how resistance must “keep things turning into something other,” if it is to avoid this trap of the Same (Huffer 39). Resistance repeats power’s repetition, but it may do so with a difference: rather than reproduce the Same, rather than determinately preserve the higher “truth” of the political object which it negates, effective resistance must be ready to unground its own position(s), to dissolve these “truths” it deploys only tactically, to seize upon unknown, unknowable, iterations. No longer to resuscitate life by assimilating new content to its self-same relations, but to let its whole deployment perish.

I can think of no better example of resistance, in Foucault, than homosexuality. Because the modern homosexual is made up of all the politico-religious-psychiatric iterations I examined above, because these iterations fail to cohere in a static identity, their heterogeneous forces can be reiterated in resistant assemblages – all the while risking their own reiteration by the hegemonic relations they aim to resist. In the first place, then, Foucault’s supposed opposition to “identity politics” – a largely American phenomenon, as Huffer points out – has sometimes been overstated; in his “Gay Science”

interview with Jean le Bitoux, Foucault states it is “absolutely clear” that “the category of homosexuality was taken up again in the struggles that took place at the end of the nineteenth century against a certain form of morality, against certain laws, against certain judicial rulings” (“Gay Science” 387). These same relations of power that pinned down the inverted homosexual now return against themselves, as their subject/object takes up its position to demand the rights categorically denied to it. But as Foucault demonstrates by ventriloquizing the “exchange” between the 19th-century homosexual and his doctor, power may shift (its founding acts) in response to resistance (albeit in shifting back to different iterations of the Same), and if resistance is not sufficiently mobile, it risks becoming arrested in truths still presupposed as originary and final. The problem, again, is less *that* resistance repeats certain terms of power than *how*: if homosexual resistance uncritically reproduces a primary homosexual *identity*, whether conceived as psychic truth or as lyrical eros, it reinstates power’s repressive hypothesis. This discourse of truth demands “you not only have to liberate your sexuality, you also have to liberate Dr. Meignant,” or Dr. Westphal (388). Foucault, however, insists that “we have to liberate ourselves even from this notion of sexuality”: to move within and against its (imperfectly) present deployment, to repeat *yet still resist* even their repressive notion of liberation itself (388). In this sense, Foucault never intends to “break” with necessary homosexual struggles for political rights, so much as to reorient their “axis” (388), perhaps to restore that contingent “slantwise position . . . in the social fabric” which alone allowed the homosexual to resist, not by reproducing his identity but rather by *producing* relations still unintelligible to the nuclear norms of Foucault’s present (“Friendship” 3).

It is most unfortunate, then, that the historicism charge has tended to target Foucault’s homosexual. When we view Foucault’s homosexual as firmly delineated in time and space, as though modern homosexuality could never assume a different meaning than Westphal’s, we miss the iterability that (un)grounds his identity from top to bottom. Such a “straight” reading of Foucault’s

history obscures the spiraling non-linearity of (his analyses of) power as well as its manifold resistances.

The historicist critique reads genealogy as written, *from* the present, by a subject (Foucault) who takes his (object of) knowledge as fully present. On the contrary, I have sought to read genealogy “from the point of view of the Eternal Return,” as though its haltering narration hailed from “6000 feet above time itself, in an instant that is as future as it is past” (“Gai Savoir” 2). As chapter 1 argued, this height of temporal contingency, expressed in the uncertain future of the “perhaps one day” at the end of *HoS 1*, is extracted from the foundationless depths of biopower’s teleological future, the end of history; nevertheless, its promise – and threat – of iterability/instability equally cuts through the past, present, *and* future presence of power-knowledge. What the charge of historicism silences, finally, is this futural thread that links resistance and genealogy: performing the resistance he describes, Foucault looks back upon history from this point where it could always (have) be(en) otherwise. Specifically, he proceeds from the possibility of the “perhaps one day”: that “people will wonder at this” (our) present, no longer quite able to understand its obsession with sex (*HoS* 157). For the *truth* of sex will then have returned otherwise, liberating us even from truth’s eschatological telos of liberation. Genealogy performs such a liberation-from-liberation; inhabiting the contingency, the repetition of death, that marks out this point, genealogy resists the historicist, dialectical operations of truth no less than it resists the (bio)power of truth. And in this, genealogy exhibits the task essential to resistance: to “make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity,” in order that even those truths which power-knowledge posits as most essential might be reiterated otherwise (“Friendship” 4).

Yet if eschatology and teleology are the joint operations of Absolute/power-knowledge, then the least (though perhaps also the most) that we can say about Foucault’s future is that it will *not*

save us, at least so long as we understand liberation on biopower's dialectical model. On the one hand, we have just said that Foucault holds open the *virtual potentiality* that another contingent moment could still "liberate" us from our present régime of truth, in order to resist the latter. The risk, however, is that this future be read as utopia. Perhaps one day: no more power? Perhaps one day: sex will be good again? How different is this future of Foucault's, really, from the Same future he repeats? Though Foucault's future is never pure of the latter, any more than resistance is pure of power, he does open, nonetheless, a fissure between the "perhaps *one day*" and "*tomorrow* sex will be good again"; for the latter reassured the present that it will soon recover its lost (sexual) identity, while the former promises only the open possibility that this identity might be lost. The subject's identity vanishes all the more in Foucault's French: « *Peut-être un jour s'étonnera-t-on.* » ("Perhaps one day people will wonder at this.") The sentence's third-person subject, translated as "people," disappears (along with sex, the subject's truth) in the anonymous, gender-neutral, unsexed pronoun « *on* ». Going further with Foucault's language, we might hear in *s'étonnera* an echo of *détonnera*, "will explode." The explosion – or implosion – of the subject and his régime of truth? Yet *perhaps* its rubble would remain; perhaps unforeseeable institutions of power would spring from such an explosion; or perhaps, yet again, this detonation would be brought about by power itself, in its latest self-overcoming. Though *HoS 1*'s "perhaps one day" moment does not explicitly raise these haunting possibilities, though it easily reads as the solace or at least the silver lining for those who make it through Foucault's darkest pages on power, in Part 5, consider Foucault's earlier turn to the "perhaps one day," in *History of Madness* (appendix 1, "Madness, the Absence of an Œuvre").

Foucault begins familiarly enough: "One day, perhaps, we will no longer know what madness was. Its form will have closed up on itself, and the traces it will have left will no longer be intelligible." (*HoM* 541) But in an open speculation about what might be the "technical substratum of such a mutation," Foucault raises the eerily prophetic "possibility of medicine mastering mental illness like

any other organic condition? Or a definition of behavioral deviancies sufficiently rigorous for society to be able to provide, for each one, the appropriate mode of neutralization?” (542) Looking back on *History of Madness* today, it almost appears as though Foucault, in 1961, really had foreseen the future (that is now our present): mental illness “is set to enter a technical region that is increasingly well controlled: in hospitals, pharmacology has already transformed the rooms of the restless into great tepid aquariums” (549). Foucault’s future is by the same token the promise that the present dominations of madness or sexuality might be overcome, as well as the bind of new and unforeseeable power relations that may well reduce any resistant, lyrical force of madness – or homosexuality – to the “great tepid aquarium” of biopower’s rationalist herd morality. So too with resistance, whose demands for rights for “life” or for “homosexuality” always risk returning in unforeseen ruses of power. Taking us back to the repetition of death, genealogy and resistance, genealogy *in its* resistance, face us with a future no less good than bad. Strictly speaking, as this Foucaultian-Nietzschean future aspires, impossibly, “beyond good and evil,” it opens the radical possibility that our very value judgments might be unimaginably transformed.¹²

In the end, neither genealogy nor resistance can ever settle for an end, as each must remain open to its own self-undoing. On the most practical level, the implications are clear: “perhaps these historical analyses will end by dissipating what this cursory survey seems to suggest” (*HoS* 72).¹³ Moreover, genealogy thusly joins resistance in taking up that strange current of reiteration running within and against power relations, so as to turn their recurring violence against itself, to restore its most essential truths to that (un)familiar background of emptiness, where they might recur

¹² As Amy Allen has written, it is in this move that Foucault’s future counters the futurism proper to the dialectic; charting an otherwise unlikely alliance between Foucaultian genealogy and Theodor Adorno’s “negative dialectics,” Allen argues that each “envision[s] social transformation not just as the better and fuller realization of our existing normative ideals – for example, a version of liberal democracy that is more transparent and less distorted by power relations, or a recognition order that is more inclusive and egalitarian – but also as the possibility of the radical transformation of those ideals themselves, where that transformation would not necessarily be a regression” (Allen 10).

¹³ Can we discern, in the necessarily partial status of Foucaultian genealogy, a distant echo of Nietzsche? “What did Zarathustra once say unto thee? That the poets lie too much? But Zarathustra is also a poet.” (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 74)

otherwise. Told from this point of view – the heterotopic futurity from which it departs, impossibly, back toward the present and its multiplicity of pasts – Foucault’s “historical analyses” will never be positivist histories, so much as artistic sketches or, in Huffer’s words, “parodic repetition[s]” (Huffer 75). Likewise with Foucault’s chronologies, which may be best conceived as internal resistances to History’s formal chronologies: starting from sexuality’s two “great ruptures” and the repressive cycle they form, Foucault excavates the untimely differences and iterations that rupture the self-identity of every “age.” Foucault’s “ages,” as self-advertised “fictions,” are always already problematic: the unities of the 18th-century homosexual or sovereign power are “given” only by power-knowledge, and rather than positively reaffirming their identity, Foucault descends to the aleatory iterations that (un)structure their only apparently linear development. Thus, the fractured presences of any “given” age or present can never be captured in their totality, even and especially by the genealogist; their historical multiplicity can only be traced in their surviving, never-fully-intelligible fracture lines. True, that unintelligibility also means that genealogy will never be absolutely delivered or *saved* from historicism, any more than the future will deliver or save us from power; traces of chronology and positivity remain in Foucault, if only as destabilized. And it is this recurring, destabilizing, problematizing instability of (power-)knowledge which, modelled as it is after Absolute Knowledge, opens its multiple identities and temporalities onto the best – and the worst – potentialities of resistance and rigidification. To open an ending, perhaps this is why I’ve always preferred Derrida’s second reading of Foucault: “There will always be this interminable alternating movement that successively opens and closes, draws near and distances, rejects and accepts, excludes and includes, disqualifies and legitimates, masters and liberates.” (Derrida 234)

Epilogue

“I had some things to tell you,” Foucault concludes his final lecture course in 1984. “But it’s too late, *voilà, merci*.” (*Le Courage de la Vérité*, cited in Huffer 280) Like Foucault’s, my own project is partially complete at best. The many reasons *Sex and Truth* remains a work in progress are both intrinsic and incidental to the thesis. If we are to believe Foucault, and particularly his reading of the Eternal Return, then to end absolutely, or claim to, would be to reproduce the violence of Absolute truth. Since power never ceases to found and to re-found its knowledge, neither can counter-knowledge content itself to remain the same, if its resistance is to keep moving. In truth, everything that has been written could always be repeated with a difference; besides, everything that has *not* been written could still be added; and lastly, *everything* could return differently, undoing the writing entirely.

Nonetheless, if I were to seat myself in the confessional just for a moment, I would have to admit that the open-endedness of *Sex and Truth* is peculiarly pronounced, well beyond this general or perhaps futural openness of the work as such. This epilogue stands in for my planned third chapter, which was to extract, in conversation with queer theory, an original account of identity and temporality from *History of Sexuality*, as read through the Eternal Return in chapter 2. In a word, I intended to revisit the psychoanalytic model of repetition so central to gender performativity as well as to so-called queer anti-sociality, in order to develop a theory of sexuality as constructed forcefully through a historically contingent, pre-subjective repetition of power-knowledge which however remains open to resistance. Regrettably, as Emory’s Honors deadline draws too close for comfort, I am forced to reserve this theorization as a future direction in my research. While I’m in the confessional, I’ll also admit that this difficult decision is spurred by a number of contingent factors: a last-minute car crash; graduate-school visits; as well as the already inordinate length of chapters 1 and 2 – not to mention that most of chapter 3 would have consisted in extraneous spins off the

previous chapters. I content myself, for now, to offer this rather lengthy interpretation of *History of Sexuality* as an experience of eternal recurrence, if only as a prelude to further theorizing. I am most interested in pursuing the following questions, in no particular order: How have homosexual, gay, or queer identities changed after Foucault's time? How has time itself changed? What new forms and forces of inclusion and exclusion have been generated by biopower's shifting telos, and through which repetitions? How might this Nietzschean-Foucaultian recurrence complement or contrast with the psychoanalytic accounts of repetition which prevail in queer theory? Is the iterable subject of psychoanalysis or again of gender performativity itself a historical iteration? – Is this subject perhaps a reiteration of biopower's rationalist-bourgeois-family morality? Can power's repetition still be resisted, and how? Could Foucault's heterotopic future, the promise and the bind of the "perhaps one day," point our way toward queer resistance? – Especially resistance to hegemonic futures which *reproduce*, by cis-het means, the Same?

Rather than rush to resolve these queer queries once and for all, I resolve to return to them as soon as I am able to treat them with due diligence. I leave the questions open in the interim; though I will indicate my current thoughts later in this epilogue, in reviewing the arguments I planned to make in chapter 3, these indications are but placeholders for future reflection. In return, I have interwoven, throughout chapters 1 and 2, those queer theoretical concerns that are more directly inherent in my approach to Foucault, (Foucault's) Nietzsche, and *History of Sexuality*. By bringing Butler and Muñoz into a highly abstract philosophical analysis of (anti-)dialectics, or again by centering Sedgwick and Menon's Derridean critiques in revisiting *History of Sexuality*, I hoped to undo the lines between the queer and the philosophical, "low" and "high" brow, sex and truth. Although the measure of my success belongs of course to my readers, my intention was to foreground the profoundly queer stakes that persistently inspire my research – my work is driven,

even in its most theoretical moments, to grapple with the violently real, recurring forces that construct sexuality as a “problem of truth.”

After all, it was this political and particularly sexual problematic of truth, above all as analyzed by queer theory, that submerged me in the larger problem of truth, as treated by the (anti-)dialectical history of philosophy. Closely associated with my unconventional, even recursive passage from queer theory back to philosophy (reversing the traditional progression from philosophy forward to its more recent “applications” in queer studies) is the circumstance that I only became interested in Foucault’s reading of Nietzsche, slowly, as I combed through Foucault’s œuvre for a satisfactory response to the (post-)Derridean critique of Foucault’s purported historicism. As a sophomore, I first became captivated by *History of Madness*’ lyrical yet scrupulous narration of the rationalist violence as foundational for the Enlightenment project of History as for the (post-)Enlightenment history of psychiatry. Yet I long remained haunted by that famous question of Derrida’s: On “what, in the last recourse, does [Foucault] support this language without recourse nor support?” (Derrida, “Cogito et histoire...” 468) Instead of beginning with idealist abstraction and becoming ever more concrete in my research focus, then, my study of Foucault started from a tangible, convincing critique which I see recurring continually in Foucault’s contemporary reception: namely, that his “historicist” methodology reproduces the violence of power-knowledge that genealogy intends to subvert. I now believe that, insofar as Nietzsche provides the unstable (anti-)foundations of Foucault’s conception of history, Foucault’s largely unpublished interpretation of Nietzsche’s Eternal Return offers a powerful defense against the historicism charge. Abstract, unlikely, made-up, or (worst of all) metaphysical as the concept may first seem, Foucault’s reevaluation of eternal recurrence opens up the possibility of resisting truth from within the clutches of its régime, by returning recursively to the multiple iterations constituting this (S)ame truth that conceals their perpetual play. When power-knowledge is grounded in the mythos of Absolute

Knowledge, to rewrite the latter's History – no longer as a continuous dialectical narrative, but as such a haunting repetition of founding acts and ultimately of foundationlessness – is to turn against itself the violent force with which the genealogist's own historical present repeats the identity of the Same, so covering over its instability or iterability. In short, I returned to the ungrounding Nietzschean grounds of Foucaultian history in hopes of ascertaining the immanently political and philosophical possibilities of this history of History; my quasi-Derridean inquiry was whether Foucault's political history of truth can successfully show up the unceasing violence of truth's construction – as well as its construction of History – *without performatively reproducing that violence*.

Thus, the stakes of my first chapter concerned the method and the object of Foucaultian genealogy in equal measure. On the methodological front, approaching genealogy through the Return allowed me not only to counter the historicist critique of Foucault, but moreover to advance a Nietzschean understanding of Foucaultian genealogy as a mimetic fiction written within and against (these hidden repetitions of) History. History's origin, determinate negation, and telos Return in genealogy as a dispersed plurality of founding acts, as well as their creative destructions and (on the other hand) their reiterated coagulations as Same identities. As this recursive, perhaps "inebriated" movement of genealogy gives rise to the "experience" of eternal recurrence, it seems less interested in positively discovering new historical "truths" than in artfully, and never *finally*, excavating the many layers of repetition sedimented, through violence, in the "truths" that define its own historical present. Further, as genealogy returns itself along with History to contingency, but only by reiterating (its) History's iterability, its (self-)ungrounding movement engenders, through its internally disruptive position, surprising parallels with foreign – worse, Derridean! – concepts such as autoimmunity, the pharmakon, and indeed Derrida's later "deconstructive genealogies." I hope then that chapter 1's analysis of Foucault's methodology may complicate, if never completely clear, his association with historicism. More important, in rereading genealogy through the Eternal Return,

I hope to make original contributions to discussions of historicity, historicism, and the (im)possibility of resisting historicism that continue to divide historians, philosophers of history, as well as theorists of critical, literary, queer, and many other stripes. Still more important, I hope that my excavation, translation, and explication of Foucault's unpublished manuscripts on Nietzsche may be of relevance to both Foucault and Nietzsche studies. Although constraints of time and space prevented me, here, from undertaking the exhaustive comparison of Foucault's Nietzsche with other (esp. contemporary French) interpretations that I had originally planned, this comparative study will stand at the forefront of my more properly philosophical work in the future, as will Nietzsche's 20th-century legacy in France.

One important reason for the absence of such a thorough comparison (of Foucault's Nietzsche in relation to his peers) from *Sex and Truth* is that I saw as the most important potential contribution of my methodological analysis its ramifications for genealogy's object: truth, become power-knowledge. If Foucault's "political history of truth" finds that truth is only the terminal crystallization of mobile force relations, hardened through the meticulously and endlessly repeated dominations which make up the long baking process of History, then genealogy's Nietzschean blows to the Absolute foundations of knowledge are also strikes against power, by the same token. For this reason, my investment in the question of truth as raised by Nietzsche, Foucault, and co. has focused primarily upon the ways in which this question (of truth) returns us to questions of power: "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." ("Two Lectures," *Power/Knowledge*, 93) Neither Foucault's interest in truth nor my own is purely philosophical or (German) ideal(ist); for the violence of truth is *realized* as power-knowledge exercises Absolute Knowledge, or seeks to. Truth matters because truth is the matter of power, the matter that *produces* power, even as power produces truth, and truth's matter(ing), at the same time.

In this light, I further hope that my second chapter's Nietzschean (R)eturn to (bio)power's production of sexuality as a discourse or a problem of *truth* will prove relevant well beyond the confines of Foucault studies (what an ironic phrase!). By emphasizing the differential return of the sovereign, "leper" model of power in and through the racist, exclusionary violence persisting in modern biopower's "plague" model, I have critically engaged post-Foucaultian theories of power that prevail as much in queer as in political theory. Specifically, reading *History of Sexuality* as an experience of eternal recurrence allowed me to challenge interpretations of biopower as the linear successor, the clean replacement, of sovereign power. Foucault's Nietzsche shows that *History of Sexuality* is able to rupture the present's "unitary consciousness" of sexuality as a truth only by returning to the *recurrence* – of violence – that comes to constitute sex as it penetrates the dialectical hearth of truth. In the face of power's "official" History of sexuality – summarized by the repressive hypothesis' imagination of sex's (free) origin, (discursive) development/negation, and (recuperative: free) telos – Foucault recovers sexuality's alien forms and founding acts, as well as their broken synthesis through the violent repetition of the Same. Sovereign and especially religious rites of exclusion then return at the deepest heart of biopower, even as biopolitical violence is deployed in no small part to secure itself from their haunting specter, whose simple existence poses the most absolute threat to its vitalist, teleological progress narrative. Once again, my reconsideration of Foucault's method ultimately aims to rethink his object: when we revisit *History of Sexuality* as a non-linear story of recurrence, a recursive mimesis of sexuality's official History, we can easily see through a number of the binaries and chronologies the book (only) appears to set up. Besides this sovereign-biopower dualism, there is also that seeming succession of sodomite by homosexual, about which queer theory has raised so much fuss. Like the biopower that produces him, Foucault's homosexual differentially repeats the sovereign, Christian, confessional workings typical of that (sodomite) which it might be seen to succeed. Honing in on the narrower accusation of historicism

as applied specifically, by certain queer theorists, to Foucault's account of homosexuality, I found that this iteration and iterability that constitutes (Foucault's) homosexuality is also what permits the identity to be resisted, in being reiterated otherwise. Circling back to power, I proceeded to argue that its constitutive repetition yields both (the potentiality for) its resistance and (the necessity of) its violence (to suppress repetition/resistance). Hearing sexuality's history through the Eternal Return, we might bend an ear to its recurring violence, and so begin to imagine the winding passage to the "perhaps one day" which permits that violence to be overcome – or exacerbated.

My third chapter planned to trace this passage through queer studies, asking at once what queer theory might add to Foucault's analysis and what that analysis might offer queer theory. In the first place, I would return to Foucault's homosexual through theories of homonormativity and homonationalism borrowed from Lisa Duggan and Jasbir Puar. In view of political developments which have altered homosexuality's contingent relations to power since 1984, when Foucault died of AIDS, the homosexual "way of life" may now be less (universally) excluded, even in its "lyrical" forms, from public expression; on the contrary, biopower openly solicits *certain* – normative and nationalistic; and so, by and large, cis, white, male – expressions of homosexual, even queer love as the liberal tokens of its legitimacy. While homonormativity demands we update Foucault's account of homosexuality's "slantwise position," Foucault's Nietzsche may in return help us think through homonormativity as a problem of truth. As some homosexual identities are repeated within the privileged quarters of biopower they formerly resisted, the repressive hypothesis is effectively fulfilled; (homo)sexual liberation passes from future prospect into fully present reality. But homonationalist queerness too kills to go on living; biopower's rationalist-moralist violence again returns otherwise, as the new (homonormative) dividing line measures the intensity of *our* (homo)sexuality's repression at the (*ir*)religious, irrational, immoral hands of abnormal, unnatural, *Other* races and sexes: "improperly queer," "perverse" and particularly non-Western, sexualities. Starting

from these present positions of homosexual subjects, I would proceed to theorize (bio)political subjectivity more generally as secured, through sexuality, by such repetitions and displacements of violence. Entering Foucault's Eternal Return into conversation with performative theories of identity, I would argue that repetition constructs not only individual subjects, but the truth of subjectivity as such; as the homonormative reversal shows, subjectivity itself is contingent, its universality (un)grounded by the differential, disavowed recurrence of identities and times past ("past"). "Before" – or better, beyond; or better yet, alongside – those performative iterations of social norms that rigidify and rupture the identity proper to any given subject, the entire biopolitical *dispositif* of subjectivity reiterates that rationalist, bourgeois-family morality Foucault excavated at the heart of modern sexuality/subjectivity. It is this rationalist morality, as chapter 2 insinuated, that gives rise to the psychoanalytic subject taken, by gender performativity and so much queer theory, as a universal model for sexuality's individual internalization. If we analyze normative repetition on the basis of this psychoanalytic subject, without firstly historicizing the sociohistorical repetition which *produces* that subject, we risk both overlooking and reproducing subjectivity's constitutive yet contingent exclusion of – ungendered and unsexed, proletariat and racialized – *non-subjects*. Further, we risk restricting resistance to the "agency" that individual subjects possess to subversively repeat social norms, such that it would ultimately fall upon the lone drag performer's simulacrum of feminine identity to reveal its "origin" as a copy. What would it mean to rethink both power and resistance on the condition of this macropolitical iterability which (de)stabilizes the whole sociohistorical field of (bio)power-knowledge, above and beyond its (un)stable subjects? This would be to understand iterability, with Foucault's Nietzsche, as that which (de)constructs both identity as well as the (bio)political *temporality* which reproduces self-same identity as originary, future, and (not) present. In its third and final section, therefore, chapter 3 planned to revisit the "temporal turn" in queer theory, to chart a third way between queer futurism and anti-futurism. On the one hand, the

hegemonic future promised to sex – “tomorrow, sex will be good again” – hardens time around that most inflexible metal ring of the Same, doing violence to whatever presently prevents power’s idealized reproduction of an imagined originary presence. Yet Lee Edelman’s *Child* is not the only face of the future, nor is the queer the sole scapegoat for that ideal’s present absence. Not only are *Child* and queer alike racialized in contingent ways that exceed Edelman’s psychoanalytic framework, but that framework, like Butler’s, fails to account for its own reproduction of the Same – of the Same subjectivity whose biopolitical norms have now become reproducible, therefore, even by some queers (however literally non-reproductive our sex), and by some queer theories. To rethink queer temporality through Nietzschean-Foucaultian contingency, rather than Lacanian lack, is at once to account for the *contingent* exclusions and inclusions that specifically *reconstitute* the horizons of our time, and moreover to remain open to still other horizons. Not the Muñozian future that promises utopia, a presently repressed totality of queer presence; but an unknowable heterotopia promised only in the *non-presence* of our historical present, in the recurring *violence* that destabilizes its time and identity. Perhaps one day...

Here we are again: repetition as the condition of power and resistance. *Guérison et maladie*: the sickness and the cure, both at once good and bad, as good as bad, *beyond* good and bad (or better, beyond good and evil). My final hope: Perhaps one day, we may become again what we never were.

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