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The Kantian Sleep. On the Limits of the “Foucault Effect”¹

SUMMARY: The essay analyzes the connection, established by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, between the appearance of “man” as an anthropological presupposition of scientific and philosophical discourses, and the construction of a transcendental *dispositif* of thought. In accordance with this presupposition, the notion of life is conceived by Foucault as a by-product of Kantian modernity and inscribed within a Heideggerian ontotheology. By stressing the vitalist alternatives to this paradigm, the essay questions the hegemony of Western transcendentalism and proposes a naturalistic reorientation of Foucault’s intellectual project.

In *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*,² Michel Foucault devotes a few dense chapters to an inspired, and sometimes obscure, description of the “anthropological ‘quadrilateral’” (Foucault 1970, 342). His target is the emergence within Western modernity of an unquestionable, and mostly invisible, set of conditions of possibility, an “archaeological mutation” that has dominated both empirical knowledge and theoretical speculation up to Nietzsche’s laughter and announcement of the “end of man”.³ The anthropological quadrilateral coincides with what Foucault sees as the transcendental *dispositif* determining the regime of truth of Western modernity, and consists of for conditions:⁴ 1) the “analytic of finitude,” as the preeminence of limits set within man’s subjectivity and finite bodies and faculties; 2) the inscription of finitude in a “strange empirico-transcendental doublet,” in which man is the

¹ Forthcoming in 2012 in *Revista de Estudios Sociales* (RES).

² Originally published in French with the title *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Foucault 1966).

³ “It was Nietzsche, in any case, who burned for us, even before we were born, the intermingled promises of the dialectic and anthropology” (Foucault 1970, 286).

⁴ The transcendental *dispositif* of Western modernity is presented in *The Order of Things* from a phenomenological and mostly Heideggerian perspective. Foucault’s “anthropological quadrilateral” follows literally Heidegger’s description of the “Kantian ground-laying” and anthropological turn of Western metaphysics, almost paraphrasing Heidegger’s arguments on finitude, the “breaking-open of the foundation” and the transcendental analytic of subjectivity (see Heidegger 1990, 139-168). Although Foucault’s programmatic objective is to disperse the exemplarity of the philosophical field, challenging the autonomy of Kant’s three *Critiques* and locating transcendentalism outside philosophical discourse, in the empirical works of Ricardo, Cuvier and Bopp (Le Blanc 2010, 7-9), I am convinced that the silent coherence of Foucault’s “critical history of thought” depends on his overarching Heideggerian assumptions about the Kantian destiny of Western modernity.

incarnated subject to whom all knowledge must be referred; 3) the “unthought”, as that Other, not-known, impersonal Outside, in which modern transcendental reflection is rooted; and 4) the “retreat and return of the origin” in a place that is already-given and therefore non-original, non-foundational; in the always already begun background of the “quasi-transcendentals” of life, language and work.⁵

According to Foucault, the anthropological quadrilateral occupies the space disclosed by the Kantian critique, which “marks the threshold of our modernity” (Foucault 1970, 242). At the end of the eighteenth century the system of Classical representation – i.e. pre-critical rationality and its set of disciplines: general grammar, natural history, the analysis of wealth – is shaken by an “essential displacement, which toppled the whole of Western thought” (Foucault 1970, 238). This “somewhat enigmatic event”, the dawn of Kantian modernity, is accompanied by “the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of representation” (Foucault 1970, 242) and by the ruthless hegemony of a transcendental paradigm, obsessed with the problem of the origin, foundation and limits of representation. After this event, the transcendental field becomes the terrain where the origin retreats in the unthought, the source of man’s finitude, the invisible double that folds all empirical evidence. Kantianism assigns to man a functional and relational status, and therefore reinvents humanity as an “empirico-transcendental doublet”, an architectural joint, a place at the crossroad of both the transcendental field and the new empirical fields. Labour, life and language are the new “historical transcendentals” that, through their articulation by political economy, biology and philology, direct the development of Western rationality and socio-political organization: “Labour, life and language appear as so many ‘transcendentals’ which make possible the objective knowledge of living beings, of the laws of production, and of the forms of language. In their being they are outside knowledge, but by that very fact they are conditions of knowledge; they correspond to Kant’s discovery of a transcendental field [...] they totalize phenomena and express the a priori coherence of empirical multiplicities” (Foucault 1970, 244).

Beyond the details of his analyses, the core of Foucault’s argument is the connection between the appearance of man as an anthropological presupposition of all scientific and philosophical

⁵ “[...] man is governed by labour, life, and language: his concrete existence finds its determinations in them [...] and he, as soon as he thinks, merely unveils himself to his own eyes in the form of a being who is already, in a necessarily subjacent density, in an irreducible anteriority, a living being, an instrument of production, a vehicle for words which exist before him” (Foucault 1970, 313).

discourses, and the unfolding of a transcendental tradition of thought, which runs from Kant to Heidegger. The intersection of these two vectors (i.e. of Kant's epistemological subjectivism and the anthropological turn that characterizes the human sciences) produces a unified *episteme*, centered on man as an impure place of passage and relational device. Man and human subjectivity are at the same time the passive object and active subject of a mixed knowledge, which oscillates between the expressive borders of the Kantian age: ontology and positivism, promise and reduction, eschatology and empiricity. Transcendentalism for Foucault is therefore much more than an historically determined philosophical option, shared by Kant, the neo-Kantians, and Husserl's phenomenology; rather, it is the common destiny of Western modernity, a *dispositif* which is displaced, transformed and yet continuously reaffirmed;⁶ a self-referential apparatus that (thanks to a phantasmal duplication) depends on the empirical for its condition of possibility and truth: "For the threshold of our modernity is situated not by the attempt to apply objective methods to the study of man, but rather by the constitution of an empirical-transcendental doublet which was called *man*" (Foucault 1970, 319).⁷

Repeating Heidegger's arguments from *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1990, 141-142), Foucault sums up his vision of modernity. When Kant adds to his traditional trilogy of questions an ultimate one, "the three critical questions (What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope?) then found themselves referred to a fourth, and inscribed, as it were, 'to its account': *Was ist der Mensch?*" (Foucault 1970, 341). Having overcome the ordered space of representation of Classical discourse, Western modernity finds itself trapped in a Kantian fold, a transcendental illusionism centered on "anthropology as an analytic of man". Foucault reasserts this idea with a memorable sentence, in the same year of *The Order of Things*: "the Kantian enigma" has "stupefied Western thought, leaving it blind to its own modernity for nearly two hundred years" (Foucault 1967, 546).⁸

⁶⁶ For a critique of the transcendental *dispositif*, see Esposito (2010, 12).

⁷ Among the many studies addressing the intricate relations of Foucault with Kant and Kantianism, see Fimiani (1997), Han (2002) and Le Blanc (2010).

⁸ This is Foucault's review of the French edition of Ernest Cassirer's *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*.

1. Becoming Nietzsche

In the last pages of the chapter of *The Orders of Things*, in which Foucault confronts a Kant-driven modernity absorbed into the aporias of “man and his doubles”, the hegemony of the anthropological quadrilateral gives way to the figure of an “anthropological sleep”. The Kantian critical awakening from dogmatic slumber becomes in Foucault a denunciation of the “anthropological configuration” of the modern *episteme*: “All empirical knowledge, provided it concerns man, can serve as a possible philosophical field in which the foundation of knowledge, the definition of its limits, and, in the end, the truth of all truth must be discoverable” (Foucault 1970, 341). The pathos and care shown by the human sciences’ attempt to define man as “a living being, an individual at work, or a speaking subject” is redirected by the “transcendental function” into a foundation of finitude; the “man of nature, of exchange, or discourse” is reduplicated into an analytic of limits and ontological structures. When Foucault declares that “Anthropology constitutes perhaps the fundamental arrangement that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day” (Foucault 1970, 342), his polemical objective is the incestuous cohabitation of the empirical and the critical, under the *insignia* of man’s humanity and its human and social sciences. The transcendental *dispositif* consists in this relational function inserted in the human; a mechanism of correlation that – from Kant’s schematism to Husserl’s intentionality, from Heidegger’s ontological difference to Deleuze’s theory of individuation – has guaranteed the odd, flexible and polarized stability of Western empirico-critical humanity, the balance and coexistence of its positivism and mysticism, the hallucinatory naturality of its synthesis of prophetism and economic-political reductionism.

In keeping with his acknowledgment, and acceptance, of the thorny destiny of Kantian modernity, Foucault apocalyptically predicts its overcoming, arguing that “there is no other way than to destroy the anthropological ‘quadrilateral’ in its very foundations,” and pointing to the “Nietzschean experience” as the “first attempt at this uprooting of Anthropology” (Foucault 1970, 341). *The Order of Things* offers just a few scattered indications of what a non-Kantian *episteme* might look like, mentioning Nietzsche’s “philological critique” and “certain form of biologism”, his championing of the “enigmatic multiplicity” of language and his concentration on the *who* of discourse, on “the possessor of the word” (Foucault 1970, 305 and 341).

We know how, after the archaeological phase of *The Order of Things*, Foucault moves to a genealogical inquiry guided by a closer dialogue with Nietzsche.⁹ Progressively, Foucault's researches turn into a *redde rationem* with Nietzsche, a "becoming Nietzsche" to such an extent that much of what we recognize as Foucauldian, especially in the so called "late Foucault" – the contingency of the origins, the connection of *pouvoir* and *savoir*, the genealogy of Western "will to truth", the emergence and variation of specific techniques of power accompanied by forms of subjectification, the problematic of biopower and biopolitics, governmentality and *parrhesia*, the care of the self – can be seen primarily as polite declinations of Nietzsche's destruction of the political, ethical, and conceptual legacy of Western thought. Despite Foucault's own attempt to mark the inner lines of continuity of his thought, it is evident that his early sympathy for modes of epistemological structuralism still heavily indebted to the transcendental paradigm,¹⁰ is replaced by a growing Nietzschean hostility towards this Kantian vocabulary.¹¹ And yet, it is also well known that, up to his testamentary essay *What is Enlightenment?*, Foucault has never followed Nietzsche's radicalism in his merciless scorn for Kant, always refusing to cut the umbilical cord that connects him to Kant and the Enlightenment. The question of critique, the discourse on the limits of reason and the heritage of modernity, have survived in Foucault alongside with his engagement with Nietzsche's anti-philosophical contempt for Western civilization.¹²

Since Foucault has disdainfully refused the "blackmail of the Enlightenment", the simplistic imputation of "being for or against the Enlightenment" (Foucault 1984a, 45), it would be useless to introduce what we may call the "blackmail of Kant", reducing his philosophical position to a

⁹ See Foucault (1984b, 76-100).

¹⁰ "One might suggest that by virtue of Foucault's very inscription within the modernity that he historically criticizes, he must be defined as a post-Kantian" (Han 2002, 37).

¹¹ See for instance Foucault's remarks on the heterogeneity between criticism and archaeology on one side, and transcendentalism on the other: "this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological - and not transcendental - in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events [...]" (Foucault 1984a, 46).

¹² "Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. [...] it seems to me that a meaning can be attributed to that critical interrogation on the present and on ourselves which Kant formulated by reflecting on the Enlightenment. It seems to me that Kant's reflection is even a way of philosophizing that has not been without its importance or effectiveness during the last two centuries. The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (Foucault 1984a, 45 and 50).

somewhat encapsulating and unresolved acceptance of Kantianism. More fruitful would be an interrogation of Foucault's intricate and oximoronic relation with both Kant and Nietzsche, with Western modernity and its inner and outer outsides (the genealogical unthought and the non-European geopolitical forces of displacement). How and why did Foucault tenaciously protect the double heritages of Kant and Nietzsche? What are the sources, impulses and theoretico-political implications of Foucault's combinatorial strategy?

The most common answers to this conundrum mobilize the resources of philosophical historiography and refine the understanding of Foucault's encounter with Kant and Nietzsche, emphasizing the seminal complexity and ambiguity of Foucault's 1961 dissertation on Kant's *Pragmatic Anthropology* (Foucault 2008), his early engagement with anthropology and Kantianism,¹³ his dependence on the interpretations of transcendentalism offered by Jean Hyppolite and Jules Vuillemin; or underlining the overlappings and distinctions between critique and analytic, between different aspects of modernity, between an early and a late Foucault; or again focusing on the subtle mutations of his transcendental presumption and the continuous micro-variations of his Nietzscheanism and Kantianism.

Thanks to the increasingly fine-tuned machinery of Foucault Studies, we are now aware of the key influence of Jules Vuillemin's book *L'Héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne* (1954) in shaping Foucault's paradigmatic synthesis of Kant and Nietzsche, mediated as it was by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.¹⁴ And, most importantly, we have grasped the extent of the hegemony of Heideggerianism in post-Second World War European philosophy, after the publication of Heidegger's *Being and Event*, the *Letter on Humanism*, his writing on Nietzsche and, in France, the 1953 translation of his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

What are the consequences of Foucault's unyielding positioning within Heidegger's history of Western metaphysics, within his ontological rewriting of Kant's transcendentalism and Nietzsche's nihilism, within his understanding of truth's mechanism of "concealedness" and

¹³ Giuseppe Bianco has called the attention to the significant role played by transcendentalism in Foucault's early philosophical apprenticeship; see Bianco. *Jean Hyppolite, Jules Vuillemin et le devenir "foucauldien" de Foucault* (unpublished essay). As early as 1949, Jean Hyppolite directed Foucault's "mémoire de DES" on *La constitution d'un transcendantal historique dans la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel* (text lost or not available). On Foucault's loyalty to a "constructed" lineage of French epistemology that runs from Bachelard to himself, through Canguilhem and in opposition to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Bergson, see Foucault (1998). On this topic see also Bianco (2011). Many thanks to Giuseppe Bianco for allowing me to read his unpublished essays.

¹⁴ See Bianco, *Jean Hyppolite, Jules Vuillemin et le devenir "foucauldien" de Foucault* and Sluga (2005).

“unconcealedness”?¹⁵ In the remaining pages I will take for granted a certain “Heideggerian sleep” of Foucault,¹⁶ concentrating exclusively on a crucial repercussion of this epoch-making Heideggerianism, to show how a new reading of Foucault, but also of the most adventurous European philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century, would benefit from its recognition.

2. A Life

What Foucault has inherited from his age, and mostly from French phenomenologically-oriented philosophical historiography – which has been under the spell of Heidegger’s powerful reinvention of ontology – is a peculiar blindness, the impossibility to ascertain the radical alternative between transcendentalism (as the philosophical mainstream of modern Western philosophy) and vitalism (as the principal challenge to this Kantian reign). This attitude, quite typical of post-Second World War European intellectuals, translates into a weakening of Nietzsche’s naturalism and a *de facto* refutation of Bergson’s vitalism, and includes a defense of philosophy’s cognitive autonomy against the anti-philosophical inclinations of Nietzsche and Bergson. While Foucault’s influential teacher and mentor, George Canguilhem, eventually overcomes his own Kantianism to champion a biological reduction of philosophy and Bergsonian naturalism,¹⁷ Foucault limits his conversion to the theorization of bio-power, without however removing his anti-Bergsonian and anti-naturalistic bias.

The example of Deleuze is even more striking: if we look systematically at the ontological presuppositions of his creative interpretations of Nietzsche and Bergson,¹⁸ we find the manufacturing of a seductive and yet paradoxical neo-Kantian image for Kant’s primary opponents, a conceptual engineering that restyles Nietzsche and Bergson into ontologists of difference and “transcendental vitalism”.¹⁹ With Deleuze, Foucault’s empirico-transcendental doublet loses its anthropological traits and is replaced by an inhuman doublet, a “transcendental

¹⁵ See in particular Foucault’s 1982 last interview: “For me Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher [...] My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger” (Foucault 1990, 250).

¹⁶ On this topic see Milchman and Rosenberg (2003). Deleuze speaks of “the necessary confrontation between Foucault and Heidegger” (Deleuze 1988: 108).

¹⁷ See Bianco (2012).

¹⁸ See Deleuze (1991) and (1983).

¹⁹ On Deleuze’s “transcendental vitalism” see F. Luisetti (2011). The process of Kantianization of Bergson is at work also in the most systematic study of Bergson’s anti-Kantianism; see Barthélemy-Madaule (1966).

empiricism”, the life of a “spiritual automaton” that presides over disjunctive syntheses and processes of individuation.²⁰

Beyond the theoretical *minutiae* of Foucault’s and Deleuze’s conceptual virtuosity, the “Kantian sleep” prolonged by Heideggerian ontology and radicalized to its furthestmost limits by the philosophies of difference and exteriority, requires a double-bind relationship not only with Kant and transcendentalism, but also with the Enlightenment and the destiny of Western modernity; that is, the willingness to accept without reservation a common destiny and engrave it in the theoretical apparatus of the West.

We can see at work this strategic *mouvement sur place*, inside Kantianism and European philosophical modernity, also in some of the most significant readings of Foucault. Let’s take as an example Canguilhem’s review of Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*. Here Canguilhem inscribes Foucault’s archaeology of the human sciences within the tasks of a “non-Kantian analytics”, defined by the “obligations” of “non-Kantianism” (Canguilhem 2005, 92). And yet, just a few paragraphs after this sentence, Canguilhem concludes his eulogy of Foucault’s book with a Kantian prophecy: “*Les Mots et les choses* might play for a future Kant, as yet unknown as such, the awakening role that Kant attributed to Hume. In such a case we would have skipped a step in the non repetitive reproduction of epistemic history by saying of this work that it is to the sciences of man what the *Critique of Pure Reason* was to the sciences of nature” (Canguilhem 2005, 93).

In his monograph on Foucault, Deleuze is even more explicit, proposing a systematic interpretation of Foucault’s work as a neo-Kantian reinvention of transcendentalism: “This research into conditions constitutes a sort of neo-Kantianism unique to Foucault [...] if there is any neo-Kantianism, it is because visibilities together with their conditions form a Receptivity, and statements together with their conditions form a Spontaneity [...] Foucault’s diagrammaticism, that is to say the presentation of pure relations between forces or the transmission of pure particular features, is therefore the analogue of Kantian schematicism” (Deleuze 1988, 60 and 82).

A way out of this socio-cognitive deadlock that has nurtured and, at the same time, paralyzed the most sophisticated European philosophy of the last decades requires the inaugural gesture of rescuing vitalism from the transcendental trap. The “philosophical characters” of Nietzsche and

²⁰ On Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism see Sauvagnargues (2010).

Bergson, with their uncompromised and systemic aversion to Kant, have pointed to the vitalist alternatives, introducing many tools for breaking the hegemony of transcendentalism and fragmenting the destiny of European modernity. Foucault's and Deleuze's *mise en abyme* of neo-Kantianism, their infinitization of the "Kantian sleep" into a permanent critique and a transcendental vitalism, has halted this movement of de-creation of the Western ontotheological heritage. The wild energy of Bergsonian and Nietzschean naturalisms, their lines of flight away from the philosophical foundations of Christian civilization, have been weakened by the re-absorption of life within the transcendental apparatus.

We already know how *The Order of Things* encounters life at the beginning of modernity, discovering its status as a historical *a priori*, as a new conceptual possibility arising within Western transcendentalism.²¹ As a by-product of the empirical-transcendental machine, life (as Foucault understood it) possesses all the characteristics of the Kantian *episteme*: it is a "synthetic notion" that replaces the taxonomic space of the Classical age (Foucault 1970, 269); it is a non-natural phenomenon endowed with an "enigmatic" and obscure vitality (the puzzling life of the quasi-transcendentals) (Foucault 1970, 273); it is an historicized nature, a *kenosis* of the transcendental (Foucault 1970, 276); it is a mysterious activity that penetrates the living, shaping it from within and yet preserving itself as a pure Outside, a source.²² Like Deleuze's *une vie*, the "immanent life", the "pure life" of the transcendental field (Deleuze 2001), Foucault's life is a transcendental hallucination. And yet, while Deleuze stresses its vital and creative connotations, Foucault is fascinated by the nightmarish aspects of this disincarnated vitality, by the "disturbing and nocturnal powers" of its biological animality: "the animal appears as the bearer of that death to which it is, at the same time, subjected; it contains a perpetual devouring of life by life. It belongs to nature only at the price of containing within itself a nucleus of anti-nature" (Foucault 1970, 277-278).²³

Foucault's account of life has surrendered to the deadly hug of transcendentalism. In *The Order of Things*, from the perspective of a unified Kantian *episteme*, Foucault overlaps transcendentalism and biologism, life as a relational *dispositif* and vitalism, so that his conception of vitality falls back into a neo-Kantian *Weltanschauung*. And yet, the naturality of

²¹ See Tarizzo (2010).

²² "Life, on the confines of being, is what is exterior to it and also, at the same time, what manifests itself within it" (Foucault 1970, 273).

²³ We may notice how this transcendental epistemology of life resonates with Agamben's negative dialectic of "bare life"; see Agamben (1998).

nature did not exhaust itself with Kant and the end of the Classical age; it was carried over, profoundly renovated from within, by the vitalist anti-Kantianisms of Bergson and Nietzsche, by the avant-gardes' technological immanentism, by bio-philosophical and Orientalist trends.²⁴ The anti-philosophical force of dispersion of Bergson's and Nietzsche's thought lies precisely in their non-belonging to the false dualism of Classical, representational naturalism, and modern, transcendental vitalism. The vitalist turn opposed by Nietzsche and Bergson to the transcendental unconscious of the European *episteme* is not a lost chapter of the history of European Kantianism. It undermines the desire to belong to the fate of Western modernity, exposing it to the multiplicity of its archaisms and geo-philosophical localisms. While the testamentary will of Foucault embraces the Kantian dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy,²⁵ the vitalist destruction of transcendentalism unveils in the theoretical ethos of autonomy the disturbing afterlife of the West's lost centrality.

3. A Theologian Success

In the present conjuncture the secret paradigmatic force of transcendentalism and Heideggerianism has begun to fade, making the theoretical projects of Foucault, Deleuze and European post-phenomenological philosophy at large substantially indecipherable. The synthesis of Kant and Nietzsche, the convergence of Bergsonism and phenomenology, which was perceived as natural for the readers of Hyppolite and Heidegger, of Vuillemin and Canguilhem, has now lost its obviousness. Transcendental vitalism is now an exotic coin, no longer a spontaneous philosophical attitude.

The positive effect of this redistribution of philosophical attitudes is the resurfacing of the structural incompatibility between transcendentalism and vitalism. Nietzsche's assault on Kant can now be reclaimed from the Heideggerian and neo-Heideggerian taming of vitalism, and restituted to its genetic conditions. First and foremost, Kantianism is in fact for Nietzsche a moral option, a continuation of Christianity and Romanticism, the recreation of "the moral instincts of Christianity". Kant translates and upholds in the scholastic realm Rousseau's "vindictive rancor", his "self-contempt and heated vanity" (Nietzsche 1994, 62). A man of

²⁴ See Luisetti (2011).

²⁵ In *What is Enlightenment?* Foucault asserts the virtue of "critique" as "a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy" (Foucault 1984a, 44).

“moral fanaticism”, Kant had no eye “for the actuality of his time, e.g., Revolution” and was “untouched by Greek philosophy” (Nietzsche 1994, 60).²⁶

Since Kant has re-infused Christianity with a subtle “theologian blood”, Nietzsche’s violent assault on Kant’s transcendentalism is a fundamental step of his campaign against European philosophical modernity: “Germans understand me immediately when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by the theologian blood. The Protestant minister is the grandfather of German philosophy [...] Why did the world of German scholars, three-quarters of whom are pastors’ and teachers’ sons, go into such fits of delights at the appearance of Kant – why were Germans so convinced (you can still find echoes of this conviction) that Kant marked a change for the better? [...] A hidden path to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a ‘true world’, the concept of morality as the essence of the world (– the two most vicious errors in existence!) were once again (thanks to an exceedingly canny scepticism), if not provable, then at least no longer refutable [...] Reality was made into ‘mere appearance’; a complete lie called ‘the world of being’ was made into a reality [...] Kant’s success is just a theologian success [...] Kant became an idiot, – And this was a contemporary of Goethe! This disaster of a spider passed for the German philosopher, – and still does! [...] The instinct that is wrong about everything, anti-nature as instinct, German decadence as philosophy – this is Kant! –” (Nietzsche 1994, 9).²⁷

If we accept the Nietzschean and Bergsonian refutation of Kantian modernity, we might be able to extract from Foucault’s self-imposed alliance with criticism and European Enlightenment the seeds of a contemporary form of non-transcendental thought. Are there, in the “Foucault effect”, any sparkles of an “affirmative biopolitics”?²⁸ What vitalist antidotes can we detect in Foucauldianism, if we decide to counter the “subterranean Christianity” of Western philosophical modernity with an immanentistic reorientation?

²⁶ “Kant [...] a subterranean Christianity in his values; a dogmatist through and through, but ponderously sick of this inclination [...] not yet touched by the slightest breath of cosmopolitan taste and the beauty of antiquity – a delayer and mediator, nothing original [...] In the case of Kant, theological prejudice, his unconscious dogmatism, his moralistic perspective, were dominant, directing, commanding [...] Kant *believes* in the fact of knowledge: what he wants is a piece of naiveté: knowledge of knowledge!” (Nietzsche 1994, 64 and 286).

²⁷ Although expressed within the constraints of intellectual discourse, Bergson’s relentless confutation of Kant and Kantianism – in particular of Charles Bernard Renouvier’s “neo-criticism” – is the leitmotif of his thought: “Kant est son adversaire de toujours; de l’*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience aux Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Bergson est resté fidèle à lui-même dans cette animadversion”, Preface by Vladimir Jankélévitch, in Barthélemy-Madaule (1966, 1); “Henri Bergson ne s’est pas montré moins sévère pour les successeurs immédiats de Kant, qu’il ne l’a été pour Kant lui-même” (Canguilhem 1968, 348).

²⁸ On “affirmative biopolitics” see Esposito (2007 and 2008) and Campbell (2011).

The main vitalist assumption articulated by Foucault throughout his work concerns topology. As in Bergson, who grounds knowledge in action and contact, in a pragmatic of behavior and movements in life-spaces, the structuralist heritage is reframed by Foucault into a topological and formalist paradigm, where archives, diagrams, discursive formations and visibilities are distributed and altered, designing a space of stability and variation, of persistence and repetitions, of continuity and dispersion. The topological orientation of Foucault's method, the complex space-time compounds that it generates, have been noted and carefully reconstructed by Deleuze, for whom "Foucault's general principle is that every form is a compound of relations between forces [...] every inside-space is topologically in contact with the outside-space, independent of distance and on the limits of a 'living'" (Deleuze 1998, 124). However, in line with his transcendental vitalism, Deleuze's final aim is to reinscribe Foucault's horizontal mechanisms of transformation within a post-phenomenological, vertical topological thought, modeled on an eclectic assemblage of Kant's schematism, Heidegger's fold of Being, and Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh. Foucault's vitalist topology is thus crushed by the gears of the transcendental *dispositif*, by this secularized neo-Kantian repetition of Christian ontotheology.²⁹

Conversely, I would argue that we should concentrate instead on the naturalistic implications of Foucault's topological turn. If life processes are not polarized between finitude and its ontological Outside, torn by the virtuality of the transcendental field and folded along the lines of Kantian self-affection, then we shall abandon the new *a priori* of neo-Kantian reason – the Neuter, ontological Difference, the Outside, the Impersonal – and explore the immanent logic of action and thought-movements, the distributions and qualitative transformations of singularities, the intersections and differences of kind among vital forces, the qualities and effects of borders and obstacles, the creativity and paradoxes of a life which has finally learned how to accept its puzzling naturality.³⁰ Reversing Foucault's understanding of Kant, we might say that topological vitalism abandons the notion of man's autonomy and his ghostly Outsides, the transcendental hypostases in which humanity reflects its desires of permanence and its fears of dependence,

²⁹ "This is Foucault's major achievement: the conversion of phenomenology into epistemology [...] in Heidegger, and then in Merleau-Ponty, the surpassing of intentionality tended towards Being, the fold of Being. From intentionality to the fold, from being to Being, from phenomenology to ontology [...] This is why we may believe that the analysis conducted by Foucault in the unpublished *Les aveux de la chair* in turn concerns the whole of the problem of the 'fold' (incarnation) when it stresses the Christian origins of flesh from the viewpoint of the history of sexuality" (Deleuze 1988, 109-110 and 149).

³⁰ See Lewin (1936).

seeking “mature adulthood” in the acknowledgment that “the essence of the living thing is that, insofar as it is living, it is immediately present to itself” (Canguilhem 1994, 318).

The principles of multiplicity and localization, of change and transformation, of exteriority and rarity must be untangled from the traces of neo-Kantianism and Heideggerianism, and fully restored to their vitalist force³¹. What happens for instance when we apply the criterion of localization to the very conditions of production, relevance and diffusion of European thought? What is the destiny of the residual forms of Western universalism, of the negative ontologies of otherness and the outside, of the neuter and the transcendental field? Can we translate Foucault’s critical “ontology of the present” into a non-Kantian topology of knowledge?³²

During a conversation with Buddhist priests, recorded in a Japanese Zen temple in 1978, Foucault offered an instance of this approach, addressing the underlying geophilosophical localization of his intellectual project: “Europe finds itself in a defined region of the world and in a defined period. That said, it presents the specificity of creating a universal category which categorises the modern world. Europe is the birth place of universality. In this sense, the crisis of European thought concerns the whole world. It is a crisis which influences different thoughts in all the countries of the world, as well as the general thought of the world [...] the crisis of Western thought, the crisis of the Western concept which is revolution, the crisis of the Western concept which is man and society. It is a crisis which concerns the entire world” (Foucault 1999, 113).

While most philosophical positions, at least in Europe and North America, programmatically deny the crisis of Western universalism, Foucault territorializes the “limited system of presences” of modernity’s hegemonic discourse formations (Foucault 1972, 119), denouncing the regressive connotations projected by the notions of man and society, by the threatening actuality of humanism: “Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation. What we call humanism has been used by the Marxists, liberals, Nazis, Catholics. [...] What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal

³¹ See *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1972), where Foucault’s provides the most comprehensive account of his immanentistic method: against the interpretative strategies of interiorization, totalization and ontological foundation, Foucault sets out a new language for the topological analysis of “statements”. What matters for a vitalist archaeologist of knowledge are not ontological “events” – the Heideggerian *Ereignis* – or logical-taxonomical homogeneities and continuities, but the positions, capacity of circulation, transformations and forms of accumulation of what is there in its dispersion and singularity – what Foucault defines “positivity”.

³² In *Pensiero vivente*, Roberto Esposito addresses this question by radicalizing Foucault’s anti-transcendental motifs and reclaiming the naturalistic ground of Italian thought (Esposito 2010, 10 sgg).

model for any kind of freedom. I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow: the Left, the Center, the Right” (Foucault 1988, 15).

This redefinition of Western reason can now be extended beyond the limits envisioned by Foucault, widened into a geophilosophical destruction of transcendentalism and pushed forward into an emancipative topological vitalism.³³ As it turned out, lingering Eurocentrism prevented Foucault from recognizing the local validity and historical contingency of his own critique, the limits of his neo-Kantian dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy, freedom and necessity. It is our task to interrupt the Kantian sleep and place ourselves in our awake actuality, fulfilling the uncertain promise of *The Order of Things*, the “emergence of what may perhaps be the space of contemporary thought” (Foucault 1970, 286).

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