

70th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 8th September 2013
ON MICHEL FOUCAULT
Marcus Steinweg

1. In a review of Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966), Gilles Deleuze, responding to the analytic of finitude elaborated in that book, brings a thinking into focus that "would of itself be in relation to the obscure."¹
2. A thinking after the death of God, it investigates and traces the radical finitude of man to the bounds of his inexistence.
3. This new thinking, which owes much to the "Nietzschean revolution,"² rives all humanisms that trust in a stable identity of *homo humanus*.³
4. It rives all those phantasms that promise the finite subject an infinite future and guarantee it an absolute origin.
5. By beginning thinking from the "rift in man," by beginning to think that rift itself, it rives man as such, not in order to make him disappear without a trace but in order to define him as the vanishing trace of himself (of what he never *really* was).
6. This rift "cannot be filled in, because it is the highest object of thought: the Human does not fill it in or glue it back together; the rift in humanity is the end of the Human or the origin of thought. A cogito for a self underneath ..."⁴
7. A thinking after the death of God must take its beginning from the impossibility of man, from an originally evacuated subject, a primordially splintered cogito, whose task will henceforth be to confront this void and fragmentation rather than strive for a substantial beginning and a reasoned finality.
8. Let us recall the famous sentences Foucault wrote: "It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be

filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think.”⁵

9. It is clear—and Deleuze underscores—that this thinking that arises in the space of the void by seeking to leave God and the humanisms of the tradition with their compatible conceptions of the subject behind, begins to outline “a new *image of thought*”: “a thinking that no longer opposes itself as from the outside to the unthinkable or the unthought, but which would lodge the unthinkable, the unthought within itself as thought, and which would be in an essential relationship to it.”⁶
10. At issue, patently, is a thinking that conceives itself as a primordial being-open toward the unthinkable and unthought, a thinking that does not simply resist the void and its own limitations, instead understanding these limitations to be elemental and constitutive of itself.⁷
11. At issue is a thinking that is aware of its originary (or “archaic”) ties to the unthought, which we may call the “unconscious” in order to associate it with “dim mechanisms” and “faceless determinations.”
12. “Man and the unthought,” Foucault writes, “are, at the archaeological level, contemporaries.”⁸
13. This is a thinking, obviously, that has broken free of the illusion of its own omnipotence—not in order to indulge in the phantasm of total impotence, the narcissism of impotence-worship, which is nothing but an indicator of luxurious self-victimization and intellectual laziness of the sort often manifest in the celebration of the celebrant’s own weakness and vulnerability—but in order to confront both at once, the object-status of the subject as much as its subject-status, its capacity for receptivity as much as spontaneity, or to put it in Heideggerian terms: itself as *geworfener Entwurf*, thrown projection.
14. The dimensions of a radical passivity and a hyperbolic activity intersect in the subject.

15. The subject is the scene of this intersection.
16. Translated into categories of ontotopology, this means that the subject is the place where the future intervenes in the past and the past determines the future.
17. Intervention and determination are strictly compossible, however forcefully they seem to exclude each other.
18. Foucault consigns thinking to its indeterminate future as much as its complex *arché*, “an unthought which [thinking] contains entirely.”⁹
19. Let us quote the following important passage in full: “The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality. This obscure space so readily interpreted as an abyssal region in man’s nature, or as a uniquely impregnable fortress in his history, is linked to him in an entirely different way; it is both exterior to him and indispensable to him: in one sense, the shadow cast by man as he emerged in the field of knowledge; in another, the blind stain by which it is possible to know him. In any case, the unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly, since the nineteenth century. Since it was really never more than an insistent double, it has never been the object of reflection in an autonomous way; it has received the complementary form and the inverted name of that for which it was the Other and the shadow: in Hegelian phenomenology, it was the *An sich* as opposed to the *Für sich*; for Schopenhauer it was the *Unbewusste*; for Marx it was alienated man; in Husserl’s analyses it was the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, the non-effected—in every case, the inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth.”¹⁰

20. It is surprising that Foucault does not see this spectral man-beside-man emerge until the nineteenth century; as though thinking were not accompanied from the very outset by a phantom double, be it the Socratic *daimon* or, at all times during which thinking interprets itself as male, the figure of female assistance; not even to mention all the animals that haunt the subject in order to assure it of its animal origins, which, like all that is repressed, acquire the presence of a phantom. What is decisive is that within the subject or beside it, in extreme proximity to it, something non-subjective is lodged or abides, an element that is now blind and obtuse, now clairvoyant but forever lays claim to its presence.
21. We might address it as the elemental itself, as chaos or wild nature, as a pre-subjective stratum of orderless materiality and Dionysian-archaic groundlessness that allows no thinking to come to rest, for it appeals to any thinking to be thought as long as the status of the unthought applies to it. Any thinking, any subject, it would seem, has “already ‘left’ itself in its own being.”¹¹
22. A chasm opens up within it so that it understands that to think itself—to be self-consciousness, thinking thinking itself—means to attend to this split or rift, this wound that will not close.
23. That makes thinking, as Foucault puts it, “a perilous act.”¹²
24. The opening toward an element that closes itself off to it, that denies it full self-consciousness, closed self-presence, that, by slipping from its grasp, destabilizes the subject in its entirety and makes it stumble in order to call upon it to adopt a conception of itself that would leave the phantasms of a presence and self-presence rid of all specters behind.
25. That the subject, moving on the trace of its own disappearance, encounters, on the line of its rampant absence, itself as though it were its own spectral double, means that it is itself a phantasm, one that does not cease to beset itself by riddling itself with questions it cannot answer.¹

¹ On the “disappearance of man” as the “disappearance of man in favor of language,” i.e., in favor of the anonymous murmur of pre-subjective or non-personal structures, see Michel Foucault, “L’homme est-il mort?”,

26. The legacy of metaphysics would perhaps be nothing but this riddling that drills a hole into the subject, never ceasing to drill, a hole or hollow large enough to make room for all sorts of specters that begin to spread through the subject and will ultimately supplant it altogether.
27. And yet: as Jacques Derrida has shown,² it would be a mistake to trust in the deferred action of specters, as though there had ever been a non-spectral subject whose unperturbed self-certainty and self-presence were only now being unsettled by a spectral power.

in *Dits et Écrits. 1954–1988*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 425.

² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, "Humans: A Dubious Existence," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, trans. Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 92.
- 2 Ibid., 91.
- 3 Nietzsche, Deleuze argues, is by no means the "inventor of the famous phrase 'God is dead.' On the contrary, he is the first to believe this phrase to have no importance whatsoever as long as the human occupies the place of God. Nietzsche was trying to uncover something that was neither God nor Human, trying to give voice to these impersonal individuations and these pre-individual singularities ... that's what he calls Dionysos, or also the super-man." Gilles Deleuze, "On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, 138–39. On the compossibility of subject and singularity see Marcus Steinweg, *Subjektsingularitäten* (Berlin: Merve, 2004).
- 4 Deleuze, "Humans: A Dubious Existence," 92 (translation modified).
- 5 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 373.
- 6 Deleuze, "Humans: A Dubious Existence," 92.
- 7 Blanchot described the void as the moment at which writing begins: "Language can begin only with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself." Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1995), 324.
- 8 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 355.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 355–56.
- 11 Ibid., 357.
- 12 Ibid.