Foucault and French Scene - (Post 1968 French philosophy: a roadmap)

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My claim on the course flyer that MF is the most influential French intellectual of the past 30 years does not mean he was the best philosopher: that title goes to Gilles Deleuze and/or Jacques Derrida, depending on orientation. What do I mean by "orientation"?

Foucault once named three as the dominant ones of his student years in the late 40s and early 50s: 1) phenomenology; 2) structuralism; 3) Marxism.

Post 1968 French thought, however, can be usefully seen as conforming to only two orientations: one, a post-phenomenological orientation to radical difference, as exemplified by Levinas, Derrida and Irigaray; two, a post-structuralist historical-libidinal materialism studying the construction of bodies politic, as exemplified by Foucault and Deleuze/Guattari. Official Marxism, as governed by the thought police of the PCF, was dropped in disgust by the major thinkers, even though Marx's own breakthroughs (he was the original historical materialist, after all) continued to influence French philosophy.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology studies cultural meaning via its production by individual subjects or intersubjective communities. Phenomenology shows how meaning is constituted by an "intention" of a subject: very roughly speaking, how the world comes to make sense.

Predecessors: Kant and Hegel

Two German philosophers, Immanuel Kant (peak years 1781-1800) and GWF Hegel (peak years 1804-32) establish transcendental philosophy. They look for the conditions of possibility of an experience in a categorial structure, the underlying basic structures of thought.

Kant thought he had established two requirements for rational and unified experience: 1) temporal-spatiality; 2) a unified table of categories for any rational and unified experience through analogy with the table of logical judgments. He then puts them together: the categories are really "schemata," ways of temporally organizing sense perceptions so that unified, stable objects undergo consistent patterns of change in a coherent unity of "experience." The subject unifying this experience is a merely logical possibility of adding "I think" to any judgment: Kant called this the TUA. These categories never changed and were not in any sense personal or historical: they showed how a theoretically knowing subject knows an objective world. Real problems then occur when relating the transcendental to the empirical, or the conditions of possibility of any experience to my non-theoretical--moral or aesthetic--experience right here and now. Now Kant did have a philosophy of history that Foucault found fascinating, and to which we will return, but its relation to the transcendental field Kant uncovered is problematic. In other words, the relation of theory and practice, knowledge and action, in Kant is problematic.

Hegel came along after some interesting developments in what is called "German Idealism" to historicize the transcendental field opened up by Kant. In other words, Hegel showed the way in which different historical epochs had different categorial structures resulting in different fundamental "experiences." Hegel also showed how these transcendental categorial changes occur on the practical and political level, not just the theoretical knowing level. Thus he thought he had unified the theory-practice split in Kant. The problem with Hegel is that he has a tendency to talk as if there were a "spirit" or "subject" of an age that undergoes an "education" through history pointing toward the modern age of freedom as self-determination concretized in liberal democracy: the infamous "end of history" thesis most recently revived by Francis Fukuyama. Hegel's history though is Eurocentric, totalizing, and teleological; a major preoccupation of Foucault's generation is to "escape" from Hegel, as it has been ever since Hegel: for Marx and Nietzsche, for instance, whom we will discuss later. Like all post-war French intellectuals, Foucault learned about Hegel from Jean Hyppolite.

Marx (peak years: 1844-82) "stood Hegel on his feet" (he had been standing on his head): that is, he located the motor of history in human labor to produce needs and culture. We'll discuss Marx's positive impact on French post-structuralism later. For now, let us note that the PCF by the 50s had become a Stalinist hierarchy controlling the truth of the objective laws of history and enforcing that truth with thought police. Thus we have to distinguish between an interesting and open way of reading Marx (admittedly against some of his own statements) as a philosopher of difference, a "bottom-up" historical materialist who opens up a future the political struggles of which are yet to be determined (in other words, who allows cultural struggle), and the Marxism of the PCF, who were Stalinists: top-down, central hierarchy, totalizing single focus on the straight white male industrial proletariat to be led by the avant-garde party.

German Phenomenology: Husserl and Heidegger

One man established phenomenology *per se*: Edmund Husserl (peak years 1900-38); his formula: "to the things themselves!" Husserl's terminology is notoriously difficult. The basic difference between Kant and Husserl is that Husserl focuses on concrete descriptions of the individual ego, albeit described at a transcendental level--what makes possible this experience right now--as opposed to Kant's abstract, universal and anonymous TUA. One way to put it: Kant works from the top-down: he asks what must an object be to be experienceable (temporal-spatial and categorial-schematized) and then locates those requirements in the subject; Husserl on the other hand works from the bottom up, concretely describing the "between" of subject and object, what he called "intentionality." The early Husserl at least was thoroughly intellectual, purporting to show that a theoretical knowledge relation underlay any other type of relation of subject to object: ethical, aesthetic, practical, productive, etc.

Husserl's major successor was Martin Heidegger (peak years 1927-62). In a sense, Heidegger does to Husserl what Hegel did to Kant: he historicized and rendered practical Husserl's transcendental field. Heidegger insisted on the personal nature of existence and on its practical ground: my immediate relation to things is that of getting around in the world, of "caring for myself." He later came up with a notion of historical epochs--something like Hegel, but not tied to the figure of an experience of spirit, and hence not teleologically ordered--in which the basic categorial structure of an age could be described from attention to the "basic words" uttered in classic philosophy texts. Some of these Heideggerian themes will recur, with changes of course, in Foucault. A major difference is that Foucault will not read classic philosophy texts but obscure practical manuals in trying to elucidate the categorial structure of the experience of madness in the Classical Age, for instance, as in *MC*. (By the time of *OT*, Foucault wavers between claims about "the Classical Age" as a whole and restricted claims about the specific discourses of general grammar, natural history and the analysis of wealth.) After *OT* clearly Foucault backs off the claim to be surveying the basic structure of an entire age and restricts himself to the structure of a *dispositif*: the link of discursive and non-discursive practices of a restricted field: criminology or sexuality.

French phenomenology: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir

Two Frenchmen, Jean-Paul Sartre (1943-80); Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945-60) in a sense replicate the relation of Husserl and Heidegger, as Sartre is an intellectualist and M-P focuses on embodiment. An important clarification: M-P takes up the later Husserl's response to Heidegger (in the *Crisis*), in which Husserl turns to analyzing embodied subjectivity in a "life world" of everyday practical life. Simone de Beauvoir (1945-86) was unfairly dismissed as Sartre's girlfriend. Her *Second Sex* (1949), however renewed the study of gendered cultural meaning and in a way began "second wave" feminism.

Thus in 2Oth C phenomenology proper the basic distinction is whether the sense-making activity is bodily and practical, and hence only intellectual by abstraction (Heidegger, late Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir), or whether it's intellectual, and only practical or ethical by guidance of the intellect (early Husserl, Sartre).

Post-phenomenology: philosophy of radical difference

In any case, post-phenomenologists look for a "radical alterity": some disturbance in sense-making, something that refuses assimiliation, something that always leaves a "remainder."

The first important work here is done by Emmanuel Levinas (peak years 1930-74), the first translator and commentator on Husserl in France. Levinas exposes the intellectualism of the early Husserl and develops a philosophy of ethical "inifinity," the recoiling of intention in the face of the other that calls the freedom of the subject, so dear to Western philosophy, into question.

The second major figure here is Jacques Derrida (peak years 1962-present) who also begins with study of Husserl. He shows the implication of difference in Husserl's fundamental level of identity, that of subjective temporalization. Since temporalization is shown to be infected by difference, Derrida coins the term *differance*: timing and spacing, differing and deferring all at once. Later, Derrida will focus on the remainder or cinders left behind by the flaming march of spirit.

The third major figure is Luce Irigaray (peak years 1974-present), whose mimicry of Western philosophy reveals patriarchal biases in favor of identity and stability. She tries to develop a feminine imaginary based on duality and fluidity. Despite unfounded charges of essentialism and biologism, Irigaray works towards what she calls "an ethic of sexual diffrence."

Structuralism

Structuralism is in some sense the polar opposite of phenomenology. Cultural meaning is grounded in social structures, not subjects. There's a good sense in which Foucault's work in the 60s is akin to structuralism, although he will vehemently deny that he IS a "structuralist" in the preface to the English edition of OT.

Structuralism was a widespread "movement" of 20th C thought, reaching its peak in 50s-60s France. Notable figures are Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Noam Chomsky in linguistics; Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology; Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis; Jean Piaget in developmental psychology; and Roland Barthes in literary criticism.

Hallmarks of structuralist thought, according to Piaget (*Structuralism*: NY: Basic Books, 1970): wholeness, transformation, self-regulation. 1) wholeness: the usual opposition is between emergent properties vs. atomistic compounding of prior and independent elements; Piaget however prefers "operational structuralism" = focus on relations [on processes by which whole comes about], not on whole OR on elements. Problem of genesis is key point. 2) transfomations: laws of composition of structures are simultaneously structuring and structured: they structure the system actively, but they can only be ("passively") defined in terms of that system (they are "structured"). 3) self-regulation: self-maintenance and closure. In math/logic, by operations; in social systems by feedback (regulation); in biological systems by rhythm.

Let's look at social systems, primarily at Levi-Strauss. Piaget begins by distinguishing global from analytic structuralism. Global structuralism studies emergent wholes; analytic structuralism elicits deep structures of transformational laws that explain empirical systems; structures are not facts but logico-math models that explain facts (thus social actors are unaware of deep rules that explain social actions.)

Piaget describes L-S as being "the very incarnation of the structuralist faith in the permanence of human nature and the unity of reason," (106) and quotes him as writing, "all social life, however elementary, presupposes an intellectual activity in man of which the formal properties cannot, accordingly, be a reflection of the concrete organization of society" (*Totemism*, 96; quoted on 107). It is this "unconscious conceptual structure" of societies that L-S seeks to discover, locating it between infrastructure and superstructure in the Marxist senses.

L-S is firmly synchronic: history is only the holding-pen of elements of structures, the starting point for the quest for intelligibility. L-S was inspired by linguistics, but the real take-off for him was being able to give mathematical form to social systems.

The ontological status of these structures is problematic. Piaget offers the following: "the collective intellect is the social equilibrium resulting from the interplay of the operations that enter into all cooperation. … [I]ntelligence … is the equilibriated form of all cognitive functions " (114).

Summary of structuralism: 1). linguistics: emphasis on the code as prior to the message; 2) reduction of content and history; 3) reduction of subjectivity to effect; 4) differential production of meaning; 5) "Kantianism w/o TUA": conditions of possibility of unified meaningful experience; 6) synoptic gaze on totality: structures as self-sufficient; 7) system of transformations governed by self-regulating laws.

Post-structuralism

The study of bodies politic

If structuralism was, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, "Kantianism without the transcendental subject," - a search for structures of intelligibility located in cultural systems rather than in a subject - then post-structuralism is the French response to German philosophy after Kant, that is, to Hegel. In other words, post-structuralism as historical-libidinal materialism turns Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud against Hegel.

Why against Hegel? Because he offers a total history: nothing can exceed or resist the march of spirit. This emphasis on totality, endemic to Western philosophy and science, is shared by the structuralists. Structuralism was expanded by Lévi-Strauss to the structuralist study of cultural systems in general: all human endeavor. Using the chess analogy common to structuralist self-explication, we can say that structuralism elucidates the synchronic oppositional rules that render a game (language or cultural system) intelligible to an observer, though not to its pieces (speakers or actors): the knight or bishop can know what is expected of him, but not understand the totality of the "rules of the game." The structuralist will model these rules using the oppositions in which each piece fits: the knight, which is not the bishop, moves one way, while the bishop, which is not the knight, moves another way.

To arrive at a structure of intelligibility via oppositions between rules governing pieces, the structuralist observer-modeller practices a grand meta-opposition between internal structure and external history. Hence the historical forces that produced different social actors (the bodily training of real knights and bishops) in order to fulfill social aims - e.g., the production and distribution of surplus value - are neutralized into rules that produce intelligibility for an observer.

Here we see the arena for historical-libidinal materialism: the production of bodies. For post-structuralism, cultural oppositions rely on the forceful production of bodies trained to fulfill the expectations of the group into which they are placed. In other words, the great social oppositions which render a system intelligible to a structuralist observer: male/female, adult/child, white/black, owner/worker, are for post-structuralism the result of appropriately-behaving and -labelled bodies produced by such loci of historical forces as families, schools, churches, and workplaces.

The historical-libidinal materialism of post-structuralism thus analyzes the de-centered, multiple, conflictual, and overlapping differential and historical force networks productive of "bodies politic": the medicalized, disciplined, racialized, gendered, capitalized - the objectified and subjectified - bodies of people and the body politic of corporations, families, sects, gangs, classes, genders, races, nations, Reichs.

German Predecessors: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

Despite Foucault's hatred of the PCF and the Eastern bloc--his hatred of totalitarianism--and his relegation of Marx's political economy to the 19th century *episteme*, Marx's term "historical materialism" is still a useful term for much of Foucault's work in DP and HS 1.

Marx showed how networks of differential force, the material and social relations of production, produce the seemingly natural identities of social categories: "owner," "worker," "product," "tool," etc. What seems a stable unity is the product of an historically relative system of production, a system put in place by the revolutionary force of the bourgeoisie. The productivity of the network of historical labor is masked by the seeming solidity of the thing and the vampiric "productivity" of capital, which Marx showed was simply the coagulation of past labor. [D/G break with Marx here on the notion of "machinic surplus value."] Marx's insistence on dissolving the certainties and identities of everyday common sense by reference to networks of historical force reveals a "deconstructive" Marx purged of the eschatological promises of the inevitability

of "The Revolution" into which he sometimes lapsed in his popular addresses and on which the PCF "bureaucrats of the revolution" pounced as if scripture.

Despite their surface opposition on political issues, Nietzsche has some striking similarities to the Marx we sketched above, for Nietzsche also dissolved received pieties through analyses of their construction by historical forces. Simply put, both thinkers are historical materialists; they both show material forces producing identities--in Nietzsche's case the identity of the responsible individual, as in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Crudely put, then, Marx dissolves "objective" identity and Nietzsche "subjective" identity by reference to historical force networks.

I have used the term "historical-libidinal materialism" to discuss the Foucualt and D/G wing. To appreciate the libidinal qualification, we turn to Freud. It's often said that there are two Freuds, the scientific materialist of the drives (the "energetic Freud") and the investigative hermeneut of the unconscious (the "linguistic Freud"); the struggle to articulate the two is notoriously difficult, both for Freud himself and his interpreters.

The key for post-structuralism is to distinguish Freud's diagnosis of the patriarchal etiology of the neuroses from his prescriptions for their treatment. In the working out of his diagnoses through his case studies, Freud points to the historical, political, economic and social milieu of his patients, even if his thematic focus on family dynamics often obscured the class and race contributions to the neuroses of his patients those case studies describe. Together with the materialist orientation of the energetic analysis of drives, we see here the elements of a historical-libidinal materialism, which, is brought out in the explicit politicizations of Reich (1933) and Deleuze and Guattari (1972, 1980).

Although Freud is important in these other post-structuralists, Foucault doesn't have much good to say about him, ultimately implicating Freud in the modern construction of bio-power.

20th century French predecessors of post-structuralism

To escape Hegel is the self-acknowledged task of French 20th C thought--to be non-totalizing, non-spiritual, and non-teleological. The French reception of Hegel is very complex: it began in earnest in the late 20s, continued throughout the 30s, and reached a peak in the immediate post-war years. The major figures are Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite and Georges Bataille. Only the last two are important for Foucault.

The break with Kojève's anthropological and progressive Hegel, and with Hegel himself, paradoxically begins with the greatest French Hegelian, Jean Hyppolite, who taught and mentored Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida. (See F's moving tribute in "The Discourse on Language," his speech upon being elected to Hyppolite's chair at the *Collège de France* [Appendix to English of AK].) Generally speaking, post-structuralists reject the anthropologism, the historical narrative of progress, and the emphasis on the work of the negative found in Kojève by taking up the hints in Hyppolite

Hyppolite translated Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1939-41) and wrote a great commentary, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947). Of more interest to us is *Logique et existence* (1953), Hyppolite's second major work, which comments on Hegel's *Logic*. In this work, Hyppolite poses three questions of importance for post-structuralism: non-dialectical difference (diversity rather than opposition), philosophy's appropriation of its other (sense and non-sense), and the centrality, priority, and self-referentiality of language (rather than disembodied thought) in constituting meaning. Hyppolite's locating of language between logic and existence, between thought and bodies, provides the seeds of Foucault's *dispositif*, which sets forth the relation of discursive and non-discursive practices.

Next, Georges Bataille, who attempts a strange interweaving of Nietzsche and Hegel in focusing on communion, sacrifice, waste, intensity, and economy. Foucault wrote an essay on Bataille in 1963 ("Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*). I don't want to go Miller's route and posit a Bataille-inspired search for "limit-experience" as the truth of Foucault's life and work, but Bataille's investigations into the construction of the ego or consciousness through social and bodily practices, the

converse experience of the dissolution of the ego in madness, the themes of non-productive expenditure, of excess and outrage to common sense, resonate in both Bataille and Foucault.

The birth of French historical-libidinal materialism in the 1960s

The key text at the origin of historical-libidinal materialism is Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962). Here Deleuze shows the productivity of the non-dialectical ("affirmative") differential forces termed by Nietzsche "noble." These forces differentiate themselves first, and only secondarily consider that from which they have differentiated themselves. Deleuze's reading rescued Nietzsche from Heidegger's narrative of the history of metaphysics (Heidegger, 1961); the thought of differential force would in turn, in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972), rescue Marx and Freud from the institutional prisons of their "isms," the orthodox parties and schools that appropriated their charisma.

Through the 60s, while Foucault was writing his archaelogies, Deleuze and Derrida led the way in theorizing a "philosophy of difference." The key is to show difference producing identity, but a non-totalized, non-spiritual, and non-teleological difference--in other words, difference freed of Hegel (and, minus the "spiritual" bit, official Marxism). Key texts: *Difference and Repetition* and *Of Grammatology*.

(In)famously, the events of May 1968 accelerated the post-structuralist movement. The story has often been told, but bears repeating. A threshold of social unrest was passed, as turbulent post-war affluence and concomitant life-style experimentation was countered by a government backlash in the guise of education reform. May '68 included students and workers, to the befuddlement of the established guardians of the revolution, the French Communist Party. Days of general strikes and standoffs with the police led de Gaulle to call a general election. Shockingly, de Gaulle's call for a parliamentary solution to the crisis was backed by the Communists, who were evidently as scared of any revolution from below - which by definition would lack the party discipline they so craved - as were the official holders of State power, to whose position they aspired. The worker-student movement eventually collapsed, leaving memories of non-scripted social interactions and revealing the investments of the Party, lampooned thereafter as "bureaucrats of the revolution" (Foucault, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. xii).

The response changed French academic life: 1) institutionally, by the creation of Paris VIII (Vincennes) where Foucault was chair briefly, and where Deleuze and Irigaray taught later; and 2) in the direction of the post-structuralist movement. The second change concerns us here. Although it was certainly never apolitical in its first incarnation, the philosophy of difference became (explicitly) political post-1968. It became, in fact, a politics of philosophy dedicated to exposing the historical force relations producing identity in all its ontological and epistemological forms. In other words, post-structuralism now set out to show how the unified objects of the world, the unified subjects who know and hence control them, the unified bodies of knowledge that codify this knowledge, <u>and</u> the unified institution of philosophy that polices the whole affair, are products of historical, political forces in combat with other forces.

The most immediately provocative politicization of the philosophy of difference was Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 <u>Anti-Oedipus</u>. A rip-roaring attack on the tame Marx-Freud synthesis that was the mother's milk of the bureaucrats of the revolution, <u>Anti-Oedipus</u> is historical-libidinal materialism par excellence: the explosive result of using the Nietzschean thought of differential force to expose the production of the socio-political identities of race, class, nation, and - most threateningly - gendered personal identity.

In the mid 70s the politics of philosophy reaches a critical mass, with major works published every year: Derrida's <u>Glas</u>; Lyotard's <u>Libidinal Economy</u>; Irigaray's <u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u>; Cixous and Clément's <u>The Newly-Born Woman</u>; Kristeva's <u>Revolution in Poetic Language</u>; Foucault's <u>Discipline and Punish</u>; Baudrillard's <u>Symbolic Exchange and Death</u>. All of them to one extent or another show how philosophy has served to legitimate forceful constructions of identity in racial, religious, economic, political, and sexual contexts. By analyzing the interrelations of these registers, and by showing differential force as productive of identity, these works set the stage for Deleuze and Guattari's <u>A Thousand Plateaus</u> (1980), arguably the high-water mark to date of post-structuralism.

In 14 plateaus, or points of intensity - productive connections between forces without reference to an external governing source - Deleuze and Guattari develop a new materialism in which a politicized philosophy of difference joins forces with the sciences explored in <u>Difference and Repetition</u>. <u>A Thousand</u>

Plateaus is a book of strange and terrifying new questions: "Who Does the Earth Think It Is?," "How Do You make Yourself a Body Without Organs?," "How does the war-machine ward off the apparatus of capture of the State?" and so on. To over-simplify, Deleuze and Guattari take the insights of "complexity theory", which explores the mathematics of the various thresholds at which matter achieves self-organization (e.g., turbulence or oscillation), and extend the notion of self-organizing matter - matter with no need of transcendent organizing agents such as gods, leaders, capital, or subjects - to the social, linguistic, political, and economic realms. The resultant "rhizome" or de-centered network that is A Thousand Plateaus provides hints for experimentation with the more and more de-regulated flows of energy and matter, ideas and actions - and the attendant attempts at binding them - that make up the contemporary world.

A stunning work, nothing after A Thousand Plateaus by any post-structuralist author has the same potential for inciting new flows of ideas and action. Yet this is not the end of the story. Perhaps the most fruitful area of on-going post-structuralism will prove to be feminism, especially as that work interacts with Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Levinas et al.

This interchange is not a simple case of feminism learning from philosophers who remain untouched. Rather we have here a "becoming" in the Deleuzian sense, for both terms change in the encounter: for instance, "Deleuze" or "Derrida" - what those names mean as potentials for inciting flows of ideas and action - are not the same after their encounter with the "corporeal feminism" of Elizabeth Grosz or the theory of performative gender in Judith Butler.