If, as Michel Foucault has taught us, authorial originality pales before the constraints of epistemic or discursive determination, then the proper contextualizing of his own seemingly idiosyncratic work becomes a particularly intriguing task. Unfortunately, it has proved to be a no less troublesome one. For when the initial efforts to categorize Foucault as a structuralist or semiotician foundered, alternatives quickly proliferated. As a result, he has been variously described as a latter-day Nietzschean, a heterodox Heideggerian, a wayward Western Marxist, a postmodernist and, most frequently, a poststructuralist. With all the difficulties attending each and any of these categorizations, it may seem most prudent to accept the advice of two of his recent commentators and conclude that ‘whoever wants to understand Foucault should not make him something he is not. Take him on his own, difficult terms.’

And yet, to do so risks ignoring Foucault’s own lesson of the power of discursive formations to undermine the alleged sovereignty of the creator subject. For his ‘own terms’ ironically imply that the terms can never be ‘his own’. Foucault, to be sure, never argued that individuals could be reduced to mere instances of a larger unified field. ‘In the proposed analysis,’ he wrote in The Archaeology of Knowledge, ‘instead of referring back to the synthesis of the unifying function of a subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest his dispersion. To the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse. To the discontinuity of the planes from which he speaks.’ The partial
truth of each of the rubrics under which he has been subsumed may thus be admitted without necessarily trying to force a reconciliation among them. Foucault should instead be seen as occupying the dynamic nodal point of a force-field of discursive impulses, which resist totalization into a coherent whole.³

It is therefore with no intention of providing a master key to unlock the mysteries of his heterogeneous œuvre that I offer the following analysis. Rather, I hope to draw attention to only one of the intersecting planes, hitherto unexamined,⁴ which can help us make sense of his remarkable work, in particular the source of its puzzling critical impulse. The plane in question can be called the anti-visual discourse of twentieth-century French thought or, more modestly, the interrogation of sight carried out by a wide and otherwise disparate number of French intellectuals beginning perhaps with Bergson.

Although I hope to explore its full ramifications at a later date, a few schematic remarks are necessary now to make clear the importance of the anti-ocular discourse in which Foucault can be situated. Long accounted the ‘noblest’ of the senses,⁵ sight traditionally enjoyed a privileged role as the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and world.⁶ Whether in terms of actual observation with the two eyes (often understood monococularly rather than in their true stereoscopic operations) or in those of internal mental speculation, vision has been accorded a special role in Western epistemology since the Greeks. Although at times more metaphorical than literal, the visual contribution to knowledge has been credited with far more importance than that of any other sense. A cursory and impressionistic ‘glance’ at such common English words and phrases as insight, perspective, overview, far-sighted, survey, point of view, demonstration, and synopsis reveal that there is more than an arbitrary choice of images in the question, do you see what I mean? As Richard Rorty has recently emphasized, modern thought at least since Descartes has generally privileged mental representations in ‘the mind’s eye’ as mirror reflections of an external reality.⁷

The role of vision in the imaginative history of Western man is no less important, as students of religious and mythical symbols have convincingly demonstrated.⁸ The visionary search for illumination, whether through mystical or mundane means, has generated a rich tradition of what Carlyle called ‘spiritual optics’.⁹ Here the resonance of related clusters of images surrounding the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, mirrors, and day and night show how basic visual experience has
been in structuring our attempts to make sense of the sacred as well as the profane. In negative terms, the fear of being watched by an omniscient God or followed by the evil eye shows how highly ambiguous the role of sight has been, especially when it includes the experience of being the object instead of the subject of the look. The complicated scopophilic-scopophobic dialectic of exhibitionism and paranoia that is evident in such figures as Rousseau shows the intimate linkages between vision and psychological phenomena. Indeed, thinkers from the time of Augustine have recognized a fundamental relationship between ocular experience and desire, especially in its unfulfilled form.

To detail the history of attitudes towards vision, including such anti-ocular moments as the Jewish prohibition of graven images, the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century or the Protestant Reformation, is impossible here. Suffice it to say that with the rise of modern science, the Gutenberg revolution in printing and the Albertian emphasis on perspective in painting, vision was given an especially powerful role in the modern era. In France in particular, the domination of visual experience and the discourse of sight seems to have been especially strong. Whether in the theatrical spectacle of Louis XIV’s court, the emphasis on clear and distinct ideas in Cartesian philosophy, the enlightening project of the philosophes, or the visual phantasmagoria of the ‘city of light’, the ocularcentric character of French culture has been vividly apparent. So too has the French fascination with technical improvements in the capacity to see, evident from the time of Descartes’ paean to the telescope in La Dioptrique, through Baudelaire’s critique of photography, all the way to Barthes’s ruminations on the camera and Deleuze’s recent writings on the cinema. Not surprisingly, one of the most striking aspects of twentieth-century French thought is the almost obligatory consideration of painting on the part of a wide variety of thinkers, such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida, Lyotard, Kofman, Lefort, Marin, Deleuze, Starobinski and, of course, Foucault himself. And as a recent commentator on the poet Jean Tardieu’s visual preoccupations remarks, ‘a list of poet-art critics of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries would be almost identical to a list of great poets of the era: Baudelaire, Valéry, Apollinaire, Reverdy, all the Surrealists, Ponge and Bonnefoy’. One might add novelists like Robbe-Grillet, Tournier and Simon to hammer the point home even more firmly.

If the French obsession with vision has continued unabated to our own day, it has, however, taken a very different turn from its earlier
Beginning with Bergson's critique of the spatialization of time, the French interrogation of sight has tended increasingly to emphasize its more problematic implications. The link between privileging vision and the traditional humanist subject, capable of rational enlightenment, has been opened to widespread attack. The illusions of imagistic representation and the allegedly disinterested scientific gaze have been subjected to hostile scrutiny. The mystifications of the social imagery and the spectacle of late capitalist culture have been the target of fierce criticism. And the psychological dependence of the ideological 'I' on the totalizing gaze of the 'eye' has been ruthlessly exposed.

Thinkers as different as Bataille and Sartre, Metz and Irigaray, Althusser and Levinas have all called into question the time-honoured nobility of sight. Even Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenological exploration of perception can be seen in part as a celebration of embodied vision, was deeply suspicious of what he called *pensée au survol*, the high-altitude thinking which maintained the Cartesian split between a distant, spectatorial subject and the object of his sight. In short, although the reasons are still uncertain, it is legitimate to talk of a discursive or paradigm shift in twentieth-century French thought in which the denigration of vision supplanted its previous celebration.

The degree of hostility has varied from thinker to thinker, as has the precise dimension of vision under attack; indeed, in certain cases, what is disliked by one critic is defended by another, and on occasion ambiguities arise within an author's oeuvre. How complicated the story actually is can, in fact, be discerned if we now turn to the special role played by Foucault in the anti-visual discourse. For although it is immediately evident that Foucault recognized important links between *voir* and both *savoir* and *pouvoir*, the nature of his fascination with the ocular is uncertain. One recent commentator, Allan Megill, has contended that in his earlier, more structuralist moments, Foucault was himself intent on portraying 'a lucent, Apollonian world' within which ocularcentrism was neutrally accepted, although he abandoned this attempt in his later writings. Another, Michel de Certeau, has argued that throughout Foucault's work a tension can be discerned between his substantive critiques of the power of the gaze and his own 'optical style', which drew on visual astonishment to subvert that power. There may, in fact, be justification for both these analyses in the labyrinthine, often highly ambiguous corpus of Foucault's writings. But the story is more
complicated still, as a systematic consideration of his many references to aspects of vision will help us to understand.

That Foucault was fascinated with vision from the beginning of his career is not surprising in view of his early interest in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Ludwig Binswanger's existential psychoanalysis and Heidegger's phenomenological ontology. For these thinkers the traditional Cartesian privileging of a detached, contemplative subject was decisively repudiated, as was Husserl's notion of an eidetic consciousness capable of intuiting essences through a *Wesensschau*. The humanist notion of a centred, rational subject, so Heidegger insisted in his influential essay, 'The Age of the World View', was rooted in scientific, pictorial subjectivism; indeed, the very notion of *theoria* introduced by the Greeks was grounded in a technological appropriation of the world dependent on the same spectatorial split between subject and object. For Merleau-Ponty and Binswanger, the problematic distinction between consciousness and body was closely linked to the elevation of perspectival vision with its single point of view. More unmediated senses like touch were thus necessary to remedy the hypertrophied role of vision in Western experience.

In all of these cases, however, another, more attractive visual mode was also possible. Heidegger spoke of a type of circumscribed vision (*Umsicht*) in which the mediated distance of representation was abandoned in favour of a more primordial encounter with ontological reality. His celebrated, if somewhat fuzzy, evocation of a 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) in which Being might manifest itself expressed this hope for a more revelatory visual experience. For Binswanger and especially Merleau-Ponty, embodied vision, the reversible, chiasmic intertwining of the visible and invisible, the viewer and the viewed, in the 'flesh' of the world, could be the locus of positive meaning.

From the beginning, Foucault seems to have been less confident of the viability of their alternatives, even as he absorbed the phenomenological critique of Cartesian ocularcentrism. Although it may appear in hindsight that he overemphasized his own distance from phenomenology, it is nonetheless striking that he would condemn the phenomenology of perception as a final variant of the very 'transcendental narcissism' that it claimed to overcome. Unlike Merleau-Ponty, he never placed his faith in an ontology of vision that would replace the discredited epistemology derived from Descartes. Instead, he drew on earlier manifestations of the anti-visual discourse, most notably those evident in Bataille and Sartre, and combined them
with others coming apparently from Nietzsche, to probe far more thoroughly than the phenomenologists the dark side of the primacy of sight. Even in his most ‘structuralist’ moments, Foucault never endorsed the possibility of a transparent, fully visible and meaningful reality. Well before his celebrated and influential critique of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*, he was aware of the costs of visual primacy. The writings of the early 1960s — *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Raymond Roussel* (1963), and ‘A Preface to Transgression’ (1963) — demonstrate this awareness in numerous ways.

Foucault’s emphasis on the sinister implications of ocularcentrism is strikingly apparent in his analysis of the history of madness in ‘the age of reason’ or what he called ‘the classical age’ (roughly 1650 to 1800). The modern category of insanity, he contends, was predicated on the dissolution of the medieval and Renaissance unity of word and image, which liberated a multitude of images of madness deprived of any eschatological significance. As a result, madness became a pure spectacle, a theatre of unreason: ‘During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at.’

For the ‘classical’ mind, the essence of madness was either blindness, a term which ‘refers to the night of quasi-sleep which surrounds the images of madness, giving them, in their solitude, an invisible sovereignty’, or dazzlement, which means that ‘the madman sees the daylight, the same daylight as the man of reason (both live in the same brightness); but seeing this same daylight, and nothing but this daylight, he sees it as void, as night, as nothing’. For Foucault, the Cartesian distrust of the actual senses nonetheless betrayed an ocular bias that worked to exclude the insane:

Descartes closes his eyes and plugs up his ears the better to see the true brightness of essential daylight; thus he is secured against the dazzlement of the madman who, opening his eyes, sees only the night, and not seeing at all, believes he sees when he imagines . . . Unreason is in the same relation to reason as dazzlement to the brightness of daylight itself. And this is not a metaphor. We are at the center of the great cosmology which animates all classical culture.

There was, as well, an institutional expression of the visual definition of insanity in the birth of the asylum, where ‘madness no
longer exists except as seen... The science of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always be only of the order of observation and classification. It would not be a dialogue. For the main psychiatrist of the postclassical era, Pinel, the patient was not merely the object of another’s scrutiny; he was turned instead into a self-reflective mirror so that ‘madness would see itself, would be seen by itself – pure spectacle and absolute subject’. And even though Freud introduced a linguistic moment into his psychoanalytic practice, he never abandoned entirely the specular bias of the psychiatric tradition. ‘It would be fairer to say,’ Foucault contended, ‘that psychoanalysis doubled the absolute observation of the watcher with the endless monologue of the person watched – thus preserving the old asylum structure of non-reciprocal observation but balancing it, in a non-symmetrical reciprocity, by the new structure of language without response.’ In fact, only in the non-psychiatric discourse of artists like Goya and de Sade were the marginalized claims of darkness and the night allowed to reassert themselves in the modern world, thus providing a prototype for the recovery of ‘unreason’ in art, the reverse side of madness.

The Birth of the Clinic has been called an ‘extended postscript’ to Madness and Civilization, which is an especially apt description if its concentration on the complicity of visual domination with the rise of modern medicine is acknowledged. In this work, Foucault more explicitly underlines the disciplinary power of le regard (the gaze or the look), a word with powerfully negative connotations in French thought since the celebrated chapter devoted to it in Sartre’s Being and Nothingness. Here as elsewhere, a subterranean affinity between two thinkers normally understood as opposed can be discerned, insofar as both express variations of the anti-visual paradigm of recent French thought.

Sartre, to be sure, is never mentioned in the work, but it is difficult to avoid hearing echoes of his chilling description of the alienating and objectifying power of the Other’s gaze in Foucault’s historical account of the rise of a specific medical practice in the classical age. Less conjectural is the role of another student of the power of sight in Western theory and practice, the distinguished historian of science Georges Canguilhem, who commissioned The Birth of the Clinic for a series of studies he edited in the history and philosophy of biology and medicine. Canguilhem, who had also been the official supervisor of Madness and Civilization for Foucault’s doctorat d’état, had given a course at the Sorbonne in 1957 on the role of vision as the model of
cognition in Western thought. Although Foucault, who was still teaching in Uppsala, Sweden at the time, could not have attended the lectures, it is highly probable that he learned something of their content when he returned to Paris. Later, he would acknowledge Canguilhem’s influence as a methodological model, but it is no less likely that Foucault also became sensitized to the importance of sight in constituting medical ‘knowledge’ in the eighteenth century through the example of his mentor.

*The Birth of the Clinic,* in fact, describes the medical innovation of the classical age in terms of an intensified faith in visual evidence. ‘The breadth of the experiment,’ he argues, ‘seems to be identified with the domain of the careful gaze, and of an empirical vigilance receptive only to the evidence of visible contents. The eye becomes the depository and source of clarity.’ The new medical gaze differs, however, from the Cartesian privileging of internal vision at the cost of the actual senses. Instead, it emphasizes ‘the sovereign power of the empirical gaze’, which plays over the solid and opaque surfaces of the body. ‘No light could now dissolve them in ideal truths; but the gaze directed upon them would, in turn, awaken them and make them stand out against a background of objectivity. The gaze is no longer reductive, it is, rather, that which establishes the individual in his irreducible quality.’

But what is in fact ‘seen’ is not a given, objective reality open to an innocent eye. Rather, it is an epistemic field, constructed as much linguistically as visually, which is no more or less close to the ‘truth’ than what it replaced. ‘In its sovereign exercise, the gaze took up once again the structures of visibility that it had itself deposited in its field of perception.”

Although the initial focus on visible surfaces and symptoms gave way in ‘the age of Bichat’ to a more penetrating gaze into the internal organic landscape, the search was still for an ‘invisible visibility’. The unexpected result of the ever more curious visual penetration of the body, Foucault suggests, is a focus not on the vitality of the patient, but rather his morality:

That which hides and envelops, the curtain of night over truth, is, paradoxically, life; and death, on the contrary, opens up to the light of day the black coffer of the body: obscure life, limpid death, the oldest imaginary values of the Western world are crossed here in a strange misconstruction that is the very meaning of pathological anatomy. Nineteenth-century medicine was haunted by that absolute eye that cadaverizes life and rediscovers in the corpse the frail, broken nervure of life.
In the Empire of the Gaze

What makes this development in the seemingly limited field of medicine so fateful for Foucault was its function as a model for future investigations in all of the ‘sciences of man’. ‘It will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture,’ he concludes, ‘that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death.’ And because the importance of perception, sight in particular, in this cadaverization of life was so great, it is impossible, Foucault suggests, to turn to it for an antidote to positivist reification, as the phenomenologists had hoped. In a passage covertly directed against Merleau-Ponty, he wrote,

when one carries out a vertical investigation of this positivism, one sees the emergence of a whole series of figures – hidden by it, but also indispensable to its birth – that will be released later, and, paradoxically, used against it. In particular, that with which phenomenology was to oppose it so tenaciously was already present in its underlying structures: the original powers of the perceived and its correlation with language in the original form of experience . . .

The surprising convergence of positivism and phenomenology on the level of their common privileging of ocular perception, with its penchant for death over life, did not, however, exhaust the importance of vision in the modern experience, as Foucault interpreted it. The complicated interlacing of language and vision was also apparent in the literary experiments of the writer to whom he devoted a very different kind of study at the same time as he was writing the history of the clinical gaze, Raymond Roussel. Often neglected because of its seeming irrelevance to Foucault’s more central concerns, the book demonstrates the complexity of his fascination with vision. That he thought it fundamental to Roussel’s work is witnessed by his publishing a short piece specifically on saying and seeing in Roussel a year before its publication. In the longer book, he expanded his analysis to cover the entire *oeuvre* of a writer whose experimental prose intrigued French intellectuals from the Surrealists to Robbe-Grillet. Roussel is perhaps best known for his game of beginning a novel with a sentence which was phonetically repeated at its end, with only one element changed to make the meaning of the two sentences utterly different. Roussel’s blithe disdain for the representative or referential function of language made him an obvious candidate for praise on the part of those who wanted to privilege the complete self-referentiality of language.
But significantly, in developing his unique style, Roussel revealed as well a preoccupation with vision, expressed even in the titles of certain of his works, such as *La Vue* and *La Poussière de Soleils*. According to Robbe-Grillet, ‘sight, the privileged sense in Roussel, rapidly achieves an obsessive acuity, tending to infinity’. Foucault, whose interest in the catachrestic dimensions of Roussel’s language had been remarked, was also very sensitive to the role of vision in his work. Like Robbe-Grillet, he emphasized its function as an impediment to meaningfulness in the novels. Contrary to the Surrealists, who were bent on seeking a hidden significance beneath the surface of Roussel’s mysterious prose, Foucault insisted that his work ‘systematically imposes an unformed, divergent, centrifugal uneasiness, oriented not towards the most reticent of secrets, but towards the redoubling and the transmutation of the most visible forms’. Roussel’s repetitive linguistic play was ‘like the redoubling of the mask above the face; it would open on the same eclipse of being’, thus revealing in infinite reflection of mirrors without a privileged point of origin.

In places, Foucault seemed to appropriate Merleau-Ponty’s terms in describing the ‘interlacing’ of the visible and the invisible in ‘exactly the same tissue, the same indissoluble substance’, or in claiming *La Vue* presented a universe without perspective or, more precisely, ‘combining the vertical point of view (which permits everything to be embraced as in a circle) and the horizontal point of view (which places the eye at ground level and gives to sight only the first dimension) so well that everything is seen in perspective and yet each thing is envisaged in its complete context’. But rejecting Merleau-Ponty’s optimism, Foucault emphasized the meaninglessness of Roussel’s visual universe, where light was cast on a world which only reabsorbed it in the ‘mutism of objects’. Roussel’s writing, he argued, invoked ‘images visibly invisible, perceptible but not decipherable, given in a lightning flash and without possible reading, present in a radiance that repelled the gaze’. Although Foucault noted a shift between the early and late Roussel – the works up to *La Vue* were illuminated by a dazzling, homogeneous light, the light of a sun too bright to permit any nuanced shadows, whereas everything written after, most notably the *Nouvelles Impressions de l’Afrique*, was cloaked in the darkness of a ‘closed-in sun’ (soleil enfermé) – the implication was the same: the visual in Roussel provided only ‘an empty lens’ (lentille vide) incapable of focusing on a clear and distinct world. Genuine transparency, in the sense of a medium which
completely dissolved to reveal an unequivocal truth or unambivalent meaning, was thus denied to both language and perception.

It was, in fact, Foucault’s awareness of the visually opaque dimension within language itself, which he called its perpetually rebus-like character, that makes it problematic to characterize him primarily as a structuralist, even of a heterodox kind. There is no enigma to be decoded, no spatial coherence to be mapped out in two-dimensional terms. Roussel was not the only figure to whom Foucault was drawn because of his debunking of this hope; the Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte, was another. In an essay written in 1968 and then expanded into a little book five years later, Foucault explored a more explicitly visual version of the phenomenon he had discerned in Roussel. Describing Magritte’s canvases as the opposite of trompe l’oeil because of their undermining of the mimetic conventions of realistic painting, he also referred to them as ‘unraveled calligrams’ because they refused to close the gap between image and word. In the terms he had introduced in *The Order of Things*, written between the Roussel and Magritte studies, the Surrealist had discarded art’s claim to provide representative ‘resemblances’ of the external world in favour of repetitive ‘similitudes’, which circulate a series of visual and linguistic signs without an external referent. Whereas resemblances always affirmatively assert the irreducible sameness of image and object, similitude, Foucault argued, ‘multiplies different affirmations, which dance together, tilting and tumbling over one another’.

Foucault’s celebration of difference, heterogeneity and the dance of otherness in *This is Not a Pipe* clearly demonstrates his affinity with one of the most seductive voices in the anti-visual discourse of twentieth-century French thought, that of Georges Bataille. His contribution to *Critique*’s 1963 homage to Bataille shows how drawn Foucault was to Bataille’s attempt to valorize a transgressive experience, ‘where the subject who speaks has just vanished, where the spectacle topples over before an upturned eye’. The upturned, unseeing eye referred to Bataille’s celebrated pornographic novel *The Story of the Eye*, with its metaphoric exchange of ocular symbols – eggs, testicles, the sun, etc. – all pierced, bleeding, enucleated, overflowing and blind. Foucault recognized Bataille’s fundamental challenge to the hierarchical privileging of vision in the Western tradition, its fateful linkage, as Freud pointed out, with man’s vertical posture, the repression of his sexual and anal erotic
urges and the rise of ‘civilization’. He also noted its challenge to the visually derived constitution of the reflective, Cartesian subject:

Bataille reverses this entire direction: sight, crossing the globular limit of the eye, constitutes the eye in its instantaneous being, sight carries it away in this luminous stream (an outpouring fountain, streaming tears and, shortly, blood), hurls the eye outside of itself, conducts it to the limit where it bursts out in the immediately extinguished flash of its being. Only a small white ball, veined with blood, is left behind, only an exorbidated eye to which all sight is now denied... In the distance created by this violence and uprooting, the eye is seen absolutely, but denied the possibility of sight: the philosophizing subject has been dispossessed and pursued to its limit.55

As in Roussel, the ultimate blindness of sight, the opacity of the seemingly transparent, also suggested the limits of linguistic meaningfulness. For ‘the upturned eye has no meaning in Bataille’s language, can have no meaning since it marks its limit’.66 Instead, it signals the point at which language explodes ‘in laughter, tears, the overturned eyes of ecstasy, the mute and exorbidated horror of sacrifice’.67 As such it shows the link between language, human finitude and the death of God, ‘a sun that rotates and the great eyelid that closes upon the world’.68

The eclipse of the solar divinity was linked for Foucault with the decline of his secular analogue, the humanist concept of Man. Hostility to visual primacy and the critique of humanism were intricately linked in the work which most vividly established Foucault’s credentials as an anti-humanist, The Order of Things.69 Significantly, the work begins with a now celebrated description of a visual scene, Velázquez’s Las Meninas, and ends with a no less frequently cited visual metaphor of Man’s face etched in the sand being erased by the waves at the edge of the sea.

Rather than focusing on these now widely discussed framing moments in the text,70 I want to explore instead the arguments in between insofar as they bear on the question of vision. Whether or not the spatial preoccupations of the book betokened an affinity for Apollonian structuralism, as Megill, following Derrida, has claimed, or merely reflected Foucault’s subject matter, as he himself later argued,71 The Order of Things does not seem quite as obsessively fixed on le regard as does his earlier work. Or rather it seems to be so only in Foucault’s account of the classical age. As in Madness and Civilization, he describes the onset of that period in terms of the
breakdown of an assumed unity of word and image before the end of the sixteenth century. In a culture based on semantic resemblances, images were understood to be decipherable hieroglyphs of meaning. The result was 'a non-distinction between what is seen and what is read, between observation and relation, which results in the constitution of a single, unbroken surface in which observation and language intersect to infinity'. For reasons that are not clear and which Foucault unfortunately never deemed worthy of explication, the classical age emerges when this unity is undone and images no longer resemble readable texts. Both Bacon and Descartes, if for different reasons, denounce thinking through resemblances or similitudes and warn against the illusions to which it is prone. One implication of the breakdown of this unity, first evident in Cervantes, is the growing awareness of the binary and representative nature of the sign, which frees it from the assumption that it bears an intrinsic figural resemblance to what it signifies. As an arbitrary human tool, language is understood as a neutral medium of communication. Inclined towards nominalism, language in the classical age also privileged the most neutral verb possible: the verb 'to be'.

Another implication of the breakdown is the compensatory unleashing of perception in general, and vision in particular, as the sole means of ascertaining reliable knowledge about the external world. According to Foucault, 'the manifestations and sign of truth are to be found in evident and distinct perception. It is the task of words to translate the truth if they can; but they no longer have the right to be considered a mark of it. Language has withdrawn from the midst of beings themselves and has entered a period of transparency and neutrality. The classical age is thus dominated by a new faith in the power of direct and technologically improved observation and by a concomitant taxonomic ordering of its findings in the visible space of the table. Although such tables are necessarily linguistic, the names they arrange in spatial relations are assumed to be utterly without density of their own. The triumph of natural history is thus the triumph of the visual:

One has the impression that with Tournefort, with Linnaeus or Buffon, someone has at last taken on the task of stating something that had been visible from the beginning of time, but had remained mute before a sort of invincible distraction of men's eyes. In fact, it was not an age-old inattentiveness being suddenly dissipated, but a new field of visibility being constituted in all its density.
Other senses like touch or hearing are denigrated, as scientific language struggles to turn itself as much as possible into a transparent record of the observing gaze.

Moreover, to the extent that visual knowledge is dominant in the classical age, there is assumed an observing eye capable of seeing the visible tables, but from a position outside of them. It is in this sense that *Las Meninas*, as Foucault interprets it, is itself a representation of classical representation. For it is the absent sovereigns, there only in their reflections in the small mirror on the back wall of the painter’s studio, who ‘see’ the picture in front of us. We are thus not yet in a fully humanist age characterized by the positive appearance of Man:

In Classical thought, the personage for whom the representation exists, and who represents himself within it, recognizing himself therein as an image or reflection, he who ties together all the interlacing threads of the ‘representation in the form of a picture or a table’—he is never to be found in that table himself. Before the end of the eighteenth century, *man* does not exist . . .

If then, it is only with the end of the visual primacy of the classical age that full-fledged humanism emerges, what is the connection between ocularcentrism and the rise of man? At first, there does not seem to be any, which would call into question the importance of the anti-visual discourse in Foucault’s work, at least at this stage of it. For when he comes to describe the end of natural history and its replacement by biology at the time of Cuvier, he explicitly stresses the new emphasis on invisible, anatomic and organic structures which supplant the empirical classifications of the classical table. ‘The visible order, with its permanent grid of distinctions,’ he writes, ‘is now only a superficial glitter above an abyss.’ With the concomitant emergence of historical consciousness, functional analogy and succession—temporal rather than spatial values—replace the static order of the classical age. Life, labour and language all break free from the domination of the taxonomic gaze. The putative transparency of language gives way to a growing opacity which culminates in the appearance of pure ‘literature’ in Mallarmé.

And yet, in a subtle way, the postclassical, humanist *episteme*, as Foucault describes it, is still hostage to the primacy of sight. We can become sensitive to this continuity across the seemingly abrupt rupture in discursive formations if we remember Foucault’s argument about Bichat, Pinel and Freud in *Madness and Civilization* and his highly speculative claim about the link between the later sciences of
man and the medical gaze in *The Birth of the Clinic*. In those works, he insisted that even as the surface of the body was penetrated to let the hitherto invisible become the object of inquiry, even as language was introduced to supplement the psychiatric gaze, vision did not falter as the dominant cognitive sense. It is for this reason that at the same time modern biology was positing ‘life’ as its object, it paradoxically discovered ‘death’ at its heart.\(^77\)

But in an even more fundamental sense, the primacy of the visual was preserved in Foucault’s account of the rise of the human sciences. For with the eclipse of the classical age,

In this extremely important paragraph, Foucault reveals the extent to which humanism is based in his view on the replacement of the absent spectator, the king, by the ‘observed spectator’, man in a still visually constituted epistemological field. Thus, the arrival of this ‘strange empirico-transcendental doublet’\(^79\) means that ‘man’ functions both as an allegedly neutral metasubject of knowledge and as its proper object, viewed from afar. Even phenomenology, Foucault insists once again, falls prey to this way of perceiving the world, showing its ‘insidious kinship, its simultaneously promising and threatening proximity, to empirical analyses of man’.\(^80\)

Only with the triumph of an opaque and self-referential concept of language does the visually determined humanist *episteme* begin to be effaced enough for Foucault to claim that ‘man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language’.\(^81\) Perhaps with writers like Roussel and Bataille – as well as others Foucault mentions, like Artaud and Blanchot – the crisis of the primacy of sight has reached a point at which an epistemic shift is on the horizon. Now those hitherto forbidden elements that had been consigned to the realm of
darkness ever since the onset of the classical age, such as madness, difference and transgressive eroticism, can be rescued from the domination of light, transparency and the Same. For with the weakening of ocular primacy goes a concomitant questioning of the translucency of language, which had been its handmaiden ever since the breakdown of the preclassical unity of word and image. But rather than a return to that prelapsarian state in which latent meaning was available to be deciphered, the posthumanist condition will be characterized more by the mutual opacity we have seen Foucault celebrate in his study of Roussel.

_The Order of Things_ marked the last great instance of what has become known as Foucault's archaeological period, which was brought to a close by his summary, if somewhat cryptic, methodological statement, _The Archaeology of Knowledge_. In a footnote in that work, he noted that 'the term "regard medical" used in my _Naissance de la clinique_ was not a very happy one' 82 which may suggest a certain weakening of his earlier visual preoccupations; but in fact, all it implied was a more heightened awareness of the anthropocentric fallacies involved in positing a synthetic, unified subject doing the looking. For it was precisely this apparently transcendental subject that _The Order of Things_ claimed was a function of ocularcentrism rather than a precondition for it. Vision, he now seemed to suggest, could help constitute an _episteme_ without the implied presence of an absent sovereign or his humanist surrogate, whose gaze totalized the discursive field. Here, interestingly, he showed a continued filiation to Sartre, whose paranoid ontology of _le regard_ in _Being and Nothingness_ did not require an actual subject looking at an objectified other. According to Sartre, 'the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain'. 83 This generalizable experience of being observed by an unknown and omnipresent 'eye' is, of course, precisely what Foucault described in his powerful investigation of panopticism in his next major work, _Discipline and Punish_. 84

Foucault had been sensitive to the relations between social and political constraint and the objectifying power of the gaze as early as _The Birth of the Clinic_, where he linked the rise of modern medicine to the reforms of the French Revolution:

This medical field, restored to its pristine truth, pervaded wholly by the gaze, without obstacle and without alteration, is strangely similar, in
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its implicit geometry, to the social space dreamt of by the Revolution . . . The ideological theme that guides all structural reforms from 1789 to Thermidor Year II is that of the sovereign liberty of truth: the majestic violence of light, which is in itself supreme, brings to an end the bounded, dark kingdom of privileged knowledge and establishes the unimpeded empire of the gaze. But it was only in Discipline and Punish, the first major fruit of his so-called genealogical method, that he discovered the more subtle social mechanism which allowed ocular domination to extend beyond the boundaries of an all-seeing sovereign or a despotically revolutionary state.

Foucault’s analysis, to be sure, begins with an evocation of the spectacle of sovereign power in the classical age. With characteristic visual éclat, he describes the torture and execution of the failed regicide Damiens in 1757 as a ‘theatrical representation of pain’ in which the power of the monarch was literally inscribed in the visible flesh of the condemned man. As in his earlier accounts of the constitution of madness, the medical gaze in the clinic and the taxonomic system of natural history, the privileging of vision is evident. Not only does it appear in the ‘spectacle of the scaffold’ of the ancien régime, it continues as well through the ‘great theatrical ritual’ of the Revolutionary guillotine.

But as in his earlier analysis, Foucault notes the decay of the classical mode in favour of a more complicated, but still visually determined alternative in the nineteenth century. Although he acknowledges its prototype in the military schools, military camps and clinics of the eighteenth century – and he might have added the court society at the end of Louis XIV’s reign – he chooses Bentham’s model prison as the most explicit version of the new ocular technology of power. For it was here that the disciplining and normalizing function of the gaze was at its most blatant. Reversing the principle of the dungeon, the Panopticon, with its hidden supervisor watching from a central tower like an omniscient but invisible God, is an architectural embodiment of the most paranoid of Sartrean fantasies about the ‘absolute look’. The object of power is everywhere penetrated by the benevolently sadistic gaze of a diffuse and anonymous power, whose actual existence soon becomes superfluous to the process of discipline. The Panopticon is a ‘machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine.”
Complementing the role of the gaze – or rather the sensation of always being its target – in the control and rehabilitation of criminals is the prophylactic power of surveillance, which is designed to prevent potential transgressions of the law. Here the external look becomes an internalized and self-regulating mechanism, which extends the old religious preoccupation with the smallest detail, whose importance ‘in the sight of God’ was immense. The normalizing function of the institutions and practices of surveillance was successful enough, according to Foucault, to dispense with the more heavy-handed displays of sovereign power needed earlier to render the population docile. Napoleon was the transitional moment, as he ‘combined in a single symbolic, ultimate figure the whole of the long process by which the pomp of sovereignty, the necessarily spectacular manifestations of power, were extinguished one by one on the daily exercise of surveillance, in a panopticism in which the vigilance of intersecting gazes was soon to render useless both the eagle and the sun.’ Thus, implicitly taking issue with Marxists like Guy Debord, who castigated the consumer-oriented ‘society of the spectacle’, Foucault concluded that ‘our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance . . . We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine’.

That our imprisonment in this machine owed much to the well-intentioned goals of the enlightenment and the Revolution it helped spawn Foucault did not doubt. ‘The “Enlightenment”, which discovered the liberties,’ he contended, ‘also invented the disciplines.’ Unlike more sympathetic defenders of the siècle des lumières, like Jürgen Habermas, who emphasized its contribution to a public sphere centred on talking and listening, Foucault tended to privilege its visual dimension instead. And although he protested near the end of his life against ‘the intellectual blackmail of “being for or against the Enlightenment”’, it is difficult to miss a certain hostility in such observations as the following remarks in an interview called ‘The Eye of Power’:

I would say Bentham was the complement to Rousseau. What in fact was the Rousseauist dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness . . . Bentham is both that and the opposite. He poses the problem of visibility, but thinks of a visibility organized entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze. He effects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power.
Thus Bentham’s obsession, the technical idea of the exercise of an ‘all-seeing’ power, is grafted on to the great Rousseauist theme which is in some sense the lyrical note of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{98}

Here, significantly, Foucault explicitly drew on the important analyses of Jean Starobinski, which were influential on other exemplars of the anti-visual discourse, such as Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman.\textsuperscript{99} Rousseau’s vain search for perfect transparency, both personal and political, could easily be turned into a target of reproach for those who detected in it a nostalgia for unmediated presence or a licence for coerced unanimity. Relying on a penetrating gaze which would pierce the surface of reality, it was no less illusory than the theatrical perusal of ‘mere’ appearances in the spectacles of the classical age.

Although Foucault took pain to avoid the implication that all modern technologies of power derived from the Rousseauist-Benthamite principle of perfect visibility.\textsuperscript{100} He nonetheless acknowledged its importance in constituting and then controlling the next phenomenon he investigated, that of sexuality. ‘With these themes of surveillance, and especially in the schools,’ he claimed, ‘it seems that control over sexuality becomes inscribed in architecture. In the Military Schools, the very walls speak the struggle against homosexuality and masturbation.’\textsuperscript{101} The sciences of man, intended to help in the macro-logical control of populations as well as the micro-logical normalizing of individuals, drew on the mixture of the gaze and discourse which Foucault had identified with psychoanalysis as early as \textit{The Birth of the Clinic}. Although he now stressed the power of discourse, such as that of the confession, in creating the very notion of sexuality, he insisted on the importance of spatial, visual controls in policing it. Nowhere was this function as evident as in the ostracism of the sexual ‘pervert’ whose very deviance was ‘written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away’.\textsuperscript{102}

In so arguing, Foucault demonstrated his implicit debt to yet another central text in the anti-visual discourse of twentieth-century French thought, Sartre’s \textit{Saint Genet}. For according to that work, not only was Genet compelled to label himself a ‘thief’ because he was observed by the ‘other’ in the act of stealing, he was also forced into assuming the character of the homosexual by the same gaze. As Sartre put it,

Sexually, Genet is first of all a raped child. This first rape was the gaze of the other, who took him by surprise, penetrated him, transformed him forever into an object . . . Undressed by the eyes of decent folk as
women are by those of males, he carries his fault as they do their breasts and behind . . . Having been caught stealing from behind, his back opens when he steals; it is with his back that he awaits human gazes and catastrophe.

Although Foucault never wrote about Genet and would have likely rejected Sartre's existentialist insistence on the victim heroically choosing to identify with his labels, his more general account of the ocular objectification of the deviant fits well with the analysis of le regard in Saint Genet.

To mention Genet is to reopen the question of possible resistance to the process of visual objectification. For certain of his works, such as the film he made with Jean Cocteau, Un Chant d'Amour, have been interpreted as visual challenges to the voyeuristic sadism of modern culture. Can Foucault himself be said to have offered a visual antidote to the disciplinary power of the gaze? How strong a weapon was that 'optic of astonishment' noted by de Certeau in Foucault's struggle against the policing of space? Or perhaps did he implicitly draw on other senses in his evocation of 'bodies and pleasures' as a counterweight to the domination of sexuality and desire?

At times, Foucault did explicitly call on the disruptive power of images, especially against the claims of language to represent a perfectly self-contained and self-sufficient system. Thus, for example, in his introduction to Binswanger, he criticized psychoanalysis in general and Lacan in particular for failing to credit the visual dimension of dreams, which they reduced instead to merely linguistic phenomena. And, as we have seen, his analyses of Roussel and Magritte emphasized the power of sight to subvert the homogenizing drive towards the 'same' implicit in naive linguistic versions of representation. What in The Order of Things he called 'heterotopias' were disturbingly inconsistent spatial configurations which undermined the alleged coherence of linguistic systems. Indeed, one might say that against both linguistic and visual trompe l'oeil, he preferred a kind of catachresis, which preserved ambiguity, otherness and chiasmic intersection.

And yet, in all of these cases, the role of vision remained essentially negative. Like Jean-François Lyotard in Discours, figure, he pitted vision against language, especially in its structuralist incarnations, but did so only in order to emphasize its viewing a world of opaque meaninglessness. As we have seen in his frequent criticisms of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault never felt attracted towards an ontology of
embodied vision in which a different kind of perception might provide answers to the unresolved problems raised in philosophies of consciousness. Unlike many non-French commentators on the implications of vision, he resisted exploring its reciprocal, intersubjective, communicative function, that of the mutual glance. Le regard never assumed its alternative meaning in English of caring or esteeming. As de Certeau has pointed out, Foucault focused so insistently on the dangers of panopticism that he remained blind to other micro-practices of everyday life that subvert its power. In short, despite his obvious delight in visual phenomena, he remained very much in thrall to the anti-visual discourse so pervasive in French thought in this century. For Foucault, the upturned eye was always preferable to the empire of the gaze.

Nor is it likely that he held out much hope for another sense as the antidote to ocularcentrism, as is the case with other critics of visual primacy such as Luce Irigaray. Feminists may choose to turn to touch or smell as more consonant with female than male sexuality, but Foucault was always too sceptical of any search for essentializing immediacy – and also, too unconcerned with female sexual experience – to feel that this choice provided an answer. Indeed, as he emphasized in one of his last interviews, ‘I am not looking for an alternative... What I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that’s the reason why I don’t accept the word alternative. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of problématiques. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous.’

Which dangers one chooses to stress are, of course, more than an arbitrary decision. It has been the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that Foucault was particularly sensitive to the putative dangers of ocularcentrism because of his embeddedness in a larger discourse, which he never himself problematized. It is only by understanding his debt to that discourse, I would argue in conclusion, that we can make sense of one of the most perplexing dimensions of his work: the source of its undefended but deeply felt critical impulse. Foucault's failure or unwillingness to probe the normative basis for his 'history of the present' has frequently troubled commentators eager to uncover the roots of his outrage. When pressed, as he often was, to defend himself, Foucault would fall back at times on a weak separation of facts and values that echoed Weber at his most neo-Kantian. But his practice was very different from Weber's because of the current of ethical commitment that ran throughout virtually all of his writings. Although in his last years Foucault began to reflect on the ethical
impulse of his work, he never developed a fully satisfactory account of it. Perhaps the explanation can be found in his unavoidable inability to 'see' beyond the horizon of his own episteme and question the premises and implications of the anti-visual discourse itself.

The generative power of that discourse in revealing hitherto unproblematized dimensions of our culture cannot be denied; Foucault's own work shows how fecund its influence can be. And yet for those not completely caught in its gravitational field, it may be time to begin probing the costs as well as benefits of the anti-ocular counter-enlightenment. Its own genealogy needs to be demystified, not in order to restore a naive faith in the nobility of sight, but rather to cast a little light on the manifold implications of its new ignobility.

Notes

3 I have attempted to apply similar analysis to another figure who defies simple categorization in *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984).
4 Some attention to the visual implications of Foucault's work has recently been paid by Allan Megill in his *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and Scott Lash, 'Postmodernity and desire', *Theory and Society*, vol. 14 (January 1985), pp. 1–33. Although the title is promising, 'Der böse Blick des Michel Foucault', *Neue Rundschau*, vol. 82 (1972) by Martin Puder does not really investigate the problematic of vision in his work.
6 The gender choice here is not accidental, as many feminists now claim ocularcentrism and phallocentrism go together. For a somewhat critical analysis of this claim, see Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine R. Grontowski, 'The Mind's Eye', in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (eds), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1983).
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10 For a discussion of the evil eye, see Tobin Siebers, The Mirror of Medusa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).


12 Augustine discusses ocular desire in chapter 35 of his Confessions, which ties it to the temptations of unchecked curiosity. Other psychological implications of vision have been explored by later thinkers, like Freud, who linked fears of blindness with castration anxiety and emphasized the relations between voyeurism and sadism.


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Although I have not done a systematic comparison, it is likely that German thought during this same period would show a far less central preoccupation with visual phenomena. From the time of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche up to that of Adorno, music rather than painting has been the primary aesthetic model for many German philosophers. And the hermeneutic tradition dating back to the Reformation, with its stress on the word of God, has always privileged hearing and speech over sight, a bias still evident in contemporary thinkers like Gadamer and Habermas. Perhaps the only visually oriented text that immediately leaps to mind as a counterexample is Heidegger’s famous discussion of Van Gogh’s peasant shoes in ‘The origin of the work of art’, which Derrida discussed in La vérité en peinture.

17 According to Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovitch, 1978), p. 122, ‘Since Bergson, the use of the sight metaphor in philosophy has kept dwindling, not unsurprisingly, as emphasis and interest have shifted entirely from contemplation to speech, from nous to logos.’ Anticipations of the shift, however, can be found somewhat earlier in, for example, the Decadents’ interest in synaesthesia. Huysman’s Against the Grain is an excellent instance of the search for other sensual experience beyond the visual.
18 Any explanation would have to include discussions of technological changes in the capacity to see in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the impact of World War I, and the general crisis of representation that appeared at that time in many areas. For a useful commentary on some of these changes, see Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

22 For an argument claiming Foucault misread Merleau-Ponty and overemphasized their differences, see Richard A. Cohen, ‘Merleau-Ponty, the Flesh and Foucault’, Philosophy Today, vol. 28 (Winter 1984). For another consideration of the Merleau-Ponty–Foucault relationship, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (University of Chicago Press, 1982).


24 For a discussion of Nietzsche on vision, see Sarah Kofman, Nietzsche et la métaphore (Paris: Galilée, 1983), pp. 149f.


26 Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. 70.

27 Ibid., p. 106.

28 Ibid., p. 108.


30 Ibid., p. 250.

31 Ibid., p. 262.

32 Ibid., pp. 250–1.

33 Goya was also the figure Starobinski chose to represent the move away from the Enlightenment in 1789: The Emblems of Reason. De Sade, of course, was heroized by a wide variety of twentieth-century thinkers, including Bataille and others important in the anti-visual discourse we are discussing in this paper.


36 For other links between Sartre and Foucault, see Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History (London: Blackwell, 1984).
37 Sarah Kofman mentions this course in *Camera obscura: De l'idéologie* (Paris: Galilée, 1937), p. 17. Foucault’s general debt to the heterodox philosophy of science tradition in France, which would include Bachelard as well as Canguilhem, is a topic still to be explored fully. For a useful introduction, see Lemert and Gillan, *Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*. They emphasize the importance of discontinuity and rupture in their respective epistemologies. Equally important is their common hostility to phenomenalism, which may have turned Foucault away from perception. I am indebted to Robert d’Amico for this suggestion.

38 Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. xiii.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. xiv.

41 Ibid., p. 117.

42 Ibid., p. 165.

43 Ibid., p. 166.

44 Ibid., p. 197.


46 Foucault, *Raymond Roussel*.


49 Ibid., p. 86.


52 Ibid., p. 28.

53 Ibid., p. 132.

54 Ibid., p. 138.

55 Ibid., p. 134.

56 Ibid., p. 75.

57 ‘Le soleil enfermé’ is the title of chapter 8 of the book; ‘La lentille vide’ is that of chapter 7.

58 Ibid., p. 154. For another discussion of the rebus as a model of language, which also turns it against a purely linguistic structuralism purged of all visual elements, see Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), pp. 295f.

59 Perhaps because he doesn’t treat *Raymond Roussel*, Allan Megill is able to claim that the spatial preoccupations of the early Foucault, most obvious in *The Order of Things*, allow him to be justly called a structuralist *malgré lui* in the special sense of the term Megill derives
from Derrida. He cites, for example, Foucault's statement about 'the table upon which . . . language has intersected space' in the preface to the book (p. xviii), but he neglects to note that Foucault begins his sentence with a reference to Roussel and his catechretic use of the 'table' as an imaginary place where Lautréamont's famous sewing machine and umbrella meet. It is not so much, in other words, a question of the homology between spatial form and linguistic structure as the tension between them. As Foucault says in Raymond Roussel (p. 148) 'This discourse forms a tissue where the texture of the verbal is already crossed with the chain of the visible.'

60 Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*. For a useful discussion of the book, see Guido Almansi, 'Foucault and Magritte', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 3 (1982), pp. 305–9.

61 It should be noted that although the terms are the same in *The Order of Things* and *This is Not a Pipe*, the meaning has shifted somewhat. In the former, 'resemblances' and 'similitudes' are used as virtual synonyms, denoting the allegedly inherent relationship between a signifier and a signified. As such, they are contrasted with 'representation' in which the arbitrary nature of that link is stressed. In the book on Magritte, however, Foucault writes (p. 44), 'Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar.' Ironically, in a letter reprinted at the end of the work (p. 57), Magritte himself chastises Foucault for distinguishing between resemblances and similitudes.

62 Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, p. 46.

63 Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', p. 40. In addition to *The Story of the Eye*, Bataille revealed his ocular obsessions in many other works, several of which have recently been translated in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. with intro. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl *et al.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). In many cases, Bataille indicates a linkage between the anus and the eye, which Foucault did not explicitly discuss in his essay.


66 Ibid., p. 48.

67 Ibid., p. 48.

68 Ibid., pp. 48–9.


70 Foucault's discussion of *Las Meninas* has stimulated an intense interest in the work. See for example John R. Searle, 'Las Meninas and the paradoxes of pictorial representation', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 6 (Spring
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73 Ibid., p. 54. Foucault’s analysis of the eclipse of language in the classical age has been disputed by implication in John W. Yolton, Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid (Oxford University Press, 1984) which argues for the semantic dimension in the account of perception in Descartes and his followers.

74 Foucault, The Order of Things, p. 132.

75 Ibid., p. 308.

76 Ibid., p. 251.

77 Ibid., p. 232.

78 Ibid., p. 312 (italics added).

79 Ibid., p. 318.

80 Ibid., p. 326.

81 Ibid., p. 386. In French, of course, figure also means face, which suggests the final metaphor of the book.

82 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 54.

83 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 316.


85 Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, pp. 38–9.

86 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p. 14. De Certeau, ‘Micro-techniques and panoptic discourse: a quid pro quo’, p. 264, notes that Discipline and Punish combines such representational tableaux with other optical figures, ‘analytic tableaux (lists of ideological “rules” or “principles” relating to a single phenomenon) and figurative tableaux (seventeenth–nineteenth century engravings and photographs).’


88 For an analysis of the shift from spectacle to surveillance at the court of Louis XIV, which places it around 1674, see Jean-Marie Apostolidès, Le roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV (Paris: Minuit, 1981). Apostolidès argues that by the end of his reign, the Sun King had absented himself from the spectacle and become an empty place in the power structure of the monarchy, which gave the
impression of being able to see without being seen.

89 'Le regard absolu' is the title of François George’s chapter on Sartre’s critique of vision. See note 35.


91 Ibid., p. 140.

92 Ibid., p. 217.

93 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, Black and Red, 1983). This work provides another variant of the anti-visual discourse, Debord claiming that ‘the spectacle is the heir of all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project, which was to understand activity dominated by the categories of seeing’ (p. 18, italics in original).


95 Ibid., p. 222.


97 Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 45.


100 See his disclaimer in ‘The Eye of Power’, p. 148.

101 Ibid., p. 150.


104 See Laura Oswald, ‘The Perversion of I/Eye in Un Chant d’Amour’, *Enclitic*, vol. 7 (Fall 1983).


106 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xviii.
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