Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

Hyper-sovereign violence, and resistance beyond pólemos

Foucault and Derrida between power and unpower

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Before I start speaking, before I start 'engaging' Foucault, I would like to thank the organisers of this conference for their invitation. I am all the more grateful because I am not speaking here as a specialist of Foucault. So, please, bear with me... I have learned a lot during the past few days, listening to all your interventions, your analyses and interrogations. And one of the things that were really striking is that the notion of power (*pouvoir*), in its Foucauldian interpretation or otherwise, remains absolutely central, structuring and inevitable, while being at the same time very elusive and difficult to define — especially in its relation to *resistance*, and to *violence* in general. Since Friday, these questions have been addressed several times already, following various perspectives (Deleuzian, Habermassian, pragmatist , proto-, neo- or post-Marxian, Spinozist, etc.), and with very different results, always illuminating. Your influence has been decisive in the last stages of writing this paper. Here is my contribution, nourished with many of your insights.

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Foucault's work on power does not present itself as a systematic theory. Explicitly and repeatedly, quasi-obsessively, Foucault condemns the temptation to theorise power. In an apparently anti-philosophical reflex, he attempts to exorcise the compulsion to *essentialise* power relations and to homogenise them into what he calls an "ontology of power".

Certainly, many theoretical efforts from various horizons are implicitly targeted by Foucault. But this tentative exorcism is first of all self-reflexive; it starts with Foucault himself. (I will now quote the lines introducing "The Subject and Power", 1982):

> *Why Study Power? The Question of the Subject*
>
> The ideas which I would like to discuss here represent neither a theory nor a methodology.
>
> I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis.

Then follow twenty pages on power. This initial 'disclaimer' is a wonderful example of preterition. Of course, Foucault's gesture, as it compulsively struggles against a compulsion, is both justified and perplexing in equal measures. And like all obsessive tendency, this effort induces ambiguous results. Indeed, as refined, fluid and sophisticated it may be, Foucault's notion of power certainly carries theoretical and performative implications. Even if we admit that it does not constitute a "theory", a "methodology", or an "ontology", his analysis of power relations *must* involve a certain level of notional and thematic formalisation. It is necessity itself. How could it not be the case, especially in the context of a reflection which explicitly posits itself as *critical*? This theorisation *a minima* is what Foucault refers to as a necessary *conceptualisation*, which does not, naturally, prevent critique or self-critique:

> Do we need a theory of power? Since a theory assumes a prior objectification, it cannot be asserted as a basis for analytical work. But this analytical work cannot proceed without an ongoing conceptualization. And this conceptualization implies critical thought — a constant checking.

What is the nature, here, of this critical instance? What is the nature of this decisive *krinein*, the cutting and selecting operation which justifies, *in fine*, the continuous reference to the idea of "critical thought"? I will not address these questions directly in this paper, but let's keep them in mind as we are interrogating the notion of power: indeed, power can be, also, a power to criticise, *un pouvoir-critique* or *pouvoir-critiquer*. Actually, critique *implies* power, the instantiation of a powerful ipseity, a sovereign instance which *can* say 'I can', '*je peux*', '*je peux pouvoir critiquer*', 'I have power to criticise', in order to exert critique against such or such dominant discourses, despite or against all forms of censorship, even self-censorship. How can we, then, provide an authentic *critique* of power, while critique is itself entirely dependent on power dispositives — and, therefore, on historical conditions, relations of forces, tentative sovereignties, performative conventions, conflictual strategies of control or mastery, etc.?... Even though I remain suspicious about the possibility to absolve a critical instance (especially under the form of "critical thought") from the power dispositives constitutive of all ipseity, there is always, however, the possibility of a "checking", as Foucault says. It is unclear what this term ("checking") signifies in this context: is this checking a form of resistance of theoretical thought to itself? And how does this resistance compare to the practical and discursive resistances consubstantial with

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power-knowledge dispositives? In other words: what is the place, heterotopic or atopic, the locus of "critical thought" in its relation to "theory", "analysis", "objectification", and "conceptualisation"?… Difficult questions. Nonetheless, whatever its impulses and its resources, this so-called "checking" is necessary. It is, again, necessity itself. And it starts *within* Foucault's text: this checking or self-checking is already at work from within Foucauldian conceptuality. Because, indeed, in and through this explicit effort of conceptualisation, Foucault's analysis of power relations *does* involve theoretical and methodological tensions or tendencies, with strategic centres and contradictory forces, mobile loci of resistances, pivotal points of reversal, lines of inclusions and exclusions, etc.

Power plays within power, like its deconstruction at work. This is what I will investigate today.

My *hypothesis*, thus, is that Foucault's conceptualisation of power is self-deconstructive. To be understandable or coherent, the notion of power must presuppose an excess inside power, an excessive force, *another* violence which precedes power and gives it meaning and circumscription, making it possible. There must be something within power located "beyond the power principle" (title of one of Derrida's lecture — 1986). At least in three occasions, this excessive violence was approached by Foucault in terms of war (*la guerre*), or struggles (*les luttes*). I will analyse this limit and this excess by looking at Foucault's articulation of power and warfare in the 70s, and examine what it tells us about power relations, and more precisely about *relationality* in terms of power and knowledge. After that, I will turn to "The Subject and Power", a text written in 1982, and I will try to work within the "conceptualisation" of power deployed by Foucault; to this purpose, I will use the notion of unpower (*impouvoir*). This notion, invented by Antonin Artaud, and theorised by Maurice Blanchot, was then reinvested by Jacques Derrida (see, among other texts, "La Parole soufflée", "The Scene of writing", or *Parages*). In Derrida's interpretation, this notion *also* constitutes a word-play: when read out loud, the French term "*impouvoir*" may be heard both as "*a* power/ *one* power" (*un pouvoir*) and "*non*-power" (*im-pouvoir*). For instance: *il y a impouvoir*. This is why the neologism "apower" (or "a-power") might constitute a more adequate translation in English. Indeed, *impouvoir* or unpower does *not* constitute the mere *negation* of power, nor a form of radical powerlessness (*impuissance*). Rather, it signifies the co-implication, the essential complicity between power and powerlessness, potency and impotency, possibility and impossibility. Unpower is prior to the power/powerlessness divide: in interrupting power before its origin, unpower opens the chance for power, limiting it by the same gesture. It is both the condition and limitation for power — power interrupted. In other words, the notion of unpower substantiates the idea that *power*, at its most fundamental level, *is not in any One's power*; that it is without identity or origin; or that this origin is always-already differed and divided. Unpower unconditionally instantiates the conditionality of power.

In any case, the notion of this structural, arche-originary incapacitation *in* and *of* power thus seems, at first glance, to be in complete opposition to notions such as warfare or

struggle. However, a certain powerlessness is *also* the first condition for violence, abdication to *another* violence, to emancipatory revolts, insurrection, chaos, brutality or warfare. In its structural interruption of power, unpower *is* violent — for better or worse, be it liberating or oppressive, progressive or conservative, creative or destructive, but always in the name of the other. It is a violence more originary than power. It suggests the force (without force) of a deconstruction of power in the name of an instance of non-power at the heart of power. This paradoxical necessity is what I will interrogate today.

One last thing, though, *before I start*: I would like to emphasise, from the onset, a certain dynamic contradiction or tension, one which shall constitute the main thread of this presentation: in spite of its deconstructive character, the unconditionality of unpower does *not* induce a disengagement from power relations, from political or pragmatic questions. On the contrary, it involves a deconstruction of pragmatics in the name of a *superior*, *more powerful* and *necessary pragmaticality*. It is a deconstruction of the logic of power-relationality in order to be *more* faithful, paradoxically, and as faithful as possible, to the full implications of this logic: at its best, this study strives to unfold the conditions and limitations of the power-relationality framework, and does so out of respectful admiration for Foucault's conceptual work on power, and for what it opened up to.

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It is a cliché to say that Foucault's work, during the mid-1970s, focused more particularly on power relations, on the specific question of power. It is true that works like *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *Society must be defended* (1975-1976), and *The Will to knowledge* (1976) seemed to narrow down slightly onto the notion of power 'itself', in view of defining it (and, somehow, deconstructing it), unfolding its essential or non-essential elements, its mechanisms and its functionality. However, the main trait of this epochal focal point is not necessarily Foucault's interest in 'power' itself (this could be argued about Foucault's entire oeuvre, just like the opposite, depending on the definition of power one settles for), but more likely the *explicit* articulation (itself differentiated) between the notion of power and notions such as 'battle', 'struggle', or 'warfare' — that is to say the conception of power as essentially *strategic* and *warlike*. I tend to believe that it is *this* particular articulation that people have in mind when they indeed suggest that Foucault focused on 'power' in this so-called 'second phase' of his career. As if the connection to warfare were more *meaningful*, more significant, more adequate than any other conceptual trait when it comes to power and politics — and this *in spite of* Foucault's later efforts to qualify or refute this connection (with ambiguous and perplexing effects, as I will try to demonstrate).

In *Society must be defended*, Foucault inaugurates his famous formula: "Power is war, the continuation of war by other means." However, in these lectures particularly, Foucault's position on this subject is, already, extremely cautious and complex. *On the one hand*, the

whole of his argument is somehow presented as a mere historiographical interrogation: in an explicit manner, he intends to expose someone else's theory of history, a working hypothesis, one which was supposedly repressed throughout modern history, excluded and silenced by dominant interpretations of politics: Boulainvilliers's historical hermeneutics of "basic warfare" (*la guerre fondamentale*) conceived as the teleological horizon of all socio-political relations. *On the other hand*, he repeatedly and explicitly *advocates* this theoretical framework: he clearly champions Boulainvilliers's methodology against other interpretative models considered as "anti-historicist" in essence, such as the philosophico-juridical conceptuality attached to liberal society (Hobbes' theory of state sovereignty being here, problematically, the prime example). Let's recall, for that matter, that when Foucault, somewhat playfully, reverses Clausewitz's dictum, he immediately affirms that this dictum was already the result of a form of reversal. In reversing a reversal, Foucault is thus, implicitly, unperverting its signification, taking us back to the 'straight', originary equation: "politics is the continuation of war…", that is to say, supposedly, a more exact or adequate articulation, more faithful to the sense of history, to its supposed origin, before the *first* reversal. Let's also note something in passing, which concerns the articulation between power and politics: in these lectures, the reversal of Clausewitz's formula *both* appears as "*power* is" and "*politics* is the continuation of war…". So that, at least *here*, and exceptionally in Foucault's corpus, this working hypothesis seems to *conflate* power and politics (often under the form of "political power") — a conflation which is theoretically justified in and through the strategic teleology of their horizon: warfare. However, power and politics are otherwise distinguished by Foucault, the latter being usually considered as a subset of the former. In *The Will to Knowledge,* power is explicitly conceived as much wider in scope than politics: power is said to have no exterior, no externality (which will be somewhat nuanced or contradicted later on in "The Subject and Power"). Power is everywhere; there is power as soon as there is a relation, as soon as there is *relationality* (I quote *The Will to Knowledge*):

> The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of gathering everything under its invincible unity, but because power produces itself from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather *in every relation from one point to another*. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. [My emphasis.]

As such, power should always be presupposed *before politicisation*, that is to say before its potential institutionalisation (its reduction into state administration or political governmentality in the strict sense of the term), which remains, however, always possible.

Despite this nuance, let's keep in mind that politics and power are, in the *Society must be defended* lectures at least, analysed uniformly, and this in virtue of their mutual bellicose essence. This, from the onset, raises the question of the conceptual limits and theoretical operability of the notion of *power* in relation to politics and war. Indeed, the triangular articulation between these concepts (power-war-politics) leaves a lot of manoeuvring space as regards their definitions. First, from a conceptual point of view, the possibly unlimited expansion of power (as well as, here, "political power", or even "politics") is itself

associated with the potentially limitless expansion of warfare. Through the reversal of Clausewitz's formula, the object "war" steps beyond the boundaries which are traditionally attached to the concept of warfare, exceeding philosophical representations of *pólemos* as opposed to peace or concord, or historical figures of antagonisms under the form of interstate conflicts or civil wars, or juridical conceptions of warfare, conflict or hostility defined as *declared* by the state-sovereign according to the protocols of *jus gentium* or International Law, etc. Foucault, in these lectures, demonstrates the very clear and explicit desire *to do justice to war*: he intends to de-limit the experience of warfare and *pólemos*, its practices or discourses, and to carry this experience of war outside of the traditional limits of the *battle*, the extent of its empiricity now *roaring* outside of *recognised* forms of warfare (and also exceeding, in Foucault's interpretation, the notion of class struggle in its orthodox-Marxist sense, conceived as civil war, *Bürgerkrieg*). Here, Foucault's gesture is justified *precisely* because these theoretical limits (warfare, civil war, politics) depend on discursive practices, legal-juridic codes, historiographies, philosophical representations (all epistemic frameworks that one would be tempted to call *ideological*), themselves dependent on historical determinations, specific strategies, power-knowledge dispositives. The apparent limit between politics and warfare is thus always the result of a martial situation, with both discursive and extra-discursive implications, but the crucial point, here, is that this limit is carried and performed *through* warfare, through politics and power *as warfare.* In this perspective, the question of this limit remains attached to that of the definition, of definition as decision, but a decision which is never exactly or never simply the result of a *sovereign* decision, or the direct expression of state power, of its representatives, individuals or groups speaking in the name of the sovereignty of the state. This last point is essential for Foucault, precisely because his antagonistic interpretation of politics and power is co-dependent with a radical interrogation and deconstruction of sovereignty. Those two are *the same gesture*. Foucault shows us that sovereign power is itself *divided*, that it is the effect of unstable dispositives aimed to integrate and stabilise a multiplicity of immanent, differential forces at war, articulated through local and mobile strategies. Indeed, this vague notion of an omnipresent "battle", tentatively hypothesised by Foucault in *Discipline and punish* and *Society must be defended,* suggests a form of post-sovereign or hyper-sovereign conflictual essence — even though it is intended to be conceived as radical *immanence* rather than transcendentally. The question, here, immense and difficult, echoes that of Foucault's so-called "nominalism", which suppresses the eventality of decision by resorting to a uniform concept of warfare, antagonism, or battle, thus neutralising sovereignty as decision and as event. Certainly, but how are we then supposed to analyse the event of "the battle", of "power" itself and, *perhaps*, *if we still wish to*, of Foucault himself? (see Derrida, "Beyond the Power Principle")

Still, the first consequence of Foucault's radical critique of political sovereignty (in the name of "fundamental warfare") is, for better or worse (and I think it's for the best), to make the object 'war' extremely difficult to stabilise, to situate and to delineate: the difficulty arises first and foremost in the locus of a potential distinction between civil war

and inter-state war, on which, however, the whole distinction between politics and warfare also depends, by necessity. This appears clearly, in *Society must be defended*, through his critique of Hobbes' doctrine of social contract and sovereignty, that Foucault interprets as fundamentally anti-historicist, and as a theoretical attempt to evacuate "real historical war" from modern politics (I find this critique very problematic, but I must leave this question aside, out of concern for time constraints). This appears even more clearly in *The Will to Knowledge* (I quote):

> If we still wish to [*si on veut toujours*] maintain a separation between war and politics, *perhaps* [*peut-être*] we should postulate rather that this multiplicity of force relations can be coded — in part but never totally — either in the form of 'war,' or in the form of 'politics'.

I emphasise: "*If we still wish to… perhaps…*". This signifies that we don't have to; nothing obligates us to do so. There is no *necessity*, here... However, if we still wish to do so, *si on veut*, then on what does the limit stand? On a simple *code*, a strategy of writing, of knowledge! This is what is called here a "form", which illustrates Foucault's explicit effort of self-distanciation. And in order to stress the effect of mention of this formalism, "war" and "politics" are within quotes. They are envisaged as simple "forms", forms potentially taken by power relations. Without necessarily starting here a whole philosophical deconstruction of *form* versus *content*, it is interesting to note that Foucault doesn't even try to *define* the conceptual distinction between "war" and "politics" in terms of power-relationality or force-relationality *per se*, or in terms of 'substance', for instance: the substantiality of power relations is assumed to be the same from one "form" to the other, from "politics" to "warfare", or, at least, it is assumed to be similar enough from one to the other to indeed justify the applicability of the term "power" indifferently in both cases. The question of the *nature* of war as opposed to politics thus remains, precisely because the nature of power relations is not differentiated through one or the other of its formalisations. Here, the vague concepts of "form" and "strategy" carry all the weight of the argument. This raises very important questions which are not explicitly tackled by Foucault, although these questions traverse the three texts at hand: for instance, can there be an ontological definition of war? Can we define the limit between war and politics without already *essentialising* a certain state of power relations, as well as its underlying dispositives of power-knowledge and effects of sovereignties, that is to say the *forms* taken by power relations in a given context? In other words, can we distinguish war and politics, as Foucault seems to do and *not* do at the same time, without repeating the ideological structures, the legitimising conventions and performative powers that have been empirically observed, described and analysed by the theorist-historian?

All the merit of Foucault's analysis is to leave these interrogations suspended to strategic questions, as they are tentatively articulated *within* the power-knowledge dispositives and conflictual strategies on which they depend, indeed. And it is also important to recall that this logic of "strategic" "integration" of power relations through *either* war *or* politics is never perfect and never complete, and that there is always the possibility of a reversal

between the two. This potential reversal is all the easier to conceive that it is merely the result of a differential *strategy* of coding, of a certain *force of law* or *force of knowledge* defining or re-defining, in the name of power, the conceptual protocols of the object "war" as opposed to "politics"... So that the question of the limit between the two objects remains *within* power, concealed *inside* power. And as such, this unfindable limit is a remainder of the practical impact of discursivity 'itself', instantiating an irreducible residue of the specific *power of* knowledge, the power *of knowledge-as-power* — power and knowledge being interlocked *inside the very definition of power*. It also signifies a "performative force" of knowledge which infinitely divides the limit between power and knowledge, at the border between politics and war.

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I'm now turning to "The Subject & the Power", written in 1982. Here, the same teleological connection is broached between power and warlike struggles, always with a potential reversal; however, war is not conceived as a "*form*" of power, but as its complementary pole in the general "phenomenon" of "domination" (an immense and difficult notion, that I must leave aside for now, as it would require a long explication with the concept of *Herrschaft* through, notably, its Marxian and Weberian interpretations). Nonetheless, the problem of the *limit* between power and warfare arises again, and now it is the argument of predictability, stabilisation, calculation of probability, which carries the weight of the distinction (itself unstable and provisional) between "confrontational strategies" and "power relations".

Power is defined as "actions over potential actions". This emphasis on the probabilistic character of power interests me greatly: power can never be complete, because it must do with the other's unpredictability and singularity, that is to say that it must do with the possibility of the *event*. In other words, the eventality of the event makes power possible and impossible at the same time. As it must structurally deal with the radical unpredictability of otherness (that Foucault refers to as "freedom"), power is orientated toward a horizon which cannot be reached: power is structurally incapable of realising itself, for if it did, it would not be power anymore. In short: *Power cannot*. In French: *Le pouvoir ne peut pas*. There is no power as soon as there is power, because there is no power if there is not, also, failure of power, impotence, *unpower*. This is where the notion of power reveals its self-deconstructiveness.

This idea of a structural incompleteness of power is related to Foucault's conviction, seemingly ontological, according to which (I quote): "resistance comes *first*, and resistance remains *superior* to the forces of the process" (from "Sex, power, and the politics of identity," my emphasis). This quote raises innumerable questions about the possibility, and the necessity, of an ontological definition of power *versus* resistance; in all rigour, according to the paradigm of force-relationality, and assuming that we know exactly what a "force"

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

is, power and resistance must be unrecognisable outside of juridico-interpretative models, themselves dependent on power-knowledge dispositives which can and must be deconstructed (the problem that I am formalising here is analogue to that of the limit between politics and war, as exposed in the previous section). *However*, on the matter of resistance, Foucault seems to oscillate between *two attitudes*: *on the one hand*, he explicitly signifies that all empirical-historical studies of power relations should *begin* with an attention to *recognised* resistances (rather than to dominant power or, I would suggest, to what is *recognised* as such, that is to say what is represented *as* dominant power through the effects of knowledge-dispositives themselves dependent on power-dispositives, etc.); but, *on the other hand*, Foucault seems to lay the ground for an ontological or pre-ontological definition of power *as* resistance, a form of fundamental or unconditional resistance of/to the other as *condition for* power, and thus precipitating all power relations into some sort of limitless 'resistantiality' — an unrecognisable resistance, before recognised or recognisable power-resistance categories, and before, maybe, force-relationality itself. It is not clear how these two attitudes could be made perfectly compatible. This might be due to a structural polysemy of the concept of 'resistance', one which might need to be fully clarified (on this polysemic, non-ontological character of 'resistance(s)', see Derrida, *Resistances — of psychoanalysis*). In any case, and if, as Foucault says, "there is power as soon as there is relation from one point to another," this must signify that forces in relation are always somehow resisting each other. As soon as there is force there must be resistance; a force (I am leaving this term, here, to its structural undecidability) is always-already resisting another force. Only resistance may require and justify the 'use' of *force*, which immediately becomes resistance by the same token. A force must 'use' another force like its body or its matter, like its own chance and resistance: another force comes and provides force with its own force. Force always comes from the other, from the other before force, before the powerful self. All this points to the notion that *force does not belong*, does not belong to itself, or to any 'One', just like power. This is what unpower signifies at the most essential level: force and power suppose, as the most extreme consequence of their 'own' logic, a radical resistance and expropriation of the proper. Resistance thus precedes power and appropriation, and this is why power is always-already strategic calculation, therefore implying the structural, essential possibility of miscalculation and power failure.

It could be said, schematically, that Derrida, on similar premises, goes further than Foucault and places incalculability *before* power: he places the law of the other, by definition incalculable and unpredictable, before power-relationality and force-relationality, before control and governmentality, and before the subject who calculates, its calculating power or its mastering sovereignty. (In this sense, Derrida's *impouvoir* is not unrelated to what Lyotard names *l'enfance* or *infantia*, conceived as fundamental heteronomy and finitude — see Lyotard, *Lectures d'enfance*.) According to Derrida, the eventality of the event properly disarms and interrupts power and knowledge. As such, it is fundamentally impossible to decide once and for all if an event *happened* as such — or, conversely, it is *only* possible to *decide* of it, which consequently divides the eventality of the

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

event through the eventality of *another* decision, another event, the origin of which is itself divided etc. (cf. *Force de loi*, or *Philosophy in a time of terror*, or "The Typewriter Ribbon"). As regards the juridico-symbolic, performative character of theoreticity, it could be said that Foucault's conceptualisation of power relations tends to point to a *recognisable* or *manageable* eventality: the event of the other is a form of incalculability that one can [*peut*] measure and evaluate, can cognate and account for, locate and determine practically and/or theoretically (one may say *critically*) (one may, for instance, produce a genealogy of the *event* through which Reason has supposedly excluded madness, according to such or such protocols, practices, or discourses, etc.); Derrida, on the other hand, emphasises the unconditional incalculability at the foundation of all calculability, incalculability *before* calculation, which depends on the notion that the so-called calculating subject does not hold this calculation in its power. This is the condition for an eventality worthy of the name, which, in its irruption, must precede, destabilise and modify the criteria of any form of "critical" instance. Even though the event is always *interpretable*, that is because it is, in itself, *illegible*, non-presentational and non-identical. In this perspective, the incalculability of the event implies an infinite resistance, but one which starts within the self, which places otherness *before* the self. Resistance is infinitely "superior" because it is mainly and firstly resistance of the self to itself: as a result, power is self-difference and self-resistance *before* being a probabilistic conduct or knowledge.

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This should involve several consequences as regards the descriptive and prescriptive dimensions of the notion of power, and call for a renegotiating of its multilayered heritage. For the purpose of this presentation, I will just draw out a few remarks about the notional limits (and potential de-limitations) of the logic of power-relationality, which might be analysed from the perspective of the disruptive logic of a more originary unpower. In the spirit of our subject, I call these theoretical and practical renegotiations 'strategic decentralisations' (Foucault would probably call them "critical shifts" — cf. "The Subject and Power"). I will sketch, schematically, five of these.

1. There is a *first* decentralisation, that we already mentioned: power should be decentred from the motifs of war and political sovereignty. I would add the necessity to *also* decentre power from its antagonistic or agonistic teleology, and from the instrumental conception of human relations it is attached to. This conception is persistent in the late Foucault, even as he claims to offer "a new economy of power relations": "Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of *its internal rationality*, it consists of analyzing power relations through *the antagonism of strategies*." ("The Subject and Power", my emphasis.) The lexicon "strategy" (*stratós-ágô*: "leading an army"), "antagonism" or "agonism", refers to the action (*ágô*) of "leading", "conducting" in the context of military commandment or conflictual opposition. Therefore, the definition of power as "actions over actions" preserves, at least in its conceptual deployment, an irreducible connection to hostile belligerence or martial oppositionality. More generally, the Greek ἄγω and Latin *agō* relate

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

to "action" and "activity", and therefore point to power as the inter-*action* or inter-*agency* between acting and leading *actors* or *agents* (I shall have more to say about this in a moment). The question, here, is to know whether it is possible to separate the notion of "power", centred around the militaristic semantics of "strategy" and "antagonism", from a certain teleological and polemological becoming: even when it is not conceived as an ontological, ahistorical substance ("Power" as a concept with a capital letter, an immutable essence or an *eidos*, etc.), the notion of power is *still* connected to the *agō* of an irreducible *agency* (power as power-to-act, *pouvoir-agir*), "actions over potential actions", and this constitutes "its internal rationality", pace Foucault. Is it possible to disconnect this *strategic* definition of power relations from an *instrumental* representation of human relations? Indeed, power is usually conceived as the use of violence (be it legitimated or not) or consent (be it imposed or not) as means or "instruments", in view of obtaining a defined gain: in "The Subject and Power", this explicitly instrumental character is common to both strategies of struggle and dispositives of power, and seems to constitute the theoretical and practical condition for their potential reversibility, from power to struggle and reciprocally. In other words, even though Foucault claims that he is chiefly interested in "how" power is exercised, rather than in its nature or origin (he even hypothesises that "power as such does not exist"), these questions return through the supposedly purely "empirical" description that Foucault offers, which irreducibly connects power to a certain onto-teleological becoming: the strategic and instrumental dimension of human relations (be it through "violence" or "consent", with all potential reversals between the two notions). The whole question of power thus concerns the idea of violence itself as an instrumental notion, and the position of "power", of power-relationality, in this teleo-polemological becoming: on this subject, Foucault constantly oscillates between, *on the one hand*, the notion of an immediate, direct, inter-subjective or inter-individual violence instrumentalised through power relations, and, *on the other hand*, that of a quasi-structural violence, absolutely disseminated and divisible, which pervades the whole of the power situation, a *battle* without centre nor origin and which is, in its hyperbolic relationality, absolutely *productive*. Here, and in spite of Foucault's explicit intentions, the conceptual articulation between the concept of violence or power (singular) and that of power relations or forces (plural) seems to structure the whole argument, although this distinction is, of course, relatively artificial and impossible to maintain in all rigour. By contrast, Derrida's notion of arche-violence, in its unconditional sense, designates force *as différance*, differentiality and divisibility *before* power and before violence, *différance* as differing force; as a non-presentational and pre-ontological notion, arche-violence thus accounts for violence in its structural divisibility, *before* and *beyond* the singular-plural distinction. While signifying the loss of presence and violent expropriation of the proper, it also accounts for the absolute singularity of force or forces, the eventality of the event — thus respecting, always, the paradoxically 'productive' character or violence or power. Admittedly, this violent process of production is *also* an expropriation, indeed, *always* and *each time* with hurtful implications and singular effects of dispossession, traumatism, loss and mourning — but it is a non-instrumental violence: it is a force of

différance before politics, war, power — and before its polemological reductions. (See also the notions of *Walten*, "arche-originary" force or violence, in Derrida, *La bête et le souverain, vol. II,* and Laura Odello's analysis in "*Walten* ou l'hyper-souveraineté".)

(It is impossible, here in this context, to cover the ethical implications of this epistemic shift from hermeneutics of power to unconditional violence, but let's just say that this structural de-instrumentalisation of power and violence should *not* be considered as a de-responsibilisation, quite the opposite: *firstly*, arche-violence does not suppress effects of instrumentalisation and responsibilisation, which may always be assessed according to conditional juridical orders, such as a contextual legal systems. Indeed, arche-violence, in and through its structuring and de-structuring effects, may always imply the contextual determination of relatively stable (or stabilised) *effects* of power and responsibility, more or less localised, under the form of conditional citizenship, juridical responsibility, socio-political agency, or otherwise: when they are not blatantly oppressive or violent, these conditional effects of power and responsibility might be, depending on the context, relatively helpful and provisionally emancipatory. *However*, these conditional effects are always and by definition contextualisable and deconstructible, and this *in the name of unconditional responsibility*, beyond conditional powers, sovereignties, and responsibilities. Indeed, and *secondly*, the attention to unconditional violence stresses that responsibility *depends* on radical irresponsibility, because it has always been responsibility towards the other before oneself, be it the other within oneself or outside oneself, opening the gage of an arche-originary injunction under the form of infinite *unpower* — be it mine or the other's, mine as the other's. Thus, arche-violence implies an infinite vulnerability, and hyperbolically expands the scope of violences and ethics, opening up these questions to fields which have been traditionally ignored by juridical, political and ethical thought, because of their assumed non-political or non-violent character (an assumption which has been dogmatically or forcefully imposed) — fields such as, for instance: linguisticality in the broadest sense, writing and arche-writing, non-human forms of relationality or sociality, infra- or trans-individuality beyond ipseic inter-individuality or intersubjectivity, all forms of ideality, spectrality and image, metaphysics or aesthetics, ecologies and economies, etc.)

2. This effort of de-instrumentalisation takes us to our *second* decentralisation: decentring power from subjectivity, from subjective ipseity, especially under the form of *human* subjectivity. If individual subjectivity, in its apparent indivisibility, is the effect of power relations between forces, be them internal or external or both, then the individual is always-already divisible. The self is always-already constituted by differential forces, conflicting forces in relations and resistance. The self is therefore resisting itself, resisting selfness. It can [*peut*] only affect itself *as the other*: auto-affection is self-difference, so that *différance* precedes the self, affecting and constituting it through a paradoxical process of self-differentiation. Consequently, there is no pure reflexivity, no technique of the self that is not already, somehow, an effect of power-knowledge dispositives, force-relationality and self-differentiation. This signifies an inappropriable alterity at the heart of the subject, an

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

unpower as the condition for subjectivity; here, unpower interrupts the subject in its ipseity, that is to say its self-power, its power-to-be-self. This should lead us to problematise radically the questions of appropriation and reappropriation: subjection is the effect of an originary disarticulation without possibility of definite reappropriation. This is what Derrida calls the expropriation of the proper, or *ex-appropriation* (see Derrida, *For what tomorrow…*, or "Il faut bien manger"). This non-presentational, non-ontological conception of subjectivity has massive implications. For instance, gender- or identity-politics are extremely important categories for problematising power dispositives, and these questions should be raised as often as possible in the name of local or wide-scale resistances. *However*, when they are envisaged purely through the prism of self-technologies, they always run the risk to fall back into ontological, essentialist representations of selfness, under the guise of a definition in terms of power relations (or under the form of "empowerment", self-determination or self-appropriation). For this reason, the ideas of self-ontology, self-technologies, or self-care appear to be ultimately paralysing, because they supposedly put power in the hands of the self, and more likely put the self in the hands of power and dominant discourses, generally in the name of some identificatory value relying, problematically, on an uninterrogated 'naturality' or 'conventionality'. This is something Foucault was lucid about, thus using the term *sujétion*, which both signifies "subjectivation" and "submission" in order to signify the necessary dependence of the subject on power dispositives; *however*, his analyses of self-practices always presuppose a certain reflexive *capacity*, a self-power of the subject before self-difference, even when it is in order to emphasise the internal divisions of the self: subjectivity results from self-practice *before* being the effect of violent repressions, conflicting forces, resistances, force-relationality. This is why theories of subjectivity have been able to rely on Foucault's ambiguity in order to suggest that self-technologies may produce measurable increases in power, empowerments, reversals of power, etc. This signifies, in any case, an ontological co-implication between power and selfness — or, in other words, the conviction that the self is instantiated *as such* through power, that it is indeed constituted ontologically, *as self*, through power. However, acknowledging selfness in and of subjectivity, even under the form of historically determined self-technologies, or through an "historical ontology of ourselves", precisely amounts to confirming power-dispositives in their performative legitimacy (always involving violent effects of expropriation and repression, in the name of selfness), thus reproducing effects of exclusion and homogenisation. Depending on contextual 'micro-' or 'macro-physical' strategies (and assuming that "power" may be reduced in any way to physicality), these effects might be assessed, evaluated and sometimes even justified — but this requires a negotiation with the unconditional, each time singular, and always beyond the self-presence of a sovereign ipseity.

I mentioned notions of 'identity' and 'gender', but questions related to self-technologies and subjectivities have broader implications, and concern all matters of conceptual and practical identification: they relate to conceptuality in general, as a performative power of self-identification or self-legitimation. The questions of subjectivity or the self thus

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

concern even the widest dimensions of self-definition, starting, for instance, with the idea that the subject of power is essentially *human*, a human subject, or humanity in general. Indeed, Foucault's theory of power ignores all subjects considered as "non-human". First of all, it ignores animality (see Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*). The "animal", or "l'animot" as Derrida would say, is the name of a crucial and immense question, but here I will emphasise another problematic aspect of Foucault's paradoxical anthropology. Here again, the orientation of his analysis is extremely ambiguous: despite its constant attention to the proliferation of techniques, technologies, mechanisms, machinistic processes through which power manifests itself, Foucault's theory of power is entirely orientated within an anthropocentric representation of sociality, which systematically stems *from the human person*, and always returns *to the human person*. This anthropocentric polemology (perhaps an "anthropolemology": cf. Derrida, "Heidegger's Ear") might seem paradoxical in relation to a philosopher who announced, in *The Order of Things*, the impending disappearance of the figure of 'Man' and humanism, through the upcoming arrival of a new *épistémè*. Nonetheless, it remains a massive and uninterrogated aspect of his conceptualisation of power relations. For instance, in "The Subject and Power":

> […] what characterizes the power we are analyzing is that it brings into play relations between *individuals* (or between *groups*). For let us not deceive ourselves; if we speak of *the power of laws*, *of institutions or ideologies*, if we speak of the *structures* or the *mechanisms of power*, it is only insofar as we suppose that *certain persons exercise power over others*. The term "power" designates relationships between partners […].
>
> [My emphasis. Translation modified by using the French version of the text.]

Thus, Foucault tends to de-prioritise, in his conceptualisation of power relations, all *forms* of institutions, legality, ideologies, knowledge, norms, disciplines, discursivity, archives, universals, etc. — in brief, all *technologies* of power-knowledge: all these "*things*" (that's Foucault's word) are essentially, teleologically conceived as produced *by* human individuals and returning *to* human individuals. This is *also* the case, problematically, when it comes to the figure of the "group", although such group may only be conceived, already, as the result of a process of institutionalisation-ideologisation, ideality-iterability *beyond* 'pure' individualities or singularities, etc. Now, of course, the same question could be raised, in more general terms, in relation to individuality as process of individuation and identification: even when Foucault conceives subjection or *sujétion* as the result of a process of subjectivation through objectification[1], this objectification, bizarrely, always seems to *presuppose* the subjective or individual ipseity of human "persons" *engaged* firsthand in antagonistic power relations. So that the definition of subjectivity, or of the self in general, is always envisaged through the prism of power relations and knowledge dispositives: before being anything else, human individuals are defined by Foucault as subjects of power, and this under the form of an *a priori* synthesis: this definition cannot

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[1] Cf. "The Subject and Power": "My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects."

account for its own eventality. By contrast, Derrida, in the wake of Levinas, conceives *sujétion* and subjectivity as the effect of an originary *hospitality* occurring before the self — a haunting which, of course, may also take the form of a violent, even deadly, invasion (see *Adieu*). As such, the self may only *answer*, and "be responsible without autonomy, before and in view of all possible autonomy of the who-subject, etc. The relation to self, in this situation, can only be différance, that is to say alterity, or trace." (Derrida, "'Eating well' or the calculation of the subject") In this sense, power relations are not 'something' that happened to selves, but precisely that which makes the complete stabilisation of something like a 'self' or 'subject' ultimately impossible, through the proliferation of self-tele-technologies of auto-affection and ex-appropriation. This tele-technical dimension of power relations can be tentatively theorised, for instance, through using Derrida's notion of spectrality, which accounts for the experience of the non-human at the heart of all human experience or practices, of all definition of humanity, and in general in all so-called "human life". Accounting for spectrality challenges this founding alliance, practical-theoretical in essence, between 'humanity' and 'living presence', by pointing to the essential complicity between naturality and technique, and by underlining the originary interdependence between life and non-life through techniques of differential syntheses, grafts, prostheses, tele-communications, etc. This is what Derrida calls, in "*Avouer - l'impossible*", "a techno-biological prosthesis" (I quote): "It is death within life, as the very condition of life." There is no power-relationality, no "living-together", no subjectivity, identity or ipseity, without the spectral haunting of such prosthesticity.

(Be it said in passing, the same spectral contagion should *also* concern all "relationships of communication" or forms of communicability with "informative" purpose, and by extension all linguisticality, "symbolic" or linguistic technicality, either considered in its performative or non-performative dimension. In "The Subject and Power", Foucault is very adamant to maintain a perplexing *typology* of "human" relationships, distinguishing taxonomically (and, therefore, ontologically) between the "type" of relationships concerned with "the production of meaning" (technologies of language, tele-communications, teaching and learning, or symbolicity at large) and what he defines as the *proper* place of power, a "type" of relationships concerned with the conduct of men… In spite of their blatant and constant "overlapping", these two types of relationships are said to be "distinct" in nature, to *not belong* to the same *proper* — the *proper place of power*, its "most elementary form", being defined as the "type" of relational practices testifying of human actions *over* human actions, a general drive of 'overness' or superiority (not to say 'sovereignty') orientated towards "domination" or "obedience", although these last terms are neither defined nor clearly thematised. How does the "obedience" entailed by power relations differ, taxonomically and ontologically, from the juridic force, the force of law or legitimacy, attached to linguistic technicality?… As often, Foucault is torn between, on the one hand, a hyperbolically disseminating-disseminated representation of power relations and, on the other hand, an ontological reduction thereof to strictly determined "practices" or "phenomena" — usually revolving around traditional structures of

hegemonic politics, governments or disciplines: power, as *the power of living human individuals over other living human individuals.*)

3. This notion of spectrality leads me to a *third* decentralisation: decentring power beyond life or living presence, and especially beyond life *as* power, or, conversely, power *as* life. If resistance is an originary, "superior" force that power can only attempt to manage, this signifies that power is structurally affected by the possibility of loss and failure. Because of infinite resistance, power must go through the test, the ordeal of unpower, which signifies unconditional heterogeneity *within* power: resistance remains to come, always-already interrupting the teleological becoming of power. Power, through the effects of an ever-incomplete self-legitimation, is thus the phantasm of its all-powerful control and mastery, a mastery which is always-already lost, in a state of mourning. This can help us understand power otherwise than just as an infinite expansion of control or management over all resistances and life in general. Power must do with structural loss and expropriation, which is the work of deconstruction, and as such it involves the work of death, under the form of a death drive or otherwise, located *inside* power. Indeed, traditional hermeneutics of power cannot account for suicides (strategic or not), sacrificial impulses (be them individual or collective, institutionalised or not), low- or high-intensity masochisms on the socio-political scale, in short, all autoimmune practices which seem to alter, interrupt or disrupt power, and often in the very name of power. Autoimmunity is the direct result of the incalculability of power relations: in attempting to stabilise the unpredictability of the event, in protecting itself against the eventality of the other, power must adapt to the resisting other, incorporate resistances, and violate itself by the same token (see Derrida, *Archive fever*). The powerful self loses itself in the process. Admittedly, this partial or temporary loss may *also* be the sign of *another* empowerment, a powerful metamorphosis with short- or long-term gains. But this transformation will have already been a becoming-other, a gift of death, a sacrifice, and this even if, or *because*, it was initially operated in the name of *more* power, *more* life: *plus de pouvoir* or *plus de vie*. Derrida calls *sur-vie* (sur-vival) this figure exceeding the opposition between life and death, excessively supplementing and supplying both life and death with *more* life, and already not life any*more* (*plus* de vie) (cf. "Living on", *Parages*)… "*La vie au-delà de la vie, la vie plus que la vie*": this suggests the force of a hypervital survival beyond life and death; survivance and revenance at work within 'bare' life; power and vitality going through the aporetic experience of *différance*, in and through unpower and death, in order to *differ from themselves*, and thus live *on* and *sur-vive* beyond mere life, in the name of life, into an excessive life, into *another* life. In any case, we have to assume the notion of an autoimmune drive or force, the work of *différance* and death within power, in the name of power, *even*, and maybe *most of all*, as we are trying to define something as 'biopower' or 'power over life' (for a reflection on biopower and biopolitics, see Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign I*; Jean-Luc Nancy: "Note sur le terme de «biopolitique»"; or Catherine Malabou: "Biopolitics as a form of sovereignty").

4. The *fourth* decentring involves a strategic shift from power conceived essentially as action or "activity", to an interpretation in terms of an originary passivity… Through his late definition of power, Foucault seemed to have transferred some of the questions related to individuality (or individuation), and the many conceptual problems correlated to those, from the level of the individual *person* or *subject* to that of the interplay of actions operated by said individuals: power, *before* being an inter-individual or inter-subjective relation, is thus defined as "actions over actions". Certainly, but the same divisibility and loss of origin re-emerge at this infra- or trans-individual level too, again with self-deconstructive results: the definition of the action, like that of the individual, must also be considered as an effect of power-knowledge. Indeed, the prioritisation of activity within praxis supposes the idea that actions and reactions are always-already active. But for reaction to be active, it must have been imprinted or affected by another, prior action, which signifies that power must *first* be passive in order to be active; and this begins, obviously, with the so-called "first" action, and before it. This suggests an essential re-activity prior to activity, and therefore the necessity of a structural passivity in all matters of politics, power, and praxis, of an unpower affecting all pragmatics with the effects of an originary passion or passivity. However, the notion of 'originary passivity' is itself paradoxical: passivity, by definition, divides originarity, deferring and differing the act or actuality of the action, also interrupting the power of the performative *before* its self-legitimation, its legitimation as self-contained 'act' or 'operation'. This passivity is a vulnerability prior to sovereignty and war, and to *pólemos* in general. It also prevents us from isolating, defining or analysing the singularity of an act or an action as such, because no action is ever absolutely foundational or self-founding — and this concerns 'discursive' and so-called 'extra-discursive' practices all the same. Accounting for passion, before all active intentionality and strategic performativity, signifies a structural passive reception, that of *another* power-knowledge relation, of *another force* (starting with the force attached to the interpretative models through which the 'action' itself, and its archive, are interpreted). This 'other force' is itself divided through logics of interpretability and testimoniality, which already affect and alter the definition of action as event or singularity. As a result, the juridico-symbolic origin of action, of an action, is always differed. This raises the question of relationality itself, the definition of such relationality, and of the forces comprised in the so-called relation — forces which are always-already taken within an interpretative-performative process, *before their ex-pression* or *effort* (*ex-fortis*) *as* forces.

The theoretical implications, here, are massive. Power is without origin and never intervenes as such, as an autonomous or autotelic act or action, or set of actions, and *certainly not as a decision or strategy which would apply itself to a "fundamentally heterogeneous ensemble"*, or which would "integrate" or "cover" a field of 'pure' "heterogeneities", singularities, practices, bodies or forces (see "Le jeu de Michel Foucault" or *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, "Method"). This necessity unsettles the methodological and theoretical protocols consubstantial with "cartographical" accounts of so-called *heterogeneous* spaces (or heterotopias), and "archeologies of knowledge" (conceived as an historical identification

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

of discursive *discontinuities*), or more generally all "archaeological" analyses envisaged as the genealogical unveiling of an originary *event*, a closuring decision, decision conceived as the *power* to exclude 'otherness' or 'alterity', etc. This points to the impossibility to even conceive or seize something like pure heterogeneity, as we necessarily inherit our interpretative models from power-knowledge dispositives, even the most refined or sophisticated, or the most 'critical'. This indicates, more generally, the risk of substantialising, re-homogenising and therefore domesticating 'alterity', and of confirming, through essentialisation, the phantasmic decision governing the identity/alterity divide, even in the name of its critical re-appreciation: indeed, such critique may be done only with reference to criteria dependent on power-knowledge dispositives, starting with the ontological or metaphysical reductions and exclusions operated by hegemonic powers or discourses. I quote Derrida ("Cogito and the history of madness"): "In attempting to write the history of the decision, of division [*partage*], of difference, one runs the risk of construing [*constituer*] said division as an event or a structure occurring, subsequently, to the prior unity of an originary presence — thereby confirming metaphysics in its fundamental operation." (Translation modified.) In other words, there is always the risk that the description of power relations, and of their effects of homogeneity-heterogeneity, only mimic the legitimising and legitimated practices or discourses on which those power relations depend. This starts, obviously, with the necessary recourse to the *archive*, that is to say, *always*, an *institutionalised* archive: it supposes the interpretative-performative power of archivation, power which can never be fully accounted for by hermeneutics of power-knowledge, but which is always presupposed by those hermeneutics. For instance: who may pretend, in all rigour, to give account of the repressed voices of history, without already giving in to archival power, and therefore speaking *in the name of* those voices, homogenising them by the same gesture? All this, of course, should complicate the protocols of any *historical* analysis of power relations, since the discipline of history is always affected by an essential historiographical-becoming, the power of writing/making history being one of the main prerogatives of power. However, it is *also* a locus of resistance: naturally, the interpretative-performative force of archivation is not enclosed onto itself, as the archive is non-presentational; the performative of the archive is always-already to-come, suspended to the force of another interpretation, of an interpretative event, always contextual and singular. Thus, archivation, even the most institutionalised or stabilised, is never given: it supposes the arche-originary force of an "archival violence" or "arch-performative" which is in no One's power: a writing of power before of beyond power, violence of a *graphy* without origin and which remains to come. This irruptive and transformative violence is *neither* external *nor* contrary to archivality 'itself': it is presupposed in its very conditions of possibility, commanding the legibility-illegibility of an archived event which may only appear as such, as archive and event, through the testimonial-interpretative mechanism of an historical-fictional account to come. But this account, as it must now be clear, will never be absolutely neutral or without violence (cf. Derrida, *Archive Fever* or "The Typewriter ribbon").

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

5. For the same reasons, accounting for the structural passivity in and of praxis also challenges the conceptual division between "practices" and "textual traces" (cf. Foucault, "My Body, This Paper, this Fire"); it questions, more fundamentally, the primacy of the former over the latter and, metonymically, the primacy of practices over discursivity, of power over knowledge, of extra-discursive practices over discursive practices, etc. More generally, it challenges the idea that power is actively *productive* of knowledge(s) (cf. *Discipline and Punish*). And this would constitute my *fifth* decentralisation. I will conclude on this. The question of a specific force attached to knowledge and discourses, the relative autonomy of *savoir* in its relation to *pouvoir*, remains certainly the most enduring and the most enigmatic element of Foucault's legacy. It is also the one which provokes thought with the most force and the most urgency [*qui nous donne à penser avec la plus grande force et la plus grande urgence*]. Considering the respiration of an infinite concatenation, *pouvoir-savoir-pouvoir*, unless it be *savoir-pouvoir-savoir*, maybe it is time to leave the power-knowledge distinction behind us, and to de-prioritise the sovereign power of its cutting dichotomy, in the name of a certain destituting performativity. In this "originary performativity", power and knowledge are mutually implicated through the force of a *faire savoir* ('make-to-know', 'make-known', 'make-knowledge'), a fabular essence of linguisticality which exceeds the distinction between action and cognition (see Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. 1*). This force is immediately pragmatic, although it suggests a pragmaticality of linguisticality before praxis, before activity and before power; in this "violence of the law before the law, before meaning" (*Spectres of Marx*), the performative is *not* a 'speech *act*', *even less* a power.

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The force of this originary performativity is by definition pre-subjective and pre-empirical; it structures and affects empiricity before the reduction of experience to active praxis, activity, self-legitimating action. But the structural passivity implied by this performative violence is *not* paralysing or disengaging. Quite the opposite. It is the very condition for engagement. Engagement, traditionally conceived as an active, deliberate operation, be it individual or collective, is only possible in relation to an *arche-originary gage* (see Derrida, *Politics of friendship*), a binding sociality which *engages* before deliberate engagement: it is an "originary sociality" before force- or power-relationality… Here, today, individually or together in this conference, we say that we are 'engaging' Foucault. It is true, but it is possible only because we have first received the gage of Foucault, the binding obligation of Foucault's heritage. He has engaged us long before we have engaged him. And Foucault is *not* an angel: the violence of his legacy, filtered through conflictual interpretations at war, its performative impact on the social, political, and juridical scenes, the many fights, resistances and engagements that his analyses have triggered locally and globally — we can feel them everywhere around us… Everyone is bound to Foucauldian thought today, one way or another. Everyone is a 'Foucauldian', even through the most vociferating or contemptuous of denials. And the violence of this legacy is certainly all the

Thomas Clément Mercier   thomas.mercier@kcl.ac.uk

more powerful and binding when it is secret or subconscious, shaping up indistinctively, though forcefully, through indirect influences, incompatible orders, impossible alliances. Even as we must admit the irruptive force of the 'Foucault'-event, its scope and its impact remain impossible to delineate, and this is still the case today; it manifests itself through the shapeless form of an unrecognisable violence, that of a disruptive event, disruptive first and foremost *because* of its essential indecipherability. This performative force that I am trying to describe here, I will be very adamant *not* to call it a "*soft*-power": who can deny the arresting force of this influence? the terrorising haunting of these contradictory injunctions? the violence of this heteronomic asymmetry and its demand of responsibility?… As such, this call involves a power or a violence that cannot be fully analysed or measured; it exceeds empiricity or theoreticity. But even so, we have no other choice but to respond to it, before deliberate responsibility, and to enact it and confirm it, each time anew, through a performative which precedes and engages us, before us, before the subject. It is the power of an event which remains to-come, *before* us because it is *behind* us, and in relation to which we are without power and without knowledge. But it is necessity itself.

Il doit y avoir un pouvoir / impouvoir.

In his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault had kind words for a *certain* philosophical practice — a late blessing which was probably surprising and expected in equal measures, and which, at least, will seem out of character to those who still consider Foucault as an anti-philosopher. Let's note, though, that his blessing is not directed toward *any* form of philosophical practice. What is, anyway, a philosophical *practice*?… Foucault says that philosophy must be "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought." Perhaps, but I would say that this exercise necessarily starts *before* the self, *before* activity, and perhaps *before* thought. The gage of philosophy, under the form of an injunction of thought towards otherness, is a violence without origin. This unpower is the condition for power. In the necessity of this gage, unpower is both enabling and incapacitating: at its heart, this empowerment is also arresting, debilitating, sovereignly disarming. This suggests the violence of a hyper-sovereignty, before and beyond all sovereignties, before and beyond power: violence of their self-difference or auto-immunity; violence of their deconstruction at work.