

Foucault v Freud: Unthought, Unconscious and Kant's "Rhapsody of Perceptions"

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In this article, I examine the relation between Foucault's concept of the Unthought, Freud's concept of the Unconscious (Ucs), and their common Kantian roots. Kant allows the possibility of what he calls "rhapsodies of perception": manifolds of experientially based representations that resist synthesis into items of conscious thought or even appearances. He adds the rider, however, that, by virtue of their failure to make it into Consciousness (Cs), such representations are "of no concern-to-us." This rider sets him apart from both Foucault and Freud, who take the "Unthought" and the "Unconscious" respectively to have prominent effects upon human action. I address two questions that arise from this difference between Foucault, Freud and Kant: (1) How (if at all) can we reconcile Kant's apparently exclusive concern with the *conscious* dimensions of human thought with Foucault's and Freud's positions that the Unthought and the Ucs respectively play a prominent role in determining human action? (2) How (if at all) can we distinguish Freud's Ucs and Foucault's Unthought from each other? The latter question takes on special salience in the light of Foucault's express desire to keep his concept of the Unthought close to the Freudian concept of the Ucs, and specifically to position the

Ucs as a as a special form of the Unthought. I argue that it is better to see the Ucs and the Unthought as different lines of development from their common root in Kant's rhapsodies of perception.

I. (Foucault & Freud) v Kant

In this article I address two questions: (1) How (if at all) can we reconcile Kant's apparently exclusive concern with the *conscious* dimensions of human thought with Foucault's and Freud's positions that the Unthought and the Unconscious (Ucs) respectively play a prominent role in determining human action? (2) How (if at all) can we distinguish Freud's Ucs and Foucault's Unthought from each other? I begin with a brief summary of the account of "Man" that Foucault offers in *The Order of Things* (OT).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault introduces what he calls "modern thought:" a quasi-Kantian structure in which a new character, "Man," takes on the role of thinker. Man operates as what Foucault calls "an empirico-transcendental doublet," who, by empirical means, reflexively acquires knowledge of the limits of his own knowledge. For Foucault, the limits in question trench upon not only the physiological limitations of Man's experiences but also upon the historical conditions in which he lives. As Foucault puts it, "there [is] a history [but also, we may add a physiology] of human knowledge which could both be given to empirical knowledge and prescribe its forms" (Foucault, OT, 318-9).

Modern Man is thus caught in a paradox. By recognizing, indeed knowing, the contingent factors that determine the limiting forms of his knowledge, Man opens what Foucault call the "eschatological possibility"—indeed "promise"—of extending those limits. He does so by developing new bodies that in new social and cultural settings enable new forms of experience, which, in turn, enable new knowledges, thereby retrospectively reinstalling the positivistic dependence of knowledge upon experience. In short, it seems that Man is locked into a perpetual exchange between radical eschatological forms of knowledge and conservative renewals of positivism (Foucault, OT, 320). As Foucault makes the point: modern Man is consigned to "a mode of being...that extends from pure apprehension to the empirical clutter...of experiences constantly eluding themselves...the sandy stretches of non-thought." This epistemological bifurcation in Man's being between thought and Unthought, Foucault argues, "constantly exposes his thought to the risk of being swamped by his own being [but, by the same token] enables him to recover his integrity on the basis of [knowing] what eludes him" (Foucault, OT, 322-3). "As a result," Foucault adds, "the question is no longer [as it is for Kant]: How can experience of nature give rise to

necessary judgements? But rather: How can man think what he does not [indeed cannot] think?" (Foucault, OT, 323).

Foucault's Nietzschean answer to this question is not optimistic. On the contrary, he takes the spiral of thought and Unthought to be a Nietzschean death spiral, portending the end of Man as an empirico-transcendental double: "Modern thought is doomed, at every level, to its great preoccupation with recurrence, to its concern with recommencement...in which the return is posited only in the extreme recession of the origin...the ceaseless rending open which frees the origin exactly [and only] to that degree to which it recedes {and thereby] restores the void of origin (Foucault, OT, 334).

This pessimistic prognosis of Man's future raises the urgent question of his replacement. Here I have space only for a brief comment on Foucault's answer. Despite frequent complaints that he adheres too closely to Nietzsche, Foucault's answer is *not* Nietzsche's "superman." On the contrary, even in *The Order of Things* Foucault leaves open the question of Man's replacement. And by the time of his final work, his answer has become explicitly anti-Nietzschean. To be specific, rather than favoring the Nietzschean superman, he veers towards the Stoic ethic of controlling one's passions: in particular, moderating the wild swings of imagination that corrode pleasures into compulsions (a regime of "self-control" that Foucault calls, not altogether propitiously, "care for the self").¹

I turn now to the first of the two questions that I will be examining, namely how (if at all) to reconcile Kant's focus upon consciousness (Cs) with Foucault's and Freud's focus upon the Unthought and the Ucs respectively. I begin by examining how Foucault's account of "Man" as an empirico-transcendental double differs from Kant's account of Man. A first obvious difference is that Kant is not interested in the neo-Kantian project of linking the limits of man's knowledge to both the contingent limits of his perceptual abilities and the constraints that historical circumstances impose upon acquiring knowledge. Instead, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant focuses upon criticizing the role of reason in dialectically extending man's knowledge beyond the limits of what he can experience. More important for our purposes, however, is a second difference: Kant's assertion that any of the representations produced by experience that fall outside the field of thought and Cs, are, as he puts it, "of no concern-to-us" (Kant, CPR, A116, A120). Foucault and Freud, by contrast, assign prominent roles to the Ucs (Freud) and Unthought (Foucault) as determinants of much human behavior.

This puts us on the two horns of a dilemma: *either* it is the case that Kant is mistaken in giving such short shrift to representations that fall outside thought, *or* it is the case that Foucault and Freud are mistaken in the prominent role that they assign to the Unthought and Ucs respectively. I argue for the first horn of this dilemma,

namely that Kant is mistaken in skipping so lightly over the Unthought. I stress, however, that I am not making the stronger negative ontological claim that there is no space within a Kantian ontology of mind for key elements of the Unthought (and of the Ucs for that matter). On the contrary, I will show that Kant makes a very precise space for such elements. At the same time, however—and here's the nub of his difference from Foucault and Freud—Kant encourages us to overlook this space for the Unthought/Unconscious, because, as he puts it, whatever in the field of mental phenomena cannot be thought or enter Cs, is “nothing to us, and do[es] not in the least concern us” except as preliminary stages along the path to what does concern us, namely thought and knowledge (Kant CPR, A116, and see too A120) Let us look more carefully at how the Kantian architectonic of the mind allows, but at the same time dismisses, representations that defy conscious thought.

For Kant, the forms of knowledge are either fixed *a priori* (including what he calls “the categories,” space, time, and causality) or they are concepts that the faculty of judgment applies to appearances as a means of transforming them into thought and ultimately into knowledge. For example, consider the amazing imaginative leap of judgement by which Newton transformed the appearances of the planets orbiting the sun by thinking them as instances of the same gravitational mechanism that causes an apple to fall towards the earth (Lacan, XI, 41-43).

This work of the faculty of judgment in conceptualizing appearances, Kant tells us, is—and will remain—a mystery, the production of what he calls a “mother-wit...an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activities nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover” (Kant, CPR, B172, B180-1). The consequent unpredictability of leaps of judgement—in particular, the unpredictability of where on the conceptual map their leap will land—is coupled with a second, even more extreme form of unpredictability: namely the possibility of their misfiring altogether, in the sense of failing to land anywhere that counts. To put this possibility in Kantian terms: synthesized appearances may, on occasions, fail to consolidate into any sort of conceptually determined item of knowledge. For example, a trail of illuminated points that makes an appearance in the Heavens may fail to consolidate conceptually into the trajectory of any sort of heavenly body, and instead remain at the level of a mysterious “unresolved” appearance (perhaps even an unsynthesized string of perceptions) that lack any clear ontological status within the observer's conceptual field.

Kant refers to such possibilities in a variety of ways: “Appearances might very well be so constituted that the understanding should not find them to be in accordance with the conditions of its unity. Everything might be in such confusion that...nothing presented itself which might yield a rule of synthesis...The concept would then be altogether empty, null and meaningless” (Kant, CPR, B123). He also

gestures towards the possibility of a more basic failure of synthesis, in which it is the perceptions themselves that fail to cohere into any sort of appearance: “Perceptions would not then belong to an experience, consequently would be without an object, merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream” (Kant, CPR, A112). (In the light of Freud’s reference to dreams as the royal road to the Ucs, I find the last quotation especially salient.) And finally, Kant remarks that: “Experience, however, rests on the synthetic unity of appearances...Apart from such synthesis, it would not be knowledge, but [instead] a [mere] *rhapsody of perceptions*” (Kant, CPR, B195, italics mine).²

Thus, it seems clear, that within a Kantian ontology there is indeed space for something like the Unthought, specifically the failure of appearances to synthesize into determinate thought, and, at an even more basic level, “rhapsodies of perception...even less than dreams,” in which manifolds of perceptions fail to synthesize into appearances (Kant, CPR, B195; A112). Kant, as I indicated, adds an important rider, however: namely that an appearance (or the intuition that causes it) which fails to synthesize into thought (and thus into knowledge) is, as he puts it, “of no concern-to-us” (Kant, CPR, A116).³ And, I argue, it is precisely for this reason—namely that Kant takes any such renegade appearances to be “of no concern to us”—that he overlooks the vicious spiral that Foucault notes between thought and Unthought.⁴

In sum, the difference between Kant, on the one side, and both Foucault and Freud on the other, resides not at an ontological level, in Kant’s disallowing the possibility of representations that are not consciously thought. On the contrary, Kant allows the existence of precisely such “unthought” (and, in a literal sense, “unconscious”) representations—indeed, his doing so constitutes one of the important Kantian roots that Foucault and Freud share. Where Kant differs from both Foucault and Freud, however, is that they deny Kant’s rider that such representations are “of no concern-to-us.” On the contrary, it is precisely the prominent role of such representations (as opposed to their mere existence) that, in different ways, underpins both Foucault’s Unthought and Freud’s Ucs.

II. Freud v Foucault

I turn now to the second of my overarching questions: namely that in the light of their shared Kantian roots, in particular their shared commitment to the prominent role played by representations that fall outside the domain of Cs, how should we differentiate Foucault’s Unthought from Freud’s Ucs? To answer this question fully and fairly, it is necessary to note a major change of tack that Foucault surreptitiously undertakes in his opening discussion of the Unthought in *The Order of Things*—a

change that constitutes a necessary course-correction if, as Foucault clearly desires, his concept of the Unthought is to be in close touch with the Freudian Ucs.⁵ To be specific, a short way into his discussion of the Unthought, instead of defining it as he does initially, namely as a “dark continent” underlying Consciousness (a popular but decidedly inappropriate definition of the Freudian Ucs) Foucault switches to a concept of the Unthought that aligns with a more straightforwardly Freudian—indeed Lacanian—concept of the Ucs⁶. As Foucault puts it: “The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shriveled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other...it is both exterior to him and indispensable to him [in Lacanian terms, we may say, it is “extimate”]: in one sense, the shadow cast by man as he emerged in the field of knowledge; in another, the blind stain by which it is possible to know him” (Foucault, OT, 326).

In short, Foucault redefines the Unthought: not as a dark abyss, empty of thought, from which, in a revolutionary moment, thought emerges into the clear light of day (also a decidedly un-Freudian conception of the Ucs), but instead as a corrosive element of the formal structure within which thinking takes place, which eats away at thought from within. He adds that, in so far as it is taken for granted by particular acts of thinking, the Unthought will do its work “off-line.” In the same way that, during everyday acts of speaking, the work of the rules of language in structuring what is said, gets overlooked: “given to representation in a form both positive and empirical, yet not transparent to the naïve consciousness [these rules] give rise to partial consciousnesses of themselves, but can never be wholly illuminated except by a reflexive form of knowledge” (Foucault, OT, 363).

In his essay “Science and Truth” (S&T), Lacan makes a similar point in discussing the formal structures that Lévi-Strauss takes to govern the discursive production of myths. Lacan points out that typically such structures (he calls them “Lévi-Straussian graphs”) also do their work under off-line, as it were. Although, he also points out, this in no way means that they function as some sort of inaccessible dark continent underlying “primitive thought”. On the contrary, Lacan cites Lévi-Strauss’s comment that a person for whom myth is a cultural form “is himself fully capable of drawing the Lévi-Straussian graph” (Lacan, S&T, 11).⁷ More generally, Lacan makes the point that, although, in the process of their application, cultural forms may well be bracketed, this does not mean that they sink into unawareness let alone reside permanently in darkness. On the contrary, they may remain fully present in the user’s thoughts, albeit in the background, in the same way that, while viewing the exhibits in a museum, I may retain a niggling concern that the cloak room clerk will misplace my coat and bag” (Lacan, X1, 13). Such formal structures that govern our discourses, while being taken for granted to the point of being back-grounded in our thoughts, constitute what Lacan calls “*one* unconscious”—meaning “one

unconscious among many”—*but without being the Ucs as such, in its full Freudian sense* (Lacan, X1, 13).

Here Lacan is using the term “unconscious” as a generalized structural category of which the Freudian Ucs is a special case, in much the way that Foucault uses the term “Unthought”, namely as a generalized structure for thinking of which the Freudian Ucs is a recent manifestation. But on closer inspection, it is clear that ultimately Lacan rejects this structuralist point of view. He insists that, *even in the case of Lévi-Straussian graphs*, any such purely structuralist approach to the Ucs is inadequate because, he says, it is “a reduction which neglects the subject” (Lacan, S&T, 20). For example, he asserts, a purely structuralist account of myth omits the constitutive process of “readying [*mise en étañ*] of the subject” which is necessary for participation in mythopaeic practices (Lacan, S&T, 20). Equally, a structuralist approach to the Ucs fails to account for the constitutive acts of *repression* by which, in responding to the impact of what Lacan calls “the signifier” (specifically “the signifier as material cause”), the subject is constituted (Lacan, S&T, 24).

What is the process of repression that a structuralist account fails to incorporate? How does it differ from a mere state of unawareness or being “off-line,” and what role does it play in constituting the subject? To put it briefly (and here I use Freud’s metapsychological account from his 1915 article “Repression”) the core contents of the Ucs consist of what Freud calls “primary repressed” materials. Freud identifies them as “instinctual memory traces”, which, like the marks made on the wax tablet that sits at the heart of Freud’s “mystic writing pad,” are permanent effects—what he calls “*Vorstellungen*”. They are registered in the subject’s neuronal memory circuits by singular experiences of instinctual compulsion; and remain in place long after the experiences that caused them have vanished from consciousness (Freud, GPT, 207).

In what sense, then, are these memory-traces “repressed,” indeed “*primary repressed*”? Before explicating the concept of primal repression, and, in particular, explaining its role in constituting the subject, I need to make some terminological notes. Firstly, I note that there is an unfortunate ambiguity in translating the German term “*Vorstellung*” that Freud uses to describe instinctual memory-traces. On the one hand, the term means a “presentation” or “trace”; on the other hand, it means a “representation” in the more traditional sense of having an intentional content or meaning. It is important to recognize that the “*Vorstellungen*” which Freud has in mind as the “memory-traces” that form the contents of the Ucs, are *not* “representations” in the traditional sense. Instead, they are mere “presentations,” which, Freud points out, require considerable reworking by the processes of mental organization before they can take on the exalted status of full-blooded

representations, let alone of thoughts.⁸ Note also that, on occasions, where it seems appropriate, I will be following the English Standard Edition of Freud's works in using the term "instinct" as a translation of Freud's German term "*Trieb*," rather than taking it as a translation of its German homonym "*Instinkt*". Lacan famously points out that this translation is misleading, in so far as Freud explicitly distances what he calls "*Trieb*" from "biological urge" (the usual sense of "instinct"). Instead, he takes it to be what Lacan more aptly calls "drive" (French "*pulsion*") which (in his Seminar X) Lacan refers to as a "natural desire" (Lacan, X, 316). A further terminological complication: in the context of a discussion of repression, Freud remarks that the energy (or what he calls cathexis) that fuels the instincts (*Triebe*) is identical with "libido." He justifies this equation by assuring us that what is at issue in the context of repression is "the fate of the *sexual* impulses" (*sexual-Triebe*) rather than the instincts of self-preservation (*Ich-Triebe*) upon which the sexual instincts "lean" (Freud, GPT 130). In the following discussion of repression, I therefore take the term "instinct" to be restricted to "sexual instinct," and, where appropriate, exchange it for the Lacanian term "drive."

For Freud, the primary repression of instinctual memory-traces involves the ego in a tricky balancing act, between, on the one hand, "anti-cathecting" instinctual memory-traces in the sense of working to keep them off the list of the (consciously) most-wanted, while, on the other hand, continuing to reap the pleasures that are gleaned from realizing the instincts: for example, continuing to reap the instinctive oral pleasures that, once upon a time, were gleaned from sucking the mother's breast, while firmly crossing her breast off the list of what the ego consciously wants to suck. This involves organizing—and specifically distributing energy to—the different possible ways of realizing the instincts so that they satisfy the following two mutually conflicting requirements:

- (1) Attaining the pleasure (we might say "relief") produced by the realization of the instinctual compulsions which uses up—or as Freud says "discharges"—the libidinal energy that the compulsions accumulate. This, Freud tells us, is the work of "The Pleasure Principle".
- (2) Avoiding the (real or imagined) dangers which the ego thinks that realizing the instincts will incur. This is the work of what Freud calls "The Reality Principle".

How do we reconcile these two apparently mutually contradictory principles: having the pleasure of eating your cake, while avoiding the danger of starvation by keeping the cake ready to hand? The Freudian theoretical (but also the practical human) solution is to open pathways (what Freud calls "*Bahnungen*") between the primary

repressed instinctual memory-traces and other “derivative” memory traces (Freud, GPT, 107). These pathways facilitate the transfer of energy between the two sets of traces, so that the acts of realizing the “derivative” traces also takes on a compulsive quality, thus creating a burst of pleasure when their energy is discharged *qua* used up in mobilizing actions through which they are realized. The pathways in question are based upon “associative connections” between the primary repressed traces and their derivatives. The associations in question are not a matter of *rational* connection between the contents of the memory traces. Instead, they are based upon the familiar non-rational relations that create associations between memories more generally: for example, similarity, juxtaposition, analogy, etc. Freud’s key assumption is that the derivatives will be “repressed”—anti-cathected by the ego—to the extent that the ego judges that their associations with the primary repressed materials are so close that their realization constitutes a danger—the same danger that causes the ego to anti-cathect the primary repressed materials. Conversely, however—and here is the key point that lets in the Pleasure Principle—if the associations are, as Freud puts it, so “remote” that little in them functions as a reminder of the primary repressed materials then the derivatives sidestep this anti-cathexis, and consequently, with the help of a little more organization (that I discuss shortly) are able to make it into Cs, albeit in a “distorted” form. This “distortion” (or, as Freud also calls it, “censorship”) is a function of the derivatives’ remoteness from the primary repressed materials (Freud, GPT, 106-7).

Freud identifies the extra level of organization that is required to elevate an unconscious memory-trace into Cs to be a matter of a “hyper-cathexis” (an extra injection of energy) that is enabled by the “linking up of it with the verbal idea of the words corresponding to it”—a “linking up” that we may, without too much of a stretch, identify with the Kantian process of conceptualization and judgement (Freud, GPT, 147). Freud suggests that “It is such hypercathexes, we may suppose, that bring about higher organization in the mind and makes it possible for the primary process to be succeeded by the secondary process which dominates the Pcs [and, of course, the Cs]” (GPT, 147). Freud concludes, then, that what characterizes repression is the failure of precisely this higher level of organization, specifically the “den[ial] to the rejected idea [of its] translation...into words” (GPT, 147).

A consequence of Freud’s theory is that it is the ideational representatives (memory-traces) of the instincts that are repressed, not the instincts themselves which, despite (indeed, we may say, because of) the repression of their ideational representatives, are able to continue on their merry way (Freud, GPT, 126). Freud’s arrival at this conclusion presupposes that the vicissitudes of the drive, by which the instinctual representatives of the drives are associated with their derivatives,

preserves the drives (and their pleasures) albeit in a distorted form that sidesteps the dangers thought up by the ego.

In what sense may we say that a drive is “preserved” by its vicissitudes, as opposed to becoming a different drive? It is because the associations (*Bahnungen*) between the primally repressed and their derivatives transfer energy from the former to the latter, so that the discharge of energy by the latter is a discharge by proxy of the energy belonging to the former. At the same time, however, the dangers that the ego recognizes to be implicated in the realization of the drives are bypassed, because the derivatives through which this proxy realization takes place are so remote from the primary repressed memory traces that the dangers that the ego thinks attend the realization of the drives no longer apply.

Note that this whole argument depends crucially upon the difference in logic between, on the one hand, the rational connections thought up by the ego, and, on the other hand, the non-rational associative connections that the Ucs makes between the primary repressed and its derivatives. This difference in logic allows the following fortunate conjuncture: on the one hand, derivatives may be so closely associated with the primally repressed materials that the energy of the latter is discharged by the realization of the former, but, on the other hand, at a rational level, they are remote enough that the dangers thought up by the ego in relation to the realization of the instincts no longer apply to the realization of the derivatives.

For example (and here I draw upon an example that Lacan gives in Seminar X) the drive to masturbate may be transformed into the compulsion to write (Lacan, X, 316). In Freud's terms, we can take this as a case of the drive undergoing the vicissitude of sublimation, which allows it to achieve its goal (of pleasure) “*zielgehemmt*” (aim-inhibited). As Lacan puts the point more generally, “The third of the four fundamental vicissitudes of the drive that Freud posits [in his “Instincts and Vicissitudes” essay] is sublimation. Well, in this article, Freud tells us repeatedly that sublimation is also satisfaction of the drive, whereas it is *zielgehemmt*, inhibited in its aim” (Lacan, XI, 165; Freud GPT, 91 and 87).⁹ (We see here too the way in which, while preserving the drive and its pleasures, the object of the drive may be switched: penis swapped for pen, or, to put it in a way that highlights the associative connections, “penis” swapped for “pen”.)

This account points to the key role of fantasy in the structure of the drive and its vicissitudes. The associative connections between the primary repressed and their derivatives are the building blocks for fantasy together with the unconscious desires that it frames. For example, the associations between, on the one “hand,” the sucking thumb and, on the other hand, the forbidden mother's breast may enable the fantasy of “having the mother” which, in turn, frames an ucs desire to have her.¹⁰

Lacan takes this account of the relation between desire and the drive in a slightly different direction. He takes the instinct to be equivalent to a “natural desire”—what he calls a desire that the instinct “satisfies naturally,” and that Freud, by contrast, calls an “instinctual wish-impulse” (Lacan, X, 316; Freud, GPT, 134). Lacan then adds that there is an egoic meta-desire to hold back the realization of the instinctual “natural desire”. In so far as it is a desire to avoid danger, this meta-desire to hold back the realization of the instinctual “natural desire”—what Lacan calls “a desire not to desire”—is a manifestation of Freud’s Reality Principle.¹¹ The instinctual “natural desires,” by contrast, are manifestations of the Pleasure Principle. This coexistence of the “natural desire” with the meta-desire to hold it back takes the form of a struggle between the Reality Principle and the Pleasure Principle. Specifically, it is a struggle over how to dispose of the neuronal energy invested in the instinctual memory traces: whether to block (or at least delay) its accumulation (the work of the Reality Principle) or instead to discharge it (the work of the Pleasure Principle).

A radical consequence of this Freudian conception of the Ucs and its constitutive process of repression is that what stands in need of explanation is not the transformation of Cs ideas into the Ucs, but instead the reverse: namely why and how unconscious ideas may make it into Cs.¹² To put it more bluntly: Freud takes it that all ideas are Ucs by nature—as he puts it: “In psychoanalysis there is no choice but to declare mental processes to be in themselves unconscious.” Thus what needs explaining is how conscious ideas are elevated into Cs, rather than how they are banished into the Ucs (Freud, GPT 121). Significantly for our purposes, it is in the context of making precisely this point that Freud acknowledges Kant, specifically by pointing to Kant’s thesis of a gap between appearances and thought: “Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perception is subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with the phenomena perceived but never really discerned, so psychoanalysis bids us not to set conscious perception in the place of the unconscious mental process” (Freud, GPT, 121). On the basis of this remark, it is, I think, not too much a stretch to take Freud to be generously allowing that his notion of the Ucs is an extension of the Kantian concept of a domain of pre-conceptualized, pre-verbalized appearances. (And, one might add, Freud seems more prepared to allow this parallel than Foucault, despite Foucault’s patent desire to stay close to Freud.)

Where does all of this leave my question of the relation between Foucault’s Unthought and the Freudian Ucs? Using Lacan’s terminology, it is tempting to take the Unthought as, like Lévi-Strauss’s graphs, “*an* unconscious,” rather than “*the* Ucs”, specifically a structuring element of thought which is “unconscious” in the weak, generalized sense that it is (to repeat the quotation I gave earlier) “given to representation in a form both positive and empirical, yet not transparent to the naïve

consciousness” (Foucault, OT, p.363). From this point of view, the Unthought belongs to the same family of generalized “unconscious structures” as the Freudian Ucs, but falls short of the latter by virtue of lacking a full-blooded process of repression. In compensation for this lack, however, the Unthought has the added feature that, in its struggle with thought, it corrodes thought from within. The Freudian Ucs, by contrast, although boasting the function of repression, operates as a source (rather than a corrosive agent) for conscious thoughts, namely those that, privileged by virtue of their remoteness from the fixed set of primary repressed *Vorstellungen*, pass the rigorous processes of “reality testing” and thus evade “censorship.” This suggestion is a reverse form of what seems to be Foucault’s position, namely that the Unthought is a generalized category of which the Freudian Ucs is a special case. In my conclusion I attempt to tie together these various and varied points of difference between the Unthought and the Ucs.

III. Conclusion

Let us return to the two questions from which I began: (1) How (if at all) can we reconcile Kant’s apparently exclusive concern with the *conscious* dimensions of human thought with Foucault’s and Freud’s positions that the Unthought and the Ucs respectively play a prominent role in determining human action? (2) How (if at all) can we distinguish Freud’s Ucs and Foucault’s Unthought from each other? I have answered these questions along the following lines: In answer to the first question (1), I have argued that Kant is mistaken in dismissing representations that fall outside the domain of conscious thought as being “of no concern-to-us.” But this should not detract from Kant’s radical ontological break (a break for which, I noted, Freud gives him credit) which opens a space for representations that fall outside the domain of Cs—a space that both Freud and Foucault fill in their different ways: Freud with the Ucs, and Foucault with the Unthought. In answer to the second question (2), I tabled a suggestion at the end of the last section that Foucault’s Unthought is an instance of a generalized “unconscious structure”-“*an* unconscious” as Lacan puts it-but, unlike the Freudian Ucs, the Unthought lacks the element of repression, instead functioning as a corrosive element in its struggle with thought.

To further clarify the relation of Foucault to Freud and Kant, I position Foucault’s Unthought within a three-fold hierarchy of mental structures that fall outside the domain of Consciousness:

Firstly, what Kant calls “rhapsodies of perception”—manifolds of perceptions that, by failing to synthesize into appearances, fall outside the domain of conscious thought, but, for that very reason, Kant adds, are “of no concern-to-us”—“less even than dreams,” he says. *Secondly*, Foucault’s category of the “Unthought,” which also

falls outside the domain of conscious thought, but, unlike Kant's rhapsodies of perception, *is* "of concern-to-us", indeed constitutes one pole of what Foucault nominates as "Man's" defining struggle "between thought and Unthought". *Thirdly*, the Freudian Ucs, which, like Foucault's Unthought, is of concern-to-us, but has the added feature that its contents are *repressed* in the technical Freudian sense of the term.

In terms of this hierarchical trinity of mental structures of non-thought, it is tempting to characterize the trajectory from Kant to Freud to Foucault in terms of the following double movement: firstly, the progressive extraction and elevation to "concern-for-us" of non-conscious elements of Kant's ontology of mental phenomena; secondly, what seems to be a reverse, regressive movement from Freud to Foucault, which impoverishes the concept of the Ucs by dispensing with a theory of repression in favor of a generalized structuralist concept of the Ucs that Foucault calls "Unthought": namely as a purely formal schema, which emerges from, even as it structures, a particular set of discursive practices that have a family resemblance to the Freudian Ucs as its *pater-familias*, but are "unconscious" in the weak sense that, by being taken for granted, they may disappear from awareness.

I suggest a more positive account of Foucault's concept of the Unthought. Its significance resides not merely in being an instance of a generalized category of "unconscious structures," which boasts *the* Freudian Ucs as its headliner. Instead, I suggest, that Foucault's Unthought and Freud's Ucs belong to different branches of the same evolutionary tree, for which Kant's unsynthesized "rhapsody of perceptions" is the progenitor. What differentiates the Unthought and the Ucs to the point that they belong to different species of non-thought as it were? I suggest that it is because, rather than merely lacking the mechanism of repression that is characteristic of Freud's Ucs, Foucault's Unthought has the added alternative feature of functioning as an invasive corrosive agent that undermines the integrity of Man as a thinking agent. Thus, the steps from Kant to Freud to Foucault is not a simple to and fro, with Foucault as a sort of deficient throw-back. Instead, I suggest, that, in its efforts at accommodating representations which fall short of conscious thought, the Kantian evolutionary tree branches in a Freudian direction as well as a different Foucaultian direction—branches that intertwine as well as grow apart.

Finally, I venture a more general methodological conclusion: a better understanding of the Ucs and its complex history requires more care in classifying the domain of non-thought. Specifically, it requires that we neither use a loosened, one-size-fits-all concept of the Ucs that covers significant distinctions between various sub-categories of non-thought, nor assume that the key conceptual elements of the Ucs emerge only when they spring fully formed from the head of Freud. My distinction between the trinity of forms of non-thought posted by Kant, Freud and

Foucault respectively is intended as a contribution to exactly such a hermeneutic project.

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Notes

¹ Lacan, we may note, endorses a similar Stoic ethic, albeit under a different description: namely as a regime of what he calls "desire that involves a defensive phase that makes it identical with not wanting to desire" — a desire on which, Lacan goes on to insist, "one must not give up" (Lacan XI, 253, see too 254 and 223-4). I mention this because of a striking parallel between Foucault and Lacan in other areas—a point to which I return in my discussion of the Ucs.

² Kant refines his account of such failures of synthesis in the context of theorizing the connection but also the gap between the mere "image of an object" (which he equates with its appearance) and a conceptual schema under which the object in question falls: ""Still less is an object of experience or its image ever adequate to...the schema of imagination [that stands] as a rule for the determination of our intuition, in accord with some specific universal concept" (Kant, CPR, B180).

³ Kant focuses upon a different interchange that goes beyond the domain of experience but not beyond the domain of thought, namely the dialectic of reason that, by speculatively extending knowledge claims beyond the safe harbor of experience, produces antinomies.

⁴ And, we may add, for precisely the same reason, the Nietzschean "death of man" is not even on the table of possibilities for Kant.

⁵ Such a desire is apparent in Foucault's remarks on p.326 of OT, where he refers to the Unthought as "what has been termed, directly or indirectly, the unconscious" — a remark that he follows immediately by conjoining the Ucs with what he calls "forms of the unthought in general".

⁶ The question of the relation of Lacan to Foucault merits commentary in its own right. Suffice to say here that among Foucault's first acts upon being appointed head of philosophy at Paris Vincennes was to offer a chair to Lacan. One may also note the parallel publication dates of Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Lacan's *Seminar XI* as well as Lacan's earlier seminal essay "Science and Truth" to which I refer in this article.

⁷ Lacan draws an analogy between, on the one hand, the usual suspension from awareness that accompanies the use of regnant cultural forms (such as hegemonic film genres) and, on the other hand, the act of "checking at the cloak room...at the Museum of Man...a certain number of operative instruments." In both cases, a framework that structures discourses fades from everyday awareness, although, in principle, remains open to recovery (Lacan, S&T, 11).

⁸ A similar difficulty attends the term "idea," which, as the Standard Edition uses it, lacks the connotation of intentionality enjoyed by the English term "idea". To be specific, the Standard edition uses this term in conjunction with the adjective "unconscious," as akin to the Kantian concept of "what comes from the object, and is registered in the 'mnemonic systems'" and thus is the complement of the "quota of affect" that accompanies the ideational component of an appearance (Laplanche and Pontalis, 200).

⁹ Lacan makes a mistake here. Sublimation is the fourth on Freud's list, not the third. One can only speculate why Lacan makes the mistake of elevating the fourth listed sublimation to third place. Perhaps it is in an effort to make sublimation into the holy ghost of a contracted trinity of vicissitudes, from which repression itself has been repressed (!).

¹⁰ There are of course other interpretations of this example, the validity of which must be sorted out by more elaborate analytic work. In particular, it may be that, rather than the thumb being directly associated with the mother by virtue of their shared property as objects to suck, the thumb may be associated with the penis, which, at least retrospectively, comes to be associated with having the mother or at least with having what she wants. Or there may be an even less direct relation between the thumb-sucking and Ucs desire for the mother, as in the relation between desire for the mother and the cotton reel in the *Fort-Da* game played by Freud's infant grandson (XI, 62-63).

¹¹ We may root this meta-desire, in turn, in Freud's "instincts of self-preservation. But Lacan refuses to take this extra step—a refusal that reflects a certain difficulty in Freud concerning the major structural differences between the instincts of self-preservation and the sexual instincts, which, in turn, cast doubt upon whether they should be lumped together under the same psycho-structural category of the instinctual—a difficulty that Lacan represents by taking the sexual instincts to be the only "true drives" (XI, 191).

¹² Note that for Lacan the act of repression is not only constitutive of the Ucs but also of the subject, since, for Lacan, the subject is the subject of the Ucs