In *The Archeology of Knowledge*,¹ Foucault attempts to frame the principles for an anti-humanist approach to history. As a result, he formulates a method of historical analysis which he calls *general history*. As he describes it, *general* history starts at a specific level of analysis — the archeological level, which is distinct from both a sociological analysis of scientific practices (the “non-discursive” level), and a grammatical or logical analysis of scientific sentences, propositions, or formulas. *The Archeology of Knowledge* is an attempt to define the general level of historical analysis.

Gary Gutting and Alan Sheridan each remark that Foucault’s *primary* concern is to avoid reference to a metaphysical foundation. Thus, he attacks humanism in order to free up a level of analysis in which scientific statements can be looked upon as groups of related *events* and be objectively described.² Foucault treats statements (fr. *énoncés*)³

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²In discussing the basic principles *The Archeology of Knowledge* starts out from, Sheridan says: “For each discipline, *oeuvre*, book may be regarded in its raw, neutral state as a collection of ‘statements’ — a term which Foucault refrains, for the moment, from defining, [early in Part II of AK] other than to stress its character as event.” (Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will To Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.95-96).
³Dreyfus and Rabinow interpret *énoncés* as “serious speech acts” to set up their claims to Foucault’s role in founding a new method of social analysis, “Interpretive Analytics.” See Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), ch. 4-5. Hereafter, D&R. The “serious” aspect warrants one to make interpretive choices about which statements one will analyze (analytics). Foucault attempts to spell out the logic of the statement in Part III of AK, which I discuss in detail below. Dreyfus and Rabinow define statements as speech acts which are “what experts say when they are speaking as experts” (D&R, “Introduction,” xxiv). It would only make sense, however,
as dated, definable, finite events which announce meaning. By regarding them in this manner, he severs any necessary relation they may be thought to have with the consciousness of scientists or with ontological truths. As enunciative events, they can be analyzed as functions of discourse. By “freeing” statements from the realms of consciousness and truth, Foucault focuses on relations between statements and formulates the rules internal to groups of statements.4

As Gary Gutting claims, the meaning and degree of seriousness statements make have to be analyzed functionally. Gutting looks at The Archeology of Knowledge as a continuation of themes developed in Foucault’s earlier archeologies, and stresses that its central aims are antihumanist: “The book’s main effort is to define archeology as an approach to the history of thought that eliminates the fundamental role of the human subject. Archeology would thus appear as the historical counterpart of the structural counter-sciences (psychoanalysis, ethnology, and linguistics) in the postmodern move away from a conception of man as the object that constitutes the world of objects.”5 As Gutting indicates, the archeological method represents a transformation in the field of history away from humanist historiography. By shifting the focus of the history of thought away from the consciousness of historical agents (or processes), archeology defines the rules which factor into the creation of a field of statements in various sciences. Unlike Dreyfus and Rabinow, Gutting locates Foucault’s archeological method somewhere near the structuralist camp because the focus of its analysis are sets of rules which determine a dispersion of statements.

In the “Introduction” to The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault distinguishes archeology from a structuralist approach while

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4Dreyfus and Rabinow refer to this process as “double bracketing,” emphasizing the similarity of Foucault’s work with traditional (Husserlian) phenomenology.

acknowledging that it borrows from structural analysis: “My aim is not to transfer to the field of history, and more particularly to the history of knowledge (connaissances), a structuralist method that has proved valuable in other fields of analysis. My aim is to uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation that is taking place in the field of historical knowledge” (AK, 15). He thus holds that his work is the product of an indigenous transformation peculiar to the field of history.

The “autochthonous transformation” in history archeology carries forward consists in the displacement of humanist historiography with an anti-humanist method based on the description of “discursive formations”; instead of seeking unifying forces to which one can reduce historical thought and events, Foucault seeks descriptions of the formative rules governing the objects, enunciative modalities (speaking subjects), concepts, and strategies of discourse. In the “Introduction,” he defines the level of historical analysis he is interested in as “general history” (AK, 10). A general history, opposed to a total history, does not treat historical events as symptoms or expressions of underlying causes. Instead, it takes apparent “unities” such as authors, texts, themes, etc. and seeks to inductively define the rules common to their formation.

**General History and the Analysis of Discourse**

In the “Introduction” to The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault begins by contrasting two forms of historical analysis: history (proper), and the history of ideas. In history proper as it was practiced in France in the late sixties (presumably, by the annales historians?), the object of analysis had become the description of stable structures, tables, and series of events united around a single historical subject: “Some very brief, others of average duration, like the development of a particular technique, or a scarcity of money, and others of a long-term nature, like a demographic equilibrium or the gradual adjustment of an economy to climatic change” (AK, 8). History works upon the

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"To this end, he imports an “embarrassing” array of terms. See AK, p. 135: “I have appealed to whole a apparatus, whose sheer weight and, no doubt, somewhat bizarre machinery are a source of embarrassment.”

7See The Will to Truth, p. 92.
component units of documents and seeks to specify the kinds of relations found among a group of related components: "History now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations" (AK, 6). On the other hand, work in the history of ideas (in France in the late sixties) began to discover ruptures and breaks in the history of thought. Foucault mentions the work of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, M. Serres, M. Gueroult, and Louis Althusser. These historians of thought shifted their focus from the establishment of continuity to the description of discontinuity. Earlier historians of ideas sought to reduce various forms of thought and scientific problems to singular patterns, horizons, research programmes, world-historical views, etc., whereas these thinkers were beginning to describe thresholds, interruptions, and radical transformations in thought between periods (AK, 5). Thus, historians began to look for ways to link discreet events within a larger horizon, while historians of ideas began to view global phenomena (underlying structures) as being subject to sudden shifts.

Foucault mentions that the transformations within the fields of history proper and the history of ideas have several consequences which bear on the methodology of archeology. The first consequence is that one finds "the proliferation of discontinuities in the history of ideas and the establishment of long series in history proper" (AK, 7). In history proper, one seeks to establish a linear connection among events in order to constitute the meaning of the object under investigation. This has had the opposite effect on the history of ideas: "In the history of ideas, of thought and of the sciences, the same mutation has brought about the opposite effect; it has broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness, or the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought" (AK, 8). The introduction of discontinuity in the history of thought has also shifted perceptions about the role of historians of thought. By introducing discontinuities, these historians are now directly part of the history they constitute. While discontinuity was something the historian of ideas formerly tried to explain away, by the sixties it became an essential feature of the work s/he constructs. Discontinuity underwent "a transference from the obstacle to the work itself" (AK, 9).
FOUCAULT’S ARCHEOLOGY: HISTORY WITHOUT FOUNDATION

Foucault holds that the new forms of historiography in history and the history of ideas have opened the way for a new level of historical analysis, a level he calls *general history*. Defining *general history* as a break from *total history*, Foucault asserts that a total history can be defined through a combination of three hypotheses:

[1] It is supposed that between all the events of a well-defined spatio-temporal area ... it must be possible to establish a system of homogenous relations: a network of causality that makes it possible to derive each of them, relations of analogy that show how they symbolize one another, or how they all express one and the same central core; [2] it is also supposed that one and the same form of historicity operates upon economic structures, social institutions and customs, the inertia of mental attitudes ... and subjects them all to the same type of transformation; lastly, [3] it is supposed that history itself may be articulated into great units — stages or phases — which contain within themselves their own principle of cohesion. (AK, 10)

Foucault levels the same criticism against total history that Althusser made of the Hegelian (idealist/humanist) conception of history. Althusser, we might recall, criticized the manner in which spirit was thought to express itself evenly across the social whole in a given period, calling the Hegelian linkage of the elements of society under a singular substance an “expressive totality.” Foucault treats the project of a total history as a variant of this form of humanism.

A general history, whose elements can be defined through the negation of total history, begins with *decentered* descriptions of social phenomena. Whereas total history seeks to unite phenomena around a central core, general history describes “the space of a dispersion” (AK, 10). “Spaces of dispersion” consist of sets of elements (thought-objects, concepts, speaking subjects, themes) related by a common set of rules, which he does not view as being expressions of an underlying agent. Throughout the remainder of the first part of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes how it is, first of all, that an archeologist can draw together a unity of discourse through the description of a field of dispersed elements without tying these elements to a pre-given unity such as a text, *oeuvre*, author, idea, or spirit of an age. In addition, he describes how archeology defines the rules common to a dispersion of elements. These elements include the objects commonly
linked or referred to in a scientific discourse; the speakers, or credentials necessary to speak; the concepts formed (even those which contradict one another); and the variety of themes and strategies (some of which are mutually incompatible) used to establish a discursive practice. From the archeological standpoint, these elements do not form groups of prearranged constellations, as they might appear to reductionist historians. They are dispersed elements whose "unity" can be inferred only by formulating rules which define the practices (discursive practices) which have enabled them to appear in their historical specificity.

In the "Introduction," Foucault mentions several methodological precautions to which general historians should adhere. First of all, the general historian must clearly state the principles guiding his/her choice of elements (e.g. why this or that author, text, problem, etc. is analyzed). Secondly, s/he must clearly define the level of analysis s/he is undertaking (i.e. macro versus micro perspectives, periodic versus problematic approaches to a set of issues, etc.) Thirdly, s/he must decide upon a specific method of analysis (e.g. comparison of concepts across disciplines or periods; juxtaposition of contradictions within a discipline, etc.). Fourthly, s/he must define the methods used to draw relations between elements that constitute groups or unities. This can only be done by establishing regularities, that is, by noting the repeated occurrence of a certain succession of events, or a regularly occurring conjunction of themes, principles, etc., even if the themes or principles oppose or contradict one another. For instance, in Medieval debates over the status of universals, many variations occur within a common set of presuppositions and agreed upon rules. In fact, in a dispersion of elements, one usually encounters oppositions, contradictions, and what Foucault calls "points of diffraction" which indicate that differing theoretical choices made by scientists nevertheless indicate a common set of procedures. The advantage of general history is that the rules governing a dispersion of elements are not determined in advance. In the remaining chapters of The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault not only endeavors to define the level of analysis specific to archeology, he seeks to justify the principles he employs in determining how to draw relationships out of historical material (archives).
The "decentering of the subject" that Foucault attempts in history had been carried out in other fields of analysis in the social sciences in France, principally by Levi-Strauss in ethnology, Lacan in psychoanalysis, and Barthes in literary and cultural studies. Foucault proposes to carry out the same task in history. Echoing Althusser, Foucault states that in the field of history Marx first established an "epistemological mutation" (AK, 12), by breaking with the problem of the subject (alienation) and turned instead to the question of the structure of the social formation. Foucault (as does Althusser) considers history to be the "last resting place of anthropological thought" (AK, 14). Here, he alludes to both Nietzsche and Marx as the forebears of decentered conceptions of history:

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject — in the form of historical consciousness — will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance ... (AK, 12)

For humanists, the subject performs a "conservative function" by uniting elements and guaranteeing their truth. Archeology seeks to displace humanism with a "decentered" mode of analysis; the bulk of The Archeology of Knowledge consists in spelling out the transformation in the field of history from humanism to archeology.

The Unities of Discourse and Discursive Formations

In Part II of The Archeology of Knowledge entitled, "The Discursive Regularities," Foucault defines his method for constituting a unity of discourse. As he does throughout The Archeology of Knowledge, he begins by deconstructing the notion of unity adopted by humanist historians: "But there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity" (AK, 21). Gary Gutting refers to these unities as "subjective unities" to emphasize their humanist origins.\(^8\) Foucault sorts through a list of notions which carry

\(^8\)Archeology of Scientific Reason, pp. 227-233.
out the conservative function of reducing thought to an underlying unity. First, the notion of tradition: "it is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical ..." Second, the notion of influence: "which links, at a distance and through time — as if through the mediation of a medium of propagation — such defined unities as individuals, oeuvres, notions, or theories." Third, the notions of development and evolution: "they make it possible to group a succession of dispersed events, to link them to one and the same organizing principle, to subject them to the exemplary power of life ..." Finally, the notion of 'spirit': "which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation" (AK, 21-22). For each instance of drawing a subjective unity, the synthesizing function is a convenient mechanism for drawing together a dispersion of events under the umbrella of a metaphysical process, each of which ultimately derives from either a singular or collective aspect of the consciousness of the knowing subject.

In addition to those outlined above, Foucault claims that even less apparent unities have to be questioned. General terms like 'literature,' 'politics,' and several other Modern terms are imported into the material of historical analysis "only by a retrospective hypothesis" (AK, 22), and they are "always themselves reflexive categories" (AK, 22). The most easily constituted unities, and those easiest to overlook, are constituted by the terms "book," oeuvre, and author. At first glance, all of these notions seem fairly unproblematic; to question their unity appears to be nitpicking. However, Foucault asserts that their unity needs especially to be questioned. A book, for instance, has an apparently obvious unity which is due to its material singularity. The "unity" of a book, however, may not be sufficient to constitute a theoretical unity, especially in cases where a work has undergone several publications and editions, appears serially or in volumes, or provides a ritual function (he mentions a catholic missal as an example). Foucault then asks: "[I]s not the material unity of the volume a weak, accessory unity in relation to the discursive unity of which it is the support?" (AK, 23). Rather than accepting the atomic unity of a book because of its material separateness, Foucault raises the concern that the book has to be looked at as "a node within a network," and therefore its unity is "variable and relative" to "a complex field of
discourse” (AK, 23). Factors beyond material singularity, including the circumstances of publication, the social functions and roles the book performs, the audience the book addresses, etc., all factor into the discursive unity of the book. The discursive unity of an oeuvre and an author are even more problematic: “The establishment of a complete oeuvre presupposes a number of choices that are difficult to justify or even to formulate: is it enough to add to the texts published by the author those that he intended for publication but which remained unfinished by the fact of his death? Should one also include all of his sketches or first drafts?... if one speaks so indiscriminately and unreflectingly of an author’s oeuvre, it is because one imagines it to be defined by a certain expressive function” (AK, 24). Foucault credits no unities or ideas for uniting discourse in advance, even though he does not abandon the notion of unity altogether. Rather than accepting the idea of unity, he claims that unities such as the book, the oeuvre, or the author serve functions whose roles cannot be determined until a larger nexus of relations has been defined.\(^9\) Instead of serving as a priori givens, these unities emerge from discourse.

Just as problematic, if not more so, are the unities given in the history of science, such as “psychopathology,” or “natural history.” With a degree of skeptical reluctance, and only after dislodging these unities from their unquestioned relation to truth, Foucault accepts them as a starting point for archeological enquiry, but at the same time claims to “not place myself within these dubious unities in order to study their internal configuration ... I shall make use of them just long enough to ask what unities they form ... according to what laws they are formed; against the background of which discursive events they stand out...” (AK, 26).\(^10\) Having accepted these discourses as bodies of historically related events, he claims that a vast field, “made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in

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\(^9\)He addresses this topic more specifically in Part II under the notion of the “enunciative modality” of the statement. The notion that the author is a function of a discursive practice is explored in his essay, “What is an author?” in Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, Donald F. Bouchard, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

\(^10\)In the final chapter of The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault insists that an archeological analysis does not have to be performed on a scientific discourse, but could in principle be applied to a persistent theme or object, such as ‘sexuality’.
their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them,” is set free from the ready-made (subjective) unities that humanist historians often begin and end with. By dismantling commonly accepted unities from their unquestioned relation to truth, he tries to arrive at the “pure description of discursive events” (AK, 27). These events can be described in their specificity only if they are set free from their subjective unities.

Archeology treats all historical events, including those continually repeated, as accidents without essences. Foucault’s suspension of subjective unities enables him to ask: “how is it that [within a discourse] one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (AK, 27). He claims that a given field of discursive events is always finite; thus, the rules which create the dispersion of a field of discursive events are also finite. After freeing a series of statements from their subjective unities, he seeks to define the specificity of the occurrence of each particular statement, to “determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes” (AK, 28). He admits that a statement is a “strange” sort of event because it is unique in its historical occurrence, yet statements are subject to “repetition, transformation, reactivation” (AK, 28), in a multitude of contexts and discursive practices. Though the task he sets for himself consists in establishing relations among “statement/events” (AK, 28), Foucault realizes that his descriptions of the conditions which enable statements to exist as specific kinds of events cannot be complete without an account of the background practices, institutions, and other events which occur outside of a given series of statements.11

There are three forms of relations one can establish: (1) relations among statements, (2) relations among groups of statements, and (3) relations among statements and events that take place outside of a discursive practice (AK, 29). The corresponding form of analysis proper to the first form of relation is linguistic — consisting in the analysis of claims that a series of statements makes in regard to meaning and/or truth through the analysis of grammatical and logical

11This theme is also taken up in the next section, where Foucault discusses the “rule of repeatable materiality” of statements.
rules. In the third form of relation, an institutional analysis is called for. This view coincides with Peter Winch’s notion that there are “ways of thinking embedded in institutions.”12 The archeological level of analysis works primarily through the second type of relation discussed above, by establishing relations among groups of statements. The benefit that Foucault purchases from this type of analysis is that he can choose the methods for establishing relations among statements without the play of unities interfering with, or predetermining his descriptions. There is, however, a price to be paid for this procedure, and this, in Foucault’s view, must be kept in mind: “That the analysis of discursive events is in no way limited to such a field; and that the division of this field itself cannot be regarded either as definitive or as absolutely valid” (AK, 30).

Archeology is an *inductive* approach to history. This approach starts out from a description of groupings of statements, and seeks to draw relationships which help one to define the conditions which made those statements occur as they did. Foucault has also carefully distanced himself from a deductive approach, in which statements are seen to be instances of certain laws, foundations, truths, or overriding principles. Statements have unique conditions which determine their appearance, but they never occur by themselves; they are also joined to other statements in a relational, general way, forming what Foucault calls a “discursive formation.” A discursive formation, which Foucault does not fully define until Part II of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, consists in a set of relations drawn between groups of statements. The leap from a description of groups of statements to the notion of a discursive formation is also inductive and subject to revision.

In the second chapter of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault questions how it is that a “discursive formation” such as the discourse on psychopathology can be constituted as a unity. The first of four possibilities he examines pertains to the question whether the discourse on insanity in Western cultures from the Renaissance to the Modern period, which we today label psychopathology, can be described through its link to a common theoretical object, madness.

Her recalls in this connection that not all statements which refer to madness refer to the same object or set of objects. In fact, *Madness and Civilization*\(^{13}\) deconstructs the claim made by humanist historians that the history of psychopathology is the history of the truth of a set of objects which belong to the nature of "madness." Between the Renaissance and the Modern period, there is no single common object proper to "madness" whose truth is constantly being worked out; what one finds instead is a dispersion of objects referred to by a number of theorists and practitioners in each period. The task of archeological history is to define the rules which factor into the formation of such a dispersion: "The unity of the discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object ‘madness’, or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects that are shaped by measures of discrimination and repression, objects that are differentiated in daily practice, in law, in religious casuistry ..." (AK, 33). Foucault holds that one of his primary methods for constructing the unity of a discursive formation such as psychopathology consists in defining the set of rules which enable the formation of dispersed fields of objects to take place. These rules are not defined as limiting conditions (i.e. as institutional constraints or inviolable norms), and they are not defined as linguistic rules which make it possible for one to generate further statements. Instead, they are rules which help one to determine the manner in which a dispersion of existing objects took place.

In the third through the sixth chapters of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault specifies the rules which together factor into the development of a discursive formation.\(^{14}\) These include:

I. *Rules for the formation of objects.* In this discussion, Foucault focuses on the discourse of psychopathology from the nineteenth century onwards (AK, 40). Some of the objects he mentions are motor disturbances, hallucinations, and speech disorders, which carried over

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\(^{14}\) For a more comprehensive analysis of the various rules of formation and examples of each, see *Archeology of Scientific Reason*, pp. 232-238.
from previous discourses, and objects which appeared after the early nineteenth century, such as behavioral disorders, sexual aberrations, and criminality (AK, 40). Archeology seeks to answer why these objects, and not some others, occur in the nineteenth century discourse on psychopathology.

II. Rules for the formation of enunciative modalities. An enunciative modality refers to the manner in which a statement is both articulated, and given a meaningful or truth-functional status. An enunciative modality is a function of a discourse. At the outset of chapter 4, Foucault asks how it is that a variety of types of statement, some of which appear to have nothing in common, are nevertheless linked into a discourse on medicine: “Qualitative descriptions, biographical accounts ... reasoning by analogy, deduction, statistical calculations, experimental verifications ... are to be found in a discourse of nineteenth century medicine. What is it that links them together? ... Why these and not others?” (AK, 50) The rules associated with them concern rituals for qualification, status, and forms of administration: “Medical statements cannot come from anybody” (AK, 51); rules associated with institutional sites (e.g. hospitals); and rules associated with the position of the subject in relation to the field of objects s/he is addressing.

III. Rules for the formation of concepts. In addressing this set of rules, Foucault refers to the manner in which a common set of concepts is to be found across the classical empirical sciences he examined in The Order of Things. These concepts are not deductively linked, but instead are dispersed. The archeologist’s task is to reconstruct the order which gave rise to this dispersion by analyzing the following: the rules that factor into the forms in which statements are organized into types of series; rules which link concepts through forms of association; and rules involving procedures for intervention by experts.

At the end of chapter 5, Foucault expresses a critique of “preconceptual” analyses. The “preconceptual” level is thought to anticipate the conceptual structure of a science or a period. It is imported across both time periods and disciplines. Foucault claims that this type of discursive unity is unfounded because it sneaks in vague unifying principles from either the realm of history or the realm of
ideas. Echoing his statements in the “Preface” to The Order of Things, Foucault proposes the alternative of writing comparative history: “The most one can do is to make a systematic comparison, from one region to another, of the rules for the formation of concepts” (AK, 63).

IV. Rules for the formation of strategies. A strategy is a central theme, theory, or motif (e.g. “evolution” in biology), usually adopted in response to the formation of new concepts in a field. Foucault indicates what the rules related to strategies might look like. To this end, he discusses three possibilities: determining the points of diffraction in discourse, including a study of the major forks in the road which make various theories incompatible or equivalent: determining the manner in which entire discourses are taken up and “colonized” by other discourses (e.g. the manner in which the discourse on sexuality was absorbed by psychoanalysis); and examining the relations between discursive and non-discursive practices. A non-discursive practice is a social field in which discursive activities are carried out. Class relations, forms of government, natural catastrophes, wars, plagues, etc., are all elements which factor into the formation of discourse. Thus, Foucault does not view “non-discursive” elements as being necessarily repressive or limiting — instead, he views them as “formative elements” (AK, 68).

Foucault claims that the rules of formation should not be studied independently of one another. In fact, it is often the case that one set of rules will override, or over-determine, a second and third set of rules. For instance, a theoretical strategy may be shaped “by points of divergence in the groups of concepts” (AK, 72). Thus, in addition to formulating the rules, one must also bear in mind the relations among the rules themselves, which involves a level of analysis he calls the level of discursive relations.

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16Archeology of Scientific Reason, p 237.

17Foucault does not use this term in The Archeology of Knowledge, but he uses it quite often in his genealogical work to discuss the same procedure.
The analysis of discursive relations seeks to bring out the manner in which discourse is practiced: "they [discursive relations] determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyze them, classify them, etc. These relations characterize not the language used by discourse, nor the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice" (AK, 46). The analysis of discursive relations takes place at a specific level of analysis, a level which is wedged between what Foucault calls primary relations and secondary relations (AK, 45-49, 75-79).

Primary relations are those established at the social and institutional levels. Foucault also refers to these relations as real relations, and suggests that relations at this level can be studied in their own right, yet they are not the primary concern of archeology. An informative set of relations can be described, for example, between the bourgeois family and judicial authorities in the nineteenth century (AK, 45). Though the set of relations one finds at the primary level may well have an impact upon a discursive practice, Foucault claims that the two levels can be analyzed separately. This commits him to shift away from an ontological analysis of discursive practices, for which he has been criticized repeatedly.

Secondary relations are those which exist inside of the language of discourse itself. These relations unfold from an analysis of the syntactical, semantic, and propositional properties of discourse. The secondary level of analysis is essentially either a grammatical or a logical analysis of discourse, through an examination of the language a discourse makes use of. Here, a scientific discourse is looked upon as a coherent whole which makes certain truth claims. These claims, or propositions, can be measured according to their logical consistency within a system of rules.

One way of marking the difference between Foucault's approach and that of institutional or linguistic analysis is that, on Foucault's approach, the rules are revisable (as newer or different levels of relations can be drawn), because he views specific instantiations of them as having already taken place. The opposite is the case for the other two forms of analysis. In both an institutional analysis and in a linguistic analysis, one attempts to define a determinate set of rules, out of which a number of empirical events are made possible. Thus, what
distinguishes archeology from these other approaches is that it seeks to define the conditions of existence, rather than the conditions of possibility, for statements: “The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division” (AK, 38).

In the second chapter of Part II, he questions three other possible ways in which a discursive formation can be said to constitute a unity. A discourse may be held together by a common style (an “enunciative modality”), by a set of concepts which lie at its core, or by “the identity and persistence of themes” (AK, 35). In each case, Foucault claims that one does not find persistent forms of statement, persistent concepts, or persistent themes; instead one finds a dispersion of forms of statements, concepts, or themes, linked to a particular set of rules specific to each. After discussing the impossibility of reducing the discourses on medicine, economics, or grammar through “a well defined field of objects ... a definite, normative type of statement ... an alphabet of notions ... or the permanence of a thematic” (AK, 37), Foucault tries to lay out the kind of inquiry specific to archeology: “Such an analysis would not try to isolate small islands of coherence in order to describe their internal structure; it would not try to suspect and to reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of division. Or again: instead of reconstituting chains of inference ... instead of drawing up tables of differences (as linguists do), it would describe systems of dispersion” (AK, 37).

He is not interested, as Hempel is, in explaining why an historical event occurred based on principles of deduction 18; moreover, he is not interested, as a structuralist theorist like Chomsky is, in spelling out a set of rules of transformation. Why not? In the first instance, to write deductive histories, one must form a foundation in advance, and reduce all phenomena one finds to that foundation. Whether one starts out from the laws of history, or a universal claim about human

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nature, some foundational laws have to be established before the explanation of an historical event can be deduced. One could not start out from a notion of a general law of history (as a sort of empirical generality) to explain an event either, as Alan Donagan attempts to do,\(^\text{19}\) unless one has already constituted a series of related events as laws. Foucault tries to work in the direction which would allow one to formulate general historical laws. Archeology differs from structuralism insofar as structural analysis defines conditions of possibility. For instance, when one is competent in a language, one essentially has a grasp of the grammatical rules (including syntactical and semantic rules) that enable one to generate an infinite set of novel utterances. Foucault, on the other hand, describes the background rules that factored into the existence of events that have already taken place, which are already definite, and which are already specific.

At a unique level, archeology starts out from the "already said." It is an essentially historical level of analysis, which looks upon statements as events. In principle, the group of statements the archeologist analyzes is finite because the statements have already occurred. However, Foucault claims that the objects which statements within a discursive practice refer to, the various places from which statements are articulated, the various concepts that they form, and the various strategies which are undertaken to organize concepts into thematic wholes, constitute four rule systems through which the unities of various groups of statements are formed. The four rules of formation, and the interactions (discursive relations) which exist between them, cannot be determined or analyzed in advance; these rules, the manner of their appearance, and specific impact that one or several have within a discourse, emerge from the archeological analysis of groups of statements. The rules of formation are the product of historical reflection and inductive inference from groups of statements. They are attempts to describe relations between dispersions of events in a non-reductionist manner.

The Enunciative Function of Discourse

The archeological method, as stated thus far, consists in gathering and describing a series of statements which occur with some regularity inside of a given practice, which strategically address problems located by the practice, which form both a conceptual and an objective field of inquiry and application in the practice, and which establish the position taken up by the “subject” of a discourse. In Part III of The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault establishes his peculiar notion that the subject of a discourse emerges as a function of a discursive practice. He presents his alternative notion of the subject after spelling out the various functions performed by statements (énoncés).

Foucault does not begin to define a statement until the first chapter in Part III, and there he first defines what a statement is not. To this end, he questions the notion that a statement is an atomic unit of discourse: “if the statement really is the elementary unit of discourse, what does it consist of?” (AK, 80) In answering this question, he presents three alternatives: a statement could either be a proposition, a sentence, or a speech act, each corresponding to a specific domain of investigation — logic, grammar, and what today is called “pragmatics”.

Foucault considers whether the statement possesses the same properties as a proposition. He finds that these two groupings have to be differentiated, because the same proposition uttered in two different contexts will “state” (in the sense of “enunciate”) two very different things. For instance, the propositions “No one heard” and “It is true that no one heard” have the same propositional (logical) content, but as statements, they are not interchangeable; if each was used as the first line of a novel, for instance, it would likely perform a different enunciative function.

Foucault next considers whether the statement is analogous to a grammatical sentence. Even if a grammarian includes things beyond the “canonical form” of sentences (subject-copula-object) to be grammatically sound, such as ‘You!’ or “absolutely!,” other examples abound

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20In discussing this level, Foucault simply refers to the “English Analysts,” and at times refers to this level as “Analysis.” A group of readings related to this field is found in Steven Davis, ed., Pragmatics: A Reader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
of statements which cannot be defined as sentences: "When one finds in a Latin grammar a series of words arranged in a column: *amo, amas, amat*, one is dealing not with a sentence, but with the statement of the different personal inflections of the present indicative of the verb *amare*" (AK, 82). Foucault cites several other examples of statements which one would be hard-pressed to define as sentences but which appear to enunciate a meaning: "a genealogical tree, an accounts book, the calculations of a trade balance ..." (AK, 82)

Finally, Foucault considers whether a statement is distinguishable from a "speech act." Here, he refers to Austin and Searle. A "speech act" is an utterance which can gain meaning only in reference to a prior or simultaneous activity, performance, ritual, or background practice. Examples of speech acts include promises, oaths, vows, contracts, prayers, promises, etc. As Foucault notes, a speech act "is what occurred by the very fact that a statement was made — and precisely this statement (and no other) in specific circumstances" (AK, 83). One might be tempted, therefore, to establish a correlation between the two levels in which statements and actions are viewed as interchangeable elements of a speech act; we might consider whether "each act is embodied in a statement, and each statement contains one of those acts" (AK, 83). However, Foucault rejects this notion because in many speech acts, such as prayers and oaths, the unity of the performance is defined by a succession of both statements and acts; something may be said which gives rise to something done in a prayer, and vice versa, in a definite sequence. Thus, a statement would have to be viewed as a more elementary unit of a speech act.

Foucault holds that the analysis of statements occurs at a specific level, which he attempts to distinguish from these other levels of analysis. The existence of a sentence, a proposition, and a speech act within a discourse are sufficient to determine the existence of a statement, but the existence of a statement does not imply any of one of these other levels. After dismissing the identification of the statement with a unit of logic, grammar, or pragmatics, Foucault asks whether statements have to be very loosely defined, and questions whether the mere existence of language is a sufficient condition for the existence of statements. To this end, he considers whether a statement can be said to exist and have a meaning from the mere existence of signs, or a series of signs. His reply is that a series of signs by itself does not con-
stitute a statement, because some form of organization is required before a sign can be said to state a discursive meaning: "This pile of printer's characters, which I can hold in my hand, or the letters marked on the keyboard of a typewriter are not statements" (AK, 85). This is because they are not "stated" in a specific discursive context — there are no rules for their application, and no specified domains in which they apply. However, a group of random numbers assembled by a statistician to form a random sample, or a series of letters listed in a typewriter's manual, are statements, if taken in context.

Foucault concludes that an arbitrary sample of language, and statements, do in fact share two qualities: first, they are both made up of definable signs; and second, they always appear in a material medium. However, a statement is not analogous with an arbitrary sign or series of signs. It is neither a linguistic unit, a unit which precedes an action, a logical unit, or a material object (or set of objects). After attempting and failing to define the statement by analyzing its properties, Foucault defines the statement as a type of function:

It is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense,' according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written). One should not be surprised, then, if one has failed to find structural criteria of unity for the statement; this is because it is not itself a unit, but a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space. (AK, 87)

Statements perform "enunciative functions" — the topic of the second chapter of Part II. Foucault holds that several factors must be in place before a statement performs an enunciative function.

First of all, statements always refer. One of the classical problems of analytic philosophy, raised by Bertrand Russell, concerns the status of sentences which have no referent, such as the sentences "the king of France is bald," or "the golden mountain is in California." These sentences, according to Russell, have no true/false (propositional) content because there are no specifiable objects they refer to; thus they are unverifiable. In Foucault's view, a statement differs from a
proposition because it always refers to something in a specific context with an established domain of discourse\(^\text{21}\); if no such context exists, a sentence or proposition cannot be said to state (enunciate) a discursive meaning. Some statements enunciate meanings in fictive contexts: “Let us suppose in fact that the formulation ‘The golden mountain is in California’ is found not in a geography book, nor in a travel book, but in a novel, or in some fictional context or other; one could still accord it a value of truth or error (according to whether the imaginary world to which it refers does or does not authorize such a geological or geographical fantasy). We must know to what the statement refers, what is its space of correlations, if we are to say whether a proposition has or has not a referent” (AK, 90). A statement, then, differs from a sentence or a proposition in the sense that it always refers to something determined by its context of utterance. Foucault then goes on to define the relationship a statement has to its “referential,” or the system of references which enables a statement to perform an enunciative function: “The referential of the statement forms the place, the condition, the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself. It defines the possibilities of appearance and delimitation of that which gives meaning to the sentence, a value as truth to the proposition” (AK, 91).

Second, statements are always found among other statements, thus they must exist in a specifiable context: “There is no statement that does not presuppose others; there is no statement that is not surrounded by a field of coexistences, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles” (AK, 99). Additionally, a statement does more than indicate a context of utterance, it helps establish a context and shapes the possibility of the form future contexts may take. A statement in a mathematical treatise, such as “a line is a set of points such that ...” performs this variety of enunciative functions.

Third, statements always have a specific relation to their subject. The “subject” of a statement is not synonymous with the author of a statement, and “the relation of production he has with the formula-

\(^\text{21}\)Foucault calls the systems of references to which a statement is subject the “referential” of the statement. For a further discussion of this point, see Archeology of Scientific Reason, p. 238.
tion is not superposable to the relation that unites the enunciating subject and what he unites" (AK, 92). Foucault distinguishes between the "enunciating subject" of discourse and its author. The "subject" of a statement is not the intellectual property of any single individual or group, it is not necessarily the voice of the speaker of a sentence, and it is not necessarily a property belonging to a conscious agent. Moreover, the enunciative position taken up by the subject of a statement is a factor in determining the specific function the statement performs within a discourse. Foucault cites the example of Proust's statement, "For a long time I used to go to bed early," which performs a different enunciative function "depending upon its context of utterance, the conditions of its appearance, and by a determination of who (or what) the "subject" speaking it is." As the first line of a novel, this statement performs an enunciative function in relation to a fictional text. The subject enunciating this claim is not Proust himself. In this case it is a speaker whose authority is established in the context of the novel. The same sentence, uttered in an entirely different context, would achieve a much different enunciative function depending on the circumstances of its utterance. Any sentence or proposition can state something different depending on when it is spoken, or read, who is speaking it, or reading it, etc. The position that the subject occupies is of crucial importance, and this position is determined by other discursive elements, including its "field of coexistences," or the statements surrounding it and their manner of appearance.

The "enunciating subject" does not necessarily perform the same function as the "speaker" of the text, nor does an enunciative subject necessarily take on an anthropomorphic form. In a mathematical treatise, for example, the subject of a statement in the middle of a proof may have no determinable speaker — the text itself completely determines the mode of enunciation. Foucault gives the example of two statements from a mathematical treatise — "I call straight any series of points that..." and "Let there be a finite series of any elements such that..." In the first case, the enunciative subject is the speaker. However, in the second case, "the enunciating subject brings into existence outside himself an object that belongs to a previously defined domain, whose laws of possibility have already been articulated, and whose characteristics preceded the enunciation that posits it" (AK, 95). This "subject" in the second case is not the same as the mathema-
tician; rather, it is a function of the proof or the text. Enunciation takes place through a system of relations established by other statements; the “act” of enunciation is actually a function of a group of statements. The “place” occupied by the subject of a statement is “a position that may be filled in by various individuals,” giving it a large degree of anonymity (AK, 115).

Fourth, all statements have a materiality — they exist in print, pictures, diagrams, sound, etc. — and so they can be recognized as material events: “The statement is always given through some material medium” (AK, 100). In addition, the materiality of the statement is a factor in specifying its content: “Even if a sentence is composed of the same words, bears exactly the same meaning, and preserves the same syntactical and semantic identity, it does not constitute the same statement if it is spoken by someone in the course of a conversation, or printed in a novel; if it was written one day centuries ago, and if it now appears in oral formulation” (AK, 100). This aspect of statements, that the materiality of their appearance is part of their constitution, establishes the statement as a unique, material event: “it has a situated and dated uniqueness that is irreducible” (AK, 101).

Though statements are unique events, their uniqueness does not preclude one from determining the grammatical, logical, or propositional constants one could attain “by neutralizing the moment of enunciation and the coordinates that individualize it” (AK, 101). Because statements can be “neutralized” (that is to say, taken out of context and analyzed for their grammatical, logical, etc. properties), and because they can be enunciated under a variety of circumstances which vary so slightly that their material uniqueness is of little significance (e.g. the various printings of a book), they are subject to repetition. The conditions which make a statement repeatable, however, cannot be accounted for by a purely formal analysis. That is to say, the repeatability of statements is not solely determined by logical, linguistic, or veridical properties. Instead, statements are subject to a “rule of repeatable materiality,” which is “of the order of the institution rather than the spatio-temporal location” (AK, 103).

Foucault’s “rule of repeatable materiality” holds that the identity of the statement is determined by “a complex set of material institutions” (AK, 103), each of which has its own history, yet forms a necessary aspect of the enunciative functions of statements. The sameness
of statements is made possible by their susceptibility to rules governing their repetition. Though a statement is necessarily a material event, the status and function of a statement are mostly determined by the discursive field it is articulated through. The discursive field, in turn, is largely supported by a number of institutional factors (libraries, universities, research traditions, etc.). Thus the analysis of institutions is essential to his account, and it suggests that one can analyze the impact of a statement as an event by determining the social and institutional factors which make its repetition possible. This strongly resembles Althusser’s notion that the primary function of institutions is to reproduce subjects.

The object of archeological analysis, the statement, is difficult to characterize because, on the one hand, it is singular and fleeting, and on the other, it is subject to repetition. Because of the uniqueness of the statement as a material event, and because it is highly susceptible to forms of repetition, the enunciative function of the statement is paradoxical:

This repeatable materiality that characterizes the enunciative function reveals the statement as a specific and paradoxical object, but also one of those objects that men produce, manipulate, use transform, exchange ... the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. (AK, 105)

In the third chapter of Part II, “The Description of Statements,” Foucault attempts to draw a link between the level of analysis indicated by the enunciative functions of statements, and the analysis of discursive formations. Here, he attempts to show that a discursive formation is “the principle of dispersion and redistribution, not of formulations, not of sentences, not of propositions, but of statements” (AK, 107). He identifies three tasks necessary for the description of statements. First of all, a statement can be defined as the “modality of existence” of a group of signs: “a modality that allows it to be something more than a series of traces, something more than a succession of marks on a substance, something more than a mere object made by a human being; a modality that allows it to be in relation with a
domain of objects, to prescribe a definite position to any possible subject, to be situated among other verbal performances, and to be endowed with a repeatable materiality” (AK, 107). Secondly, statements should not be described as atomic units of meaning, logic, or grammar. Instead, one must describe the conditions which give a group or series of signs an existence: “It is a description of things said, precisely as they were said. The analysis of statements, then, is a historical analysis, but one that avoids all interpretation: it does not question things said at the level of what they are hiding, what they were “really” saying ... it questions them as to their mode of existence, what it means to them to have come into existence ... From this point of view, there is no latent statement: for what one is concerned with is the fact of language” (AK, 109). The third “task” involved in describing statements is to specify their location. A statement remains paradoxical in this regard also, because it has a “quasi-invisibility.” That is to say, statements do not conceal anything, but they are not immediately obvious either. Their existence, and their function, cannot be specified through a set of facts or signs alone. As mentioned above, before a statement exists, a series of material signs must also exist, but the statement is not analogous with a series of signs. Nor is it analogous with the grammatical, logical, and propositional properties of language. The level of the statement is one which makes these other levels (grammatical, logical, propositional) possible — it is a level at which signs exist and say something. This level is neither immediately obvious, nor is it a deep structural level. It exists at the surface of language, but requires one to abandon all “transcendental and anthropological” (AK, 113) forms of description before this level can be reached. Thus, the analysis of statements, and their enunciative functions, leads one to an anti-humanist reading of an historical archive.

At the end of chapter 3, Foucault links his reflections upon the task of describing statements with the larger project of mapping discursive formations. First, the description of the statement, and the specification of the enunciative level of analysis “leads to the individualization of the discursive formation” (AK, 116). That is, one can map a discursive formation through the description of the enunciative functions of statements. Foucault claims that “A statement belongs to a discursive formation as a sentence belongs to a text, and a proposition to a deductive whole” (AK, 116). While sentences and proposi-
tions are subject to formal rules (grammar and logic), the “laws” governing statements are functions arising form the discursive formation itself.

At this point in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault claims to finally be in a position to define both “discourse” and “discursive practice” more specifically. A “discourse” is “made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined” (AK, 117). These conditions, presumably, are the factors which gave a groups of statements their unique sequence and appearance. A “discursive practice” is a historically determined, anonymous body of rules specific to a given time and place, which governs the manner in which discourse achieves its specific form and states its specific meanings.

The goal of mapping discursive formations, as Foucault mentions in chapter 4 of Part II, is not to reveal the meaning of statements, nor to reveal the intentions of the authors or groups who were behind their appearance. At the archeological level of description, these “anthropological” categories are brushed aside so that one can arrive at the description of an anonymous body of rules which gave rise to the specific enunciative functions of statements. Thus, the goal that one sets is “to rediscover their occurrence as an event” (AK, 121). Archeological description aims at restoring the specificity of statements by revealing the conditions which gave rise to them in their local particularity. Moreover, archeological description takes place without reference to a knowing subject:

The analysis of statements operates ... without reference to a *cogito*. It does not pose the question of the speaking subject ... it is situated at the level of the “it is said” — and we must not understand by this a sort of communal opinion, a collective representation that is imposed on every individual ... but we must understand by it the totality of things said, the relations, the regularities, and the transformations that may be observed in them. (AK, 122)

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22 In a fairly standard critical thinking text (*Creative and Critical Thinking*, Moore, McAnn, and McAnn, eds. (Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 20), discourse is defined as a group of sentences which can express either a series of facts, a question, a command, or an argument.

23 Gary Gutting cites this quote on p. 241. In regard to the method of Foucault’s archeological description, he writes: “He wants to look at statements from the outside
Archeology Versus the History of Ideas

In the final section of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault distances the archeological approach from approaches found in the history of ideas by flushing out and criticizing the theme of humanism in its most insidious forms. First of all, he claims that the vague research tradition known as the history of ideas works through a unique process. First, it operates at the margins of history (AK, 136), analyzing such fields as alchemy instead of chemistry, or phrenology instead of physiology; moreover, its principal concerns lie in revealing the reverse sides of things taken for granted in the history of thought; it focuses upon opinions held in various periods instead of knowledge gained, upon the errors behind truths, and upon mentalities or "horizons" rather than thought itself (AK, 137). Second, the history of ideas operates outside of the domains of traditional fields of inquiry (e.g. branches in philosophy, literature, or science) and cuts across these boundaries to reveal the similarities in thought which lie beneath apparent differences: “It becomes, therefore, the discipline of interferences, the description of the concentric circles that surround works, underlie them, relate them to one another, and insert them into whatever they are not” (AK, 137).

These two processes often overlap, leading to a quest for “silent births ... distant correspondence ... permanences that perish beneath apparent changes” (AK, 137). The history of ideas thus comprises what Foucault earlier called a “total history.” Archeological history is “a systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures, an attempt to practice a quite different history of what men have said” (AK, 138). There are four principal areas in which archeology stands apart from the history of ideas: these concern the problems of tradition; the establishment of coherence and contradictions within discourses; methods of writing comparative history; and the treatment of change. Because I have already spelled out most of these differences at the beginning, I will only briefly gloss through each.

i. The problem of tradition

Foucault claims that historians of ideas tend to group ideas into either of two categories: the traditional (preservative), and the original (the new, or the deviant), thus drawing a line between ideas which are banal and those which are original. The first group have a certain
immobile density, while the second group are thought to spring into existence spontaneously. In its traditional line of development, history is shown to be "a silent sedimentation of things said" (AK, 141). Originality is linked to sudden changes or transformations, largely as a process of the revelation of truth, or "instant rationality." The historian's task in this regard is to "rediscover on the basis of these points ... the continuous line of an evolution" (AK, 141).

Archeology, on the other hand, seeks to locate and define a regularity among statements: "What it seeks in the texts of Linnaeus or Buffon, Petty or Ricardo ... is not to draw up a list of founding saints; it is to uncover the regularity of a discursive practice" (AK, 145). Foucault lists a few important directions of research opened up by archeological analysis which distinguish its approach to the novelty of ideas and the weight of tradition. These directions amount to the claim that the archeologist is interested in identifying "enunciative homogeneities" rather than "logical identities" (AK, 146). Enunciative homogeneities are regularly occurring statements formed from the same set of rules of formation. The same exact sentence spoken by Locke and repeated by a nineteenth century political economist concerning the relation between prices and monetary value are logically, and perhaps grammatically equivalent, but they are not enunciatively homogenous. Nothing may differentiate these claims logically or grammatically — but on an enunciative level, because they are found in entirely different systems of usage with different rules of application, they do not state the same thing.

Foucault offers little concern for revolutionary thinkers or geniuses. To archeology, an important, innovative move in a field of research lies at the same level as other statements; the properties of genius, innovation, creativity, etc., may at most be attributes of transformations in systems of rules, rather than intellectual achievements of great minds. Furthermore, Foucault has nothing to say about the relationship between statements and the "truth value" they contain. What determines the status of a statement is the web of rules that

and describe the relations that define the field in which various sorts of statements are able to perform their linguistic functions and hence have various meanings." (241)

circumscribes its appearance, rather than the correspondence to a greater truth that such a claim might have. This is not to suggest that scientific statements have no truth-functional value; it is simply to say that the examination of those values lie outside the domain of archeological investigation.

ii. The problem of contradiction

Foucault claims that it is an unspoken procedural rule among historians of ideas to seek coherence in discourse. Sometimes surface contradictions exist within texts, *œuvres*, thoughts, or entire eras. The historian of ideas tries to smooth over contradictions by linking them to underlying foundational principles. As Gutting notes, the history of ideas “never accepts conflicting statements on their own terms; it must either reconcile them or understand their conflict as a manifestation of a deeper contradiction.”²⁵ There are several strategies an historian of ideas might employ to resolve contradictions: first, s/he might formalize propositions into a logical scheme and demonstrate the grammatical errors or ideological conflicts which gave rise to a set of contradictions; or, s/he might operate in the reverse direction, and seek to discover a “plastic continuity” (AK, 150), or a coherence founded among a string of metaphors, images, or desires, which a text somehow expresses; or, one might seek continuity through the biographical circumstances of an individual. In all of these cases, the attempt to resolve contradictions serves the same purpose: “it shows that immediately visible contradictions are merely surface reflections; and that this play of dispersed light must be concentrated into a single focus” (AK, 150).

The archeologist, on the other hand, describes contradictions just as they are found. Foucault cites an example from eighteenth century natural history, where an opposition between “fixist” principles and “evolutionist” principles developed. Archeology seeks to describe the space opened up by these oppositions: “By taking contradictions as objects to be described, archeological analysis does not try to discover in their place a common form or theme, it tries to determine the laws of their dispersion.”

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²⁵ *Archeology of Scientific Reason*, p. 245.
iii. The problem of writing comparative history

One can conduct comparative history across periods or across disciplines. Foucault emphasizes the archeologist’s concern with describing the specificity of discursive formations and respecting differences between them. Again, in this regard, the historians of ideas struggle to unite associated ideas by invoking such categories as influence, exchanges of information, or some other means of communication which bridges minds, disciplines, or time periods. Archeology has the opposite effect: “Archeology is a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must diversify them, but is intended to divide their diversity into different figures. Archeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect” (AK, 160).

The diversity that the archeologist brings out of a series of discursive formations is based on several operations. The archeologist may show that a number of diverse elements can form from a similar set of rules; or, the archeologist may show that a similar set of rules does not apply in the same way from one discourse to another (e.g. the manner in which the theory of attribution applies in General Grammar is not the same as it applies in Natural History). Foucault’s earlier archeologies offer a variety of comparative histories. It is clear from Madness and Civilization that Foucault’s principle interests lie in showing how the concept of madness, and the objects proper to it, shifted dramatically from the Classical to the Modern periods, and this was demonstrated by comparing methods of treatment for the insane. In this instance, he uses comparison as a way of indicating major differences and incompatibilities, rather than seeking to rectify these differences under a unifying principle.

iv. The problem of change

Perhaps Foucault’s greatest difference from historians of ideas lies in his treatment of historical change. It should first of all be noted that changes within a discursive practice, and historical change, are not always isomorphic. The historian of ideas tends to treat history and discourse at the same level. Thus, changes within a discourse reflect other changes in historical periods, unless certain discursive elements themselves can be treated as the agent of historical change in a specific period.
In chapter 5, Foucault answers specific charges brought against archeology by those in the camp of the history of ideas concerning the notion of historical change, and at the same time, he is interested in charting a completely different landscape for the treatment of change. These charges center on two related problems. The first set apply to structural analysis. According to these charges, archeology is thought to dismiss the category of change altogether, because it focuses on structures of knowledge (discursive formations) which consist in a set of immutable rules; a discursive formation, or an episteme (from The Order of Things), can be analyzed as a coherent system only if history is frozen and the possibility of historical change is sealed off. The system of rules governing a discursive formation constitute a synchronous, interlocking set (akin to Kuhn’s notion of a paradigm).26 The second set of charges concerns the problem of historical continuity/discontinuity. Archeology is thought to invent differences between periods, so as to resolve the problem of synchronicity. That is to say, in seeking to preserve the synchronicity of discursive formations, the archeologist is thought to regard differences between discursive formations (usually across time periods) as vast and incommensurable. Thus, according to this second set of charges, the archeologist dismisses any forms of continuity between periods so as to preserve the notion of synchronicity within periods.

Foucault responds to the charge of synchronicity by stating that archeology suspends the notion of temporal successions in order to reveal the temporality of discursive formations (AK, 167). There are two specific allegations brought against archeology in regard to its apparent temporal suspension: the first concerns the impact that external events play in determining changes within a discourse (e.g. the impact that the cholera epidemic of 1832 had on the field of medicine), and the second concerns the notion that archeology fails to respect the impact that single themes, research paradigms, thought-objects, or individuals may have on the development of a scientific discipline. As to the first of these allegations, Foucault insists that archeological analysis does not ignore external events, even though the focus of archeology lies in examining statements: “Archeology does

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not deny the possibility of new statements in correlation with ‘external’ events. Its task is to show on what condition a correlation can exist between them ...” (AK, 168). Foucault cites an example from the classical Analysis of Wealth in regard to monetary fluctuations in the eighteenth century: “it [archeology] tries to show what, in these crises, could be given as an object of discourse, how those crises could be conceptualized in such an object, how the interests that were in conflict throughout these processes could deploy their strategy in them” (AK, 167). Even though the archeologist analyzes groups of statements, and focuses on the relations embedded in them, this does not in any way suggest that such an enterprise ignores the play of events. As to the second allegation, that archeology treats the elements of discourse at the same level, Foucault answers that archeology is sensitive to the impact that one set of rules may exert upon another (for instance, the impact that a set of concepts has on a strategy), and it is also sensitive to reversals and transformations among discursive relations (for instance, between the interplay of the rules governing the formation of objects). Thus, instead of ignoring such changes, archeology maps diachronic changes within discursive relations where they occur within a discursive formation: “Archeology, then, takes as its model neither a purely logical schema of simultaneities; nor a linear succession of events; but it tries to show the intersection between necessarily successive relations and others that are not so” (AK, 168).

Foucault then claims that both of these allegations arise from two misunderstandings which reveal certain humanist commitments. The historian of ideas, not the archeologist, wants to treat history as “the flow of consciousness or the linearity of language” (AK, 169). The archeologist, by contrast, does not treat discourse as either a language striving toward purity (AK, 169), or as a form of consciousness (hence the need to apply all of the rules in an even manner in accordance with a conception of an a priori structure of consciousness) — both of which reserve a privileged place for the subject. Archeology treats discourse as a practice “that has its own forms of sequence and succession” (AK, 169).

Foucault then takes up the charge that archeology invents differences between periods, and utterly fails to recognize historical continuities in discourse. As he does in the preceding chapter on comparative history, Foucault emphasizes the important methodological dif-
ferences archeology has from the history of ideas. These historians (or theorists), according to Foucault, impose forms of continuity upon specific discourses in advance without examining specific transformations particular to a discursive formation. An example he cites in chapter 5 (and in a number of other places) is the transition in medical practice from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century: "in a quarter of a century, from 1790 to 1815, medical discourse changed more profoundly than since the seventeenth century, probably than since the middle ages, and perhaps even since Greek medicine: a change that revealed new objects ... techniques of observation, of detection of the pathological site, recording; a new perceptual grid, and an almost entirely new descriptive vocabulary; new sets of concepts and nosographical distributions..." (AK, 17). According to historians of ideas, changes are either the result of a slow, continuous development, or they are the result of the genius of one or a few minds who free truth from error. Even in this latter case, change happens in a continuous fashion, with the difference that it is a rapid development of truth through a spark of genius. Foucault claims that many of the discontinuities he finds in medical practice are vast and obvious, unless one approaches the history of early modern medicine from within the framework of the history of ideas: "what does this insistence on discontinuity correspond to? In fact, it is paradoxical only in relation to the practice of the historians of ideas. It is rather the history of ideas — with its concern for continuities, transitions, anticipations, and foreshadowings — that plays with paradox" (AK, 170).

As several commentators have emphasized, Foucault’s concern lies in describing changes and transformations within, or between discursive formations. In several cases, many of the objects, concepts, strategies, etc. found in one discursive formation are found in identical, or nearly identical form across formations. This does not commit him to a view of change which implies that wholesale changes from one formation to another always occur, akin to Kuhn’s notion of a "paradigm shift":

To say that one discursive formation is substituted for another ... is to say that a general transformation of relations has occurred, but that it does not necessarily alter all of the elements; it is to say that statements are governed by new rules of formation, it is not to say that all objects or concepts, all enunciations or theoretical choices disappear ... (AK, 172)

Foucault often emphasizes continuities among discursive elements. His major point of difference from the history of ideas is that changes have to be mapped more specifically, and the historian should not seek to link differences through an empty, abstract metaphysical medium such as "creation," "consciousness," or "evolution," but to specify them. To this end, Foucault offers a transformational model of change: "We must... substitute for an undifferentiated reference to change — which is both a container for all events and the abstract principle of their succession — the analysis of transformations" (AK, 172). This type of analysis consists in looking at the manner in which relations between specific elements are altered in various discursive practices. This does not suggest that one abandon the category of continuity, as Gutting notes: "Foucault makes it further clear that an archeology of thought is concerned with changes from one discursive formation to another and that these changes may occur against a background of significant continuities."28

Gutting, Dreyfus and Rabinow, lament Foucault’s failure to attribute enough significance to the role that non-discursive factors play in determining the structure of discourse in The Archeology of Knowledge.29 To a large extent, they are justified in lodging their criticisms, but one should also recognize that Foucault admits that relations of this sort can be drawn when he discusses the three levels of relation that emerge from the analysis of discourse: the primary (or non-discursive level), the secondary (the "linguistic" level), and the archeological level. The main task of The Archeology of Knowledge is to isolate the archeological level and to indicate the problems archeological analysis seeks to overcome. The primary vehicle Foucault employs to this end is his criticism of the history of ideas, or humanist

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historiography, out of which his claims as to what comprises the archeological approach are made plausible and intelligible.

His new method of historical analysis, general history, emerges in this work as an inductive procedure for defining the manner in which discursive formations make their specific appearance through discursive practices. From *The Archeology of Knowledge*, one can glean the centrally important notion that the "subjects" of discursive practices surface within and are produced by those practices, as opposed to serving as their source. ⇨