

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Order of Things (1966)

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

Michel Foucault worked on his *The Order of Things*, to create a theory of the place of order in the world of the sciences. He traced the logical structures of the thought practices of linguistics and biology. He was a profound student of the thought practices of reasoning in academic work. In the following brief essay on FOUCAULT I DEVELOP A POSITION which QUESTIONS FOUCAULT' Is basis for that universe he imagines, a universe in which principles and regularities are the norm. He postulates a universe too finely constructed for academic thinking. His jump of point is an intelligible universe, an intelligible multiverse universe .

What, then, is to decide whether ours is in fact an intelligible universe? Is it not rather a universe that imposes by its grandeur, neither by order nor chaos. The Greek pantheon ritual and the priests of the heroes of the Hebrews were to find great room for awe and its corresponding grandeur, in the expressive life of their pantheons, but were they accomplishing the purification of the universe, and not simply cognising the universe which was there? Were they not open to the fundamental disorders in the natural world and its shagginess?

Have we reason to accept Foucault's assurance that the universe is orderly, and therefore supportive of projects in the humane sciences ? Is there a light pervading the universe at the same time as the intelligibility principle in which the universe seeps? Are we in fact surrounded by meaning which is invisible to us, but which is the very substance of our presence here? Such a view seems to conflict with the shaggy irregularities of the natural universe as we are becoming familiar with it. Foucault's concern with the order of processes of thought will seem to be a throwback to grander centuries--the seventeenth is an excellent example with its careful attention to rules and unities onstage--and not a model of living in the present of scientific observation.

The rules of order and power clearly exercise their force through many of the organs of society as Foucault has famously claimed in his numerous books on the social sciences, in which he continues to study the valences of power as it plays out in modern societies. Order, however, plainly is less to count on, when you come to sociometric measurements than when you are dealing with the inner structures of scholarship and learning. The smooth places in the mind, across which the calculations of the mind pass in the hard thinking of the sciences, are very different from the infinitely small matte-rbumpy- surface of the moon.

Rages for order, those that quiet the longings of the poet, wrestling as he does with emotions that are too tufty to submit to any discipline but prosody. That longing for order has directed a thousand enterprises, all the Chippendales, all the Guccis, all the Parthenons for that matter. with their doodled and curliqued capitals all the...we talk art as a whole. We are where order has transcended itself into beauty, and mere order has been transcended altogether