Seeing - Believing
From Sign to Episteme in Foucault's *The Order of [Words and] Things*.

Part I—Situating *The Order of Things*

From the *Foreword to the English edition*, *The Order of Things* (1966)
I should like this work to be read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer either to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun (xii).

From the *Introduction to The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972)
At this point there emerges an enterprise of which my earlier books *Historie de la folie* (*Madness and Civilization*) [1961, diss.], *Naissance de la clinique* [1963], and *Les Mots et les Choses* (*The Order of Things*) [1966] were a very imperfect sketch. An enterprise by which one tries to measure the mutations that operate in the field of history; an enterprise in which the methods, limits, and themes proper to the history of ideas are questioned; an enterprise by which one tries to throw off the last anthropological constraints; an enterprise that wishes, in return, to reveal how these constraints could come about. These tasks were outlined in a rather disordered way, and their general articulation was never clearly defined. It was time that they were given a greater coherence—or, at least—that an attempt was made to do so. This book is the result (14).

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault frames knowledge systems as *discourse formation* rather than *episteme*.

Diego Velazquez | 1665, Madrid
"Las Meninas" (Ladies in Waiting)
Velazquez has been tabbed "the painter's painter" and "the painter of truth."

(Brief) Foucault career notes

Ongoing emphases on the **visual** (seeing, perspectives) and **social deviance** (aphasics, criminality, sexuality)

1972—visits Attica prison in New York (appr. 90 miles west of Syracuse).

1973—while working on interests in the formation of prisons, Foucault comes out with *This is not a Pipe*, a critique of Rene Magritte's painting by the same name, and *I, Pierre Riviere, a case of parricide*.

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Part II—Foucault and Parallax

Parallax—Relative shifts in subjectivity resulting from the varied perspectives of the seer(s).
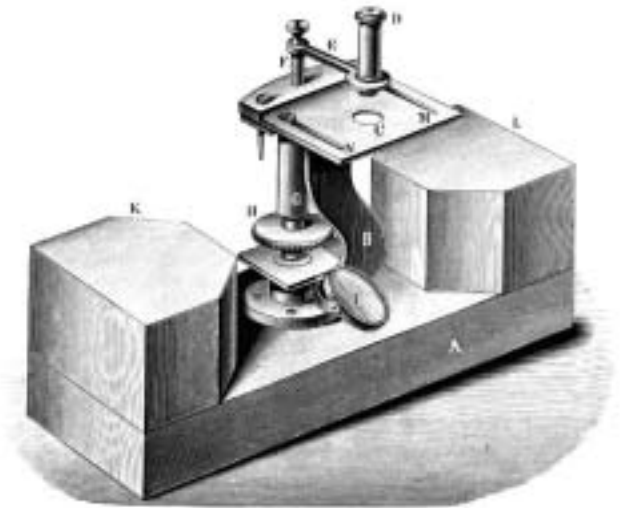
"No gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, ***reverse their roles to infinity***" (5).

"The mirror, by making visible, beyond even the walls of the studio itself, what is happening in front of the picture, creates, in its sagittal dimension, ***an oscillation between the interior and the exterior***" (11).

Microscope—Excluding uncertainty by flattening signs

"Everything would be manifest and immediately knowable if the hermeneutics of resemblance and the semiology of signatures ***coincided without the slightest parallax***. But because the similitudes that form the graphics of the world are one 'cog' out of alignment with those that form its discourse, knowledge and the infinite labour it involves find here the space that is proper to them: it is their task to weave their ways across this distance, pursuing *an endless zigzag* course from resemblance to what it resembles" (30).

"If language exists, it is because below the level of identities and differences there is the foundation provided by continuities, resemblances, repetitions, and ***natural criss-crossings***." [oscillatory path] (120)

"[Natural history] must therefore ***reduce this distance*** between [things and words] so as to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words." (132)

Reading for
rhetoric—discourse—representation—episteme—knowledge