

A glossary of unfamiliar terms taken from the preface of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (1966) and their approximate definitions (as I have tried to understand them)

Degree of unfamiliarity (to me) indicated as follows:

(?) somewhat unfamiliar (??) very unfamiliar (???) I am guessing

Adumbrated (???)

- (1) categorised, classified

Agglutinate (???)

- (1) Meaning to combine, to form; “nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets” (pp. 20)

Anterior (???)

- (1) A middle-ground between interior and exterior, to mean intrinsic to or contained within something

Aphasiac (??)

- (1) relating to Aphasia, a degenerative neurological condition

a priori (???)

- (1) relating to *priority*, necessity
- (2) time-based event that affects or causes urgency; “a historical *a priori*” (pp. 26)

Atopia (??)

- (1) antonym of Utopia, meaning an unfamiliar, uncomfortable space

Bestiary (???)

- (1) relating to beast or beastliness, to mean a primitive or primal area; “in the bestiary of the imagination” (pp. 17)

Chimerical, chimera (???)

- (1) An imagined concept or construct that is fictitious but fantasised about

Code, codes (?)

- (1) system[s] by which we classify, understand or obscure complex information, typically numbered
- (2) *moral* codes relate to the way in which we govern our lives in accordance with our personal belief systems

Common locus (??)

- (1) to mean a commonality or thread that can bind things together

Concatenation (???)

- (1) relating to obligation, pressure
- (2) a pre-decided set of rules to be adhered to

Epistemological, *episteme* (???)

- (1) relating to the foundation of something, meaning intrinsic or fundamental to its wider perception; “the *episteme* of Western Culture” (pp. 24)

Enumeration (??)

- (1) a system that produces a numbered list, classification by numbering

Fabula (???)

- (1) meaning or relating to fable(s), [the] *fabula* denoting the dimension of the fictional

Heteroclite (???)

- (1) things which are fundamentally different from one another on a spatial plane
- (2) where by things are organised in such an incongruous way, there is no way to find commonality between them (pp. 19)

Heterotopia (??)

- (1) antonym to *Utopia*, meaning an imagined reality where things are incongruous, contradictory and paradoxical; inharmonious

Humanism(s) (???)

- (1) pro-human or human centric opinion

Limit-experience (???)

- (1) the outer edge of lived experiences
- (2) the experience of marginalised peoples at the edges of society

Modalities (??)

- (1) synonym of modes, meaning and relating to the variable ways that something exists; “the modalities of [...] order” (pp. 23)

Non-place (?)

- (1) denoting an immaterial space, one which allows for non-geographical exploration and discovery; “where else could they be juxtaposed except for the non-place of language?” (pp. 18)

Ordering codes (???)

- (1) the *codes* by which we consider ordering, classifying, categorising (etc.) our lived experiences

Semantic field (?)

- (1) the field of language and its meaning

Similitude (??)

- (1) synonym of similarity, to mean *the same as* something else

Site of space (???)

- (1) Space in this context denoting geographical space, but also middle grounds, spaces between things, unclassified or unordered space; “In our dreamworld, is not China precisely this privileged *site of space*?” (pp. 20)

Squamous (???)

- (2) monstrous, denoting a sticky or moist texture or with scales; “[...] disgusting, squamous epidermis” (pp. 17)

Syntax (???)

- (1) the relationship between words, the meaning between words that allows us to construct and understand sentences; “the syntax with which we construct sentences [...]” (pp. 19)

Paradoxes (?)

- (1) A concept or notion which contradicts itself

Philology (??)

- (1) the study of language and knowledge, relating to *Philosophy*

Philosophy, philosophical (?)

- (1) the study of knowledge
- (2) the theorisation of new schools of thought and concepts

Polymorphous (???)

- (1) the characteristic of having multiple facets or faces that can change around

Propinquity (??)

- (1) relating to strangeness, bizarreness or unexpected relationships
- (2) odd combinations of objects, words, concepts; “I am concerned here with observing how a culture experiences the propinquity of things” (pp. 26)

It should be noted that this glossary is partial. There are many more unfamiliar, complicated and bizarre terms that could have featured, as Foucault clearly dedicated his practice to the varied use of the thesaurus. While this glossary of approximate definitions may be a semi-functional (or dysfunctional, depending on how accurate my guesswork was) tool for reading and understanding *The Order of Things*, it also poses questions around access and education, and Foucault’s intention for the work. With a text so concerned with the systems of knowledge and language and their codification — and its purpose as an academic text inherently *to educate* — perhaps it could be a little easier for readers to understand.

Bibliography

Foucault, M. (2001) *The Order of Things*, Taylor & Francis Group, London. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [31 October 2024].