In this paper an interpretation of Foucault's work on power is presented. One aim is to introduce this aspect of Foucault's work to the emerging debate on Critical Systems Thinking. Another goal is to clarify how Foucauldian discourse about power can be framed within the notion of "interpretive analytics" (a term that describes Foucault's work, conceived by Dreyfus and Rabinow). This metalogical thinking proposes that archaeological and genealogical dimensions are proper methods for the study of the History of Thought. The interpretive space of experience—in which knowledge, power, and self are the axes of experience—is presented as a comprehensive model of the critical task of the History of Thought. Foucault's work is analyzed according to this model. Two conceptions of power arise from this analysis: the first conception is a peripheral view of power which raises key questions that drive the second, microphysical conception of power. We then demonstrate how the latter absorbs the former. The microphysical conception is based on a nominalistic view, which raises issues about nominalism in Foucault's critical thinking. These are addressed at the end of the article.

KEY WORDS: interpretive thinking; critical thinking; power; systems philosophy.

"... If experience is not a given that is then interpreted, but is itself already interpreted, observable change in patterns of interpretation and action will be the same as changes in subjective experience."

D. Couzens Hoy

1. AN OVERVIEW OF FOUCALUT'S NOTION OF POWER

1.1. Introduction

Seven years passed between the publication of Volumes 1 and 2 of the History of Sexuality. It seems that this was a time of rich reflection for Michel Foucault. The Introduction of the second volume provides a reflection on Foucault's pre-
vious entire work and it details what he sees as important modifications to this. The efforts in Critical Systems Thinking which have drawn upon Foucault’s ideas (e.g., Flood, 1990a, b; Oliga, 1990) stop short of this most recent work. Time is now ripe for us to reconsider Foucault’s contributions in light of this recent development.

Our first task in this opening section of the paper is to develop a comprehensive overview of Foucault’s work. We will do this by first considering what philosophy means to Foucault, then considering the History of Knowledge in Foucauldian terms. A clear vision of Foucault’s notion of the History of Knowledge will be given in the form of a model that brings together Foucault’s conception of knowledge, power and self. The first section is concluded by revisiting the question about Foucault and philosophy.

1.2. What Does Philosophy Mean to Foucault?

Foucault’s retrospective thoughts show a commitment to authentic philosophy. He declared this in modifications to his previous work in the second volume of the History of Sexuality. He asks himself

What would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeability and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of himself? (UP, 8).

Foucault answered this succinctly by posing another question: “What is philosophy today . . . if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself?” (UP, 8–9).

As suggested in the two citations above, Foucault’s main interest was in a critical approach to thought. This can be said to be the main theme of his work overall. This critical approach constitutes for Foucault a “historical ontology of ourselves.” We therefore need to work out very clearly this characteristic train of ideas.

1.3. What Is the History of Thought?

Foucault offers a place to start discussion of the question, “What is the History of Thought?” It is

the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviours or representations: to define the conditions in which human beings “problematize” what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live. (UP, 10)

The History of Thought, then, is an important distinction from other modalities