



# FOUCAULT LIVE

COLLECTED INTERVIEWS, 1961–1984  
MICHEL FOUCAULT



EDITED BY SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER

SEMIOTEXT(E) FOREIGN AGENTS SERIES

Jim Fleming and SyMre Lx)tringer, Editors

**IN THE SHADOW OF THE  
SILENT MAJORITIES**  
*Jean Baudrillard*

**NOMADOLOGY:  
THE WAR MACHINE**  
*Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari*

**DRIFTWORKS**  
*Jean-François Lyotard*

**POPULAR DEFENSE AND  
ECOLOGICAL STRUGGLES**  
*Paul Virilio*

**SIMULATIONS**  
*Jean Baudrillard*

**THE SOCIAL FACTORY**  
*Toni Negri & Mario Tronti*

**PURE WAR**  
*Paul Virilio & Sylvère Lotringer*

**LOOKING BACK ON THE  
END OF THE WORLD**  
*Jean Baudrillard*  
*Gunter Gebauer*  
*Dietmar Kamper*  
*--Dieter Lenzen*  
*Edgar Morin*  
*Gerburg Treusch-Dieter*  
*Paul Virilio*  
*Christoph Wulf*

**FOUCAULT LIVE**  
*Michel Foucault*

**FORGETFOUCAULT**  
*Jean Baudrillard*

**BEHOLD METATRON,  
THE RECORDING ANGEL**  
*SolYurick*

**BOLO'BOLO**  
*P. M.*

**SPEED AND POLITICS**  
*Paul Virilio*

**ON THE UNE**  
*Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari*

**SADNESS AT LEAVING**  
*Erje Ay den*

**REMARKS ON MARX**  
*Michel Foucault*

**69 WAYS TO SING THE BLUES**  
*Jürg Laéderach*

**INTERVENTIONS**  
*Michel Foucault*

**ASSASSINATION RHAPSODY**  
*Derek Pell*

**Foucault Live**  
**(Interviews, 1966-84)**

**Michel Foucault**

**Translated by John Johnston**  
**Edited by Sylvère Lotringer**

SEMIOTEXT(E) FOREIGN AGENTS SERIES

Publication references and  
acknowledgements appear in the  
final section of this book.

Special thanks to Vincent Errante,  
Jim Fleming, Michel Foucault,  
John Johnston, and Lewanne Jones.

Copyright © 1989 Semiotext(e)  
Semiotext(e)  
522 Philosophy Hall  
Columbia University  
New York, NY 10027 USA

Printed in the United States of America

## Contents

1	The Order of Things.....	1
2	The Discourse of History.....	11
3	Foucault Responds to Sartre.....	35
4	The Archeology of Knowledge.....	45
5	The Birth of a World.....	57
6	Rituals of Exclusion.....	63
7	An Historian of Culture.....	73
8	Film and Popular Memory.....	89
9	Sorcery and Madness.....	107
10	On Literature.....	113
11	The Politics of Soviet Crime.....	121
12	L Pierre Rivière.....	131
13	The End of the Monarchy of Sex.....	137
14	The Anxiety of Judging.....	157
15	Clarifications on the Question of Power.....	179
i 16	The Masked Philosopher.....	193
17	Friendship as a Way of Life.....	203
18	Sexual Choice, Sexual Act.....	211
19	How Much Does it Cost to Tell the Truth?...233	
20	An Ethics of Pleasure.....	257
21	What Calls for Punishment?.....	275
22	The Concern for Truth.....	293
t 23	An Aesthetics of Existence.....	309
' 24	The Return of Morality.....	317
	References and Acknowledgements.....	333

## **Foucault Live**

# 1

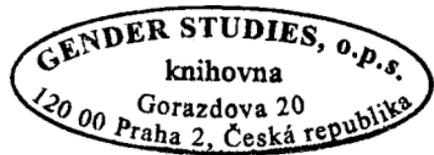
## The Order of Things

Q: How is *The Order of Things* related to *Madness and Civilization*?

MF: *Madness and Civilization*, roughly speaking, was the history of a division, the history above all of a certain break that every society found itself obliged to install. On the other hand, in this book I wanted to write a history of order, to state how a society reflects upon resemblances among things and how differences between things can be mastered, organized into networks, sketched out according to rational schemes. *Madness and Civilization* is the history of difference. *The Order of Things* the history of resemblance, sameness, and identity.

Q: In the sub-title that you have given the book one again encounters this word "archeology," which appeared in the sub-title of *The Birth of the Clinic* and again in the Preface to *Madness and Civilization*.

MF: By archeology I would like to designate not exactly a discipline, but a domain of research, which would be the following:



## 2 The Order of Things

In a society, different bodies of learning, philosophical ideas, everyday opinions, but also institutions, commercial practices and police activities, mores—all refer to a certain implicit knowledge (*savoir*) special to this society.' This knowledge is profoundly different from the bodies of learning that one can find in scientific books, philosophical theories, and religious justifications, but it is what makes possible at a given moment the appearance of a theory, an opinion, a practice. Thus, in order for the big centers of internment to be opened at the end of the 17th century, it was necessary that a certain knowledge of madness be opposed to non-madness, of order to disorder, and it's this knowledge (*savoir*) that I wanted to investigate, as the condition of possibility of knowledge (*connaissance*), of institutions, of practices.

This style of research has for me the following interest: it permits me to avoid every problem concerning the anteriority of theory in relation to practice, and the inverse. In fact, I deal with practices, institutions and theories on the same plane and according to the same isomorphisms, and I look for the underlying knowledge (*savoir*) that makes them possible, the stratum of knowledge that constitutes them historically. Rather than try to explain this knowledge from the point of view of the practico-inert, I try to formulate an analysis from the position of what one could call the “theoretico-active.”^

Q: You find yourself therefore confronting a double problem; of history and formalization.

MF; All these practices, then, these institutions and theories, I take at the level of traces, that is, almost always at the level of verbal traces. The ensemble of these traces constitutes a sort of domain considered to be homogeneous; one doesn't establish any differences *a priori*. The problem is to find common traits between these traces of sufficiently

### *The Order of Things 3*

different orders in order to constitute what logicians call classes, aestheticians call forms, men of science call structures, and which are the invariants common to a certain number of traces.

Q: How have you posed the problem of choice and non-choice?

MF: I will respond by saying that in fact there must not be any privileged choice. One must be able to read everything, to know all the institutions and all the practices. None of the values traditionally recognized in the history of ideas and philosophy must be accepted as such. One is dealing with a field that will ignore the differences and traditionally important things. Which means that one will take up *Don Quixote*, Descartes, and a decree by Pomponne de Belierre about houses of internment in the same stroke. One will perceive that the grammarians of the 18 th century have as much importance as the recognized philosophers of the same period.

Q: It is in this sense that you say, for example, that Curier and Ricardo have taught you as much or more than Kant and Hegel. But then the question of information becomes the pressing one: how do you read everything?

MF: One can read all the grammarians, and all the economists. For *The Birth of the Clinic* I read every medical work of importance for methodology of the period 1780-1820. The choices that one could make are inadmissible, and shouldn't exist. One ought to read everything, study everything. In other words, one must have at one's disposal the general archive of a period at a given moment. And archeology is, in a strict sense, the science of this archive.

## 4 *The Order of Things*

Q: What determines the choice of historic period (here, as in *Madness and Civilization*, it's from the Renaissance to the present), and its relationship with the "archeological" perspective that you adopt?

MF: This kind of research is only possible as the analysis of our own sub-soil. It's not a defect of these retrospective disciplines to find their point of departure in our own actuality. There can be no doubt that the problem of the division between reason and unreason became possible only with Nietzsche and Artaud. And it's the sub-soil of our modern consciousness of madness that I have wanted to investigate. If there were not something like a fault line in this soil archeology would not have been possible or necessary. In the same way, if the question of meaning and of the relation between meaning and the sign had not appeared in European culture with Freud, Saussure<sup>^</sup> and Husserl, it is obvious that it would not have been necessary to investigate the sub-soil of our consciousness of meaning. In the two cases these are the critical analyses of our own condition.

Q: What has pushed you to adopt the three axes that orient your whole analysis?

MF; Roughly this. The human sciences that have appeared since the end of the 19th century are caught as it were in a double obligation, a double and simultaneous postulation: that of hermeneutics, interpretation, or exegesis: one must understand a hidden meaning; and the other: one must formalize, discover the system, the structural invariant, the network of simultaneities. Yet these two questions seemed to confront each other in a privileged fashion in the human sciences, to the point that one has the impression that it is necessary that they be one or the other, interpretation or formal-

## *The Order of Things 5*

zation. What I understood was precisely the archeological research of what had made this ambiguity possible. I wanted to find the branch that bore this fork.

Thus I had to respond to a double question concerning the classic period: that of the theory of, signs, and that of the empirical order, of the constitution of empirical orders.

It appeared to me that in fact the classical age, usually considered as the age of the radical mechanization of nature, of the mathematization of the living, was in reality something entirely different, that there existed a very important domain that included general grammar, natural history and the analysis of wealth; and that this empirical domain is based on the project of an ordering of things, and this thanks not to mathematics and geometry but to a systematic of signs, a sort of general and systematic taxonomy of things.

Q: It's thus a return to the classical age that has determined the three axes. How then is the passage in these three domains from the classical age to the 19th century effected?

MF: It revealed one thing that came to me as a complete surprise: that man didn't exist within classical knowledge (*savoir*). What existed in the place where we now discover man was the power special to discourse, to the verbal order, to represent the order of things. In order to study the grammar or the system of wealth, there was no need to pass through a science of man, but through discourse.

Q: Yet, apparently, if ever a literature seemed to speak of man, it was our literature of the 17th century.

MF: Insofar as what existed in classical knowledge were representations ordered in a discourse, all the notions

## ***6 The Order of Things***

that are fundamental for our conception of man, like those of life, work, and language, had no basis in that period, and no place.

At the end of the 17th century, discourse ceased to play the organizing role that it had in classical knowledge. There was no longer any transparency between the order of things and the representations that one could have of them; things were folded somehow onto their own thickness and onto a demand exterior to representation, and it's for this reason that languages with their history, life with its organization and its autonomy, and work with its own capacity for production appeared. In the face of that, in the lacuna left by discourse, man constituted himself, a man who is as much one who lives, who speaks and who works, as one who experiences life, language and work, as one finally who can be known to the extent that he lives, speaks and works.

Q: Against this background how does our situation today present itself?

MF: At the moment we find ourselves in a very ambiguous situation. Man has existed since the beginning of the 19th century only because discourse ceased to have the force of law over the empirical world. Man has existed there where discourse was silenced. Yet with Saussure, Freud and Hegel, at the heart of what is most fundamental in the knowledge of man, the problem of meaning and the sign reappeared. Now one can wonder if this return of the great problem of the sign and meaning, of the order of signs, constitutes a kind of superimposition in our culture over what had constituted the classical age and modernity, or rather if it's a question of omens announcing that man is disappearing, since until the present the order of man and that of signs have in our culture been incompatible with each other. Man would die from the

## *The Order of Things 7*

signs that were bom in him—that's what Nietzsche, the first one to see this, meant.

Q: It seems to me that this idea of an incompatibility between the OTder of signs and the order of man must have a certain number of consequences.

MF: Yes. For example;

1. It makes an idle fancy of the idea of a science of man that would be at the same time an analysis of signs.

2. It announces the first deterioration in European history of the anthropological and humanist episode that we experienced in the 19th century, when one thought that the sciences of man would be at the same time the liberation of man, of the human being in his plenitude. Experience has shown that in their development the sciences of man lead to the disappearance of man rather than to his apotheosis.

3. Literature, whose status changed in the 19th century when it ceased to belong to the order of discourse and became the manifestation of language in its thickness, must no doubt now assume another status, is assuming another status, and the hesitation that it manifests between the vague humanisms and the pure formalism of language is no doubt only one of the manifestations of this phenomenon that is fundamental for us and which makes us oscillate between interpretation and formalization, man and signs.

Q; Thus one sees clearly the great determinations of French literature since the classical age take form; in particular, the scheme that leads from a first humanism, that of Romanticism, to Flaubert, then to this literature of the subject incarnated in the generation of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, to the new humanism of before and after the war, and today to the formation of the *nouveau roman*. Yet German literature

## ***8 The Order of Things***

holds this kind of evolutionary scheme in check, however one envisages it.

MF; Perhaps insofar as German classicism was contemporary with this age of history and interpretation, German literature found itself from its origins in this confrontation that we are experiencing today. That would explain why Nietzsche didn't do anything but become aware of this situation, and now he's the one who serves as a light for us.

Q; That would explain why he can appear throughout your book as the exemplary figure, the non-archeologizable subject (or not yet), since it is starting from what he opened that the question is posed in all its violence.

MF; Yes, he is the one who through German culture understood that the rediscovery of the dimension proper to language is incompatible with man. From that point Nietzsche has taken a prophetic value for us. And then on the other hand it is necessary to condemn with the most complete severity all the attempts to dull the problem. For example, the use of the most familiar notions of the 18th century, the schemes of resemblance and contiguity, all of that which is used to build the human sciences, to found them, all that appears to me to be a form of intellectual cowardice that serves to confirm what Nietzsche signified to us for almost a century, that where there is a sign, there man cannot be, and that where one makes signs speak, there man must fall silent.

What appears to me to be deceiving and naive in reflections on and analyses of signs is that one supposes them to be always already there, deposited on the figure of the world, or constituted by men, and that one never investigates their being. What does it mean, the fact that there are signs and marks of language? One must pose the problem of the

## *The Order of Things 9*

being of language as a task, in order not to fall back to a level of reflection which would be that of the 18th century, to the level of empiricism.

Q: One thing in your book struck me very sharply, the perfect singularity of its position towards philosophy, the philosophical tradition and history on the one hand, and on the other towards the history of ideas, methods and concepts.

MF: I was shocked by the fact that there existed on one side a history of philosophy which gave itself as a privileged object the philosophical edifices that the tradition signaled as important (at the very most one accepted, when one was a little trendy, to relate them to the birth of industrial capitalism), and on the other side a history of ideas, that is to say sub-philosophies, which took for their privileged object the texts of Montesquieu, Diderot or FonteneUe.

If one adds to that the histories of the sciences, one cannot fail to be struck by the impossibility for our culture to pose the problem of the history of its own thought. It's why I have tried to make, obviously in a rather particular style, the history not of thought in general but of all that "contains thought" in a culture, of all in which there is thought. For there is thought in philosophy, but also in a novel, in jurisprudence, in law, in an administrative system, in a prison. A

Translated by John Johnston

## ***10 The Order of Things***

### Notes

'In the case of Foucault's use of the terms *savoir* and *connaissance*, I have retained the French in parentheses in order to preserve a distinction not available in English. (Translator)

^The "practico-inert" is a historical category developed by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). The practico-inert field is a structure that unifies individuals from without (e.g., common interest).

'Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), first published in 1916, is at the origin of the modern science of signs, or semiotics.

# 2

## The Discourse of History

Q: The double reception given to your book—critical and public, enthusiastic and reticent—prompts a follow-up interview to the one you gave more than a year ago, where you laid out the nature and the field of your research. Which appears to you to be the most striking reaction raised by *The Order of Things*?

MF: I was struck by the following fact: professional historians recognized it as a work of history, and many others, who think of history as an old idea and no doubt feel it to be very outmoded today, cried out at the murder of history.

Q: Does it not seem to you that the form of the book—mean by that as much the absence of detailed notes and bibliographies, accumulated and acknowledged references, customary for this kind of work, as the mirror play constituted by *Las Meninas* and your style itself—has not this form helped to mask its nature?

MF: No doubt the presentation of the book is not indifferent to these things, but above all I believe that certain people are ignorant of the very important mutation in

## ***12 The Discourse of History***

historical knowledge (*savoir*) already more than twenty years old. One knows that the books of Dumézil,<sup>1</sup> Lévi-Strauss and Lacan count among the major books of our time, but is it similarly known that, among the works that assure a new adventure in knowledge today, one must put the books of Braudel, Furet and Denis Richet, Leroy-Ladurie, the research of the Cambridge historical school and of the Soviet school?^

Q; You thus situate yourself deliberately as an historian. To what do you attribute this ignorance?

MF: History, I believe, has become the object of a curious sacralization. For many intellectuals, a distant respect for history, uninformed and traditionalist, was the simplest way of reconciling their political conscience and their activity as researchers or writers. Under the sign of the cross of history, every discourse became a prayer to the God of just causes. There is next a more technical reason. One must recognize that in domains like linguistics, anthropology, history of religion and sociology, the concepts, formed in the 19th century and of a dialectical order, one can say, have been for the most part abandoned. Yet, in the eyes of certain people, history as a discipline constituted the last refuge of the dialectical order: in it one could save the reign of rational contradiction. Thus, for these two reasons and against all likelihood, a conception of history organized on the narrative model as a great sequence of events caught up in a hierarchy of determinations: individuals are grasped at the interior of this totality which transcends them and plays with them but of which they are perhaps at the same time the badly conscious authors. To the point that this history, simultaneously an individual project and a totality, has for some become untouchable: to refuse such a form of historical statement would be to attack the great cause of the revolution.

## *The Discourse of History 13*

Q: The novelty of the historical works you allude to consists in what exactly?

MF: One can characterize them a little schematically as follows:

1. These historians are posing the very difficult problem of periodization. They have perceived that the manifest periodization highlighted by political revolutions was not always methodologically the best way possible to mark things out.

2. Each periodization marks out in history a certain level of events, and, inversely, each layer of events calls for its own periodization. There lies a delicate set of problems, since, according to the level one chooses, one will have to delimit different periodizations, and according to the periodization that one is given, one will attain different levels. Thus one accedes to a complex methodology of discontinuity.

3. The old traditional opposition between the human sciences and history (the first studying the synchronic and the non-evolutionary, the second analyzing the dimension of ceaseless great changes) disappears; change can be the object of analysis in terms of structure, and historical discourse is populated with analyses borrowed from ethnology, sociology, and the human sciences.

4. One introduces into historical analysis many more types of relationship and modes of linkage than the universal relation of causality through which one had formerly wanted to define historical method.

Thus, for the first time perhaps, one has the possibility of analyzing as an object a set of materials which have been deposited in the course of time in the form of signs, traces, institutions, practices and works, etc. In all these changes there are two essential manifestations:

## 14 *The Discourse of History*

(a) On the historians' side, the works of Braudel, the Cambridge school, the Russian school, etc.

(b) The very remarkable critique and analysis of the notion of history developed by Althusser at the beginning of *Reading Capital*.<sup>^</sup>

Q: Thus you mark a direct kinship between your works and those of Althusser?

MF: Having been his student and owing him much, perhaps I tend to place under his sign an effort that he might challenge, so much that I can't respond to what concerns him. But all the same, I would say: open Althusser's books.

There remains, however, between Althusser and myself, an obvious difference: he employs the word epistemological break in relation to Marx, while I affirm that Marx does not represent such a break."

Q: Is not this difference over Marx precisely the most manifest sign of what has appeared to be arguable in your analysis of the structural mutations of knowledge (*sa-voir*) in the course of the 19th century?

MF: What I said *a propos* of Marx concerns the precise epistemological domain of political economy. Whatever the importance of the modifications Marx brings to Ricardo's analysis, I do not believe that his economic analyses escape the epistemological space inaugurated by Ricardo. On the other hand, one can suppose that Marx introduced into the historical and political consciousness of men a radical break and that the Marxist theory of society inaugurated an entirely new epistemological field.

My book bears the sub-title "An archeology of the human sciences": that itself supposes another, which would be

## *The Discourse of History 15*

precisely the analysis of knowledge (*savoir*) and of historical consciousness in the West since the 16th century. And even before having advanced very far in this work, it seemed to me that the great break has to be situated at the level of Marx. Here we are led back to what I was saying earlier: the periodization of domains of knowledge (*connaissance*) cannot be made in the same way according to the levels where one is positioned. One finds oneself before a kind of superimposition of bricks and the interesting thing, the strange and curious thing, will be to know precisely how and why the epistemological break for the life sciences, economy and language is situated at the beginning of the 19th century, and at the middle of the 19th century for the theory of history and pohtics.

Q: But that's to break deliberately with the tendency to privilege history as the harmonic science of the totality as the Marxist tradition transmits it to us.

MF: In my opinion this widespread idea is not really to be found in Marx. But I will respond, since in this domain where one is still only broaching possible principles, it is still way too early to pose the problem of the reciprocal determinations of these layers. It is not at all impossible that one can discover forms of determination such that all the levels line up and move together in a great regimented step on the bridge of historical progress. But that's only an hypothesis.

Q: In the articles that attack your book one notices the words "to freeze history," which return like a *leitmotif* and seem to formulate the more fundamental accusation, which puts into question as much your conceptual scheme as the narrative technique it implies, in fact the very possibility, as you intend to do it, of formulating a logic of mutation. What do you think of this objection?

## 16 *The Discourse of History*

MF: In what is called the history of ideas one describes change in general by making things easy in two ways:

(1) One uses concepts which appear to me to be a little magical, like influence, crisis, the coming to consciousness (*la prise de conscience*), the interest taken in a problem, etc. All utilitarian, they do not appear to me to be operating.

(2) When one encounters a difficulty, one passes from the level of analysis which is that of the statements themselves to another which is exterior to it. Thus, when confronted with a change, a contradiction or an incoherence, one resorts to an explanation in terms of social conditions, mentality, vision of the world, etc.

I wanted, through a methodological move, to do without all that; consequently, I have striven to describe statements, entire groups of statements, by making the relations of implication, of opposition and exclusion which could link them appear.

I am told for example that I have admitted or invented an absolute break between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. In fact, when one carefully examines the scientific discourse of the end of the 18th century, one notices a very rapid and in truth a very enigmatic change. I wanted to describe this change very precisely, in other words to establish the transformations necessary and sufficient for passing from the initial form of scientific discourse, that of the 18th century, to its final form, that of the 19th. The set for transformations that I have defined maintains a certain number of theoretical elements, displaces certain others, sees old ones, disappear and new ones arise; all that allows me to define the rule of passage in the domains I have focused upon. What I have wanted to establish is the very contrary of a discontinuity, since I have made manifest the very form of passage from one state to another.

## *The Discourse of History 17*

Q: I wonder if the equivocation doesn't derive from the difficulty of thinking side by side the terms of the change and passage on the one hand, and the picture and the description on the other.

MF: All the same, it's been more than fifty years since we perceived that the task of description was essential in domains like those of history, ethnology and language. After all, mathematical language since Galileo and Newton doesn't function as an explanation of nature but as a description of a process. I don't see why one should contest the attempt of non-formalized disciplines like history to undertake for themselves the first task of description.

Q: How do you conceive the methodological orientation of this first task?

MF: (1) One must be able, if what I have said is true, to account for and analyze exactly the texts I've discussed according to the same schemes by bringing to them several supplementary transformations.

(2) One can very well reconsider these texts, and the material itself that I have treated, in a description that would have another periodization and would be situated at another level. When one makes an archeology of historical knowledge (*savoir*) for example, it will be necessary to utilize again the texts on language and to relate them to exegetical techniques, the criticism of sources, and to all knowledge (*savoir*) concerning the holy scriptures and the historic tradition; their description will then be different. But these descriptions, if they are exact, must be such that one can define the transformations that permit one to pass from one to the other.

In one sense description is therefore infinite, in another it is closed, to the extent that it tends to establish a

## 18 *The Discourse of History*

theoretical model capable of accounting for relations that exist between the discourse studied.

Q: It would seem that it is precisely this double character of description that by its very nature creates the reticence or the bewilderment, since history thus finds itself at once directly grafted onto the infinity of its archives, therefore onto the non-sense proper to every infinity, and mastered in the models whose formal character challenges in its very logic the non-sense belonging to every closure of an internal character. And the effect is all the more powerful as your book observes an absolute distance towards what one could call “living history,” where the practice, whatever the theoretical level at which one solicits it and the models in which its indefatigable diversity can be enclosed, turns the non-sense into a sort of familiarity in a “natural” world of actions and institutions. How do you understand this break on which *The Order of Things* is established?

MF: In wanting to engage in a rigorous description of the statements themselves, it appeared to me that the domain of statements very much obeyed certain formal laws, that one could for example discover a single theoretical model for different epistemological domains and that one could, in this sense, infer an autonomy of discourse. But there is no reason for describing this autonomous layer of discourse except to the extent that one can relate it to other layers, practices, institutions, social and political relations, etc. It is this relationship that has always haunted me, and in *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic* I wanted precisely to define the different relationships between these different domains. I took for example the epistemological domain of medicine and that of the institutions of repression, of hospitalization, of aid to the unemployed, of administrative control over public health.

## *The Discourse of History 19*

etc. But I perceived that things were more complicated than I had believed in the first two works, that the discursive domains didn't always obey the structures that had common practical domains and associated institutions, that they obeyed on the other hand structures common to other epistemological domains, that there was something like an isomorphism of discourses for a given period. In such a way that one finds oneself before two axes of perpendicular description: that of theoretical models common to several discourses, and that of relationships between a discursive domain and a non-discursive domain. In *The Order of Things* I traversed the horizontal axis, in *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic* the vertical dimension of the figure.

For the first, let someone undertake to show me, using texts as a basis, that such a theoretical coherence among discourses doesn't exist and a real discussion could begin. As for minimizing the domain of practice, my preceding books are there to show that I am far from doing that; for their relationship I'll refer to an illustrative example. When Dumézil demonstrates that the Roman religion has an isomorphic relationship with Scandinavian or Celtic legends or some Iranian rite, he doesn't mean that Roman religion doesn't have its place within Roman history, that the history of Rome doesn't exist, but that one cannot describe the history of Roman religion, its relationships with institutions, social classes and economic conditions except by taking into account its internal morphology. In the same way, to demonstrate that the scientific discourses of a period stem from a common theoretical model does not mean that they escape history and float in the air as if disembodied and isolated, but that one cannot write the history and the analysis of the functioning of the role of this knowledge (*savoir*), the conditions that give rise to it, and the manner in which it is rooted in the society without taking into account the force and consistency of these isomorphisms.

## 20 *The Discourse of History*

Q: This objectivity that you accord to theoretical models in view of an extensive analysis of history as a science and, for the constitution of these models, to the descriptive logic as such, obliges us to investigate the point of departure of this description, its source in some sense, which amounts in the case of a book as personal as yours to trying to understand the relationship of the author and his text, what place exactly it can, wants to, and must occupy.

MF: I can't respond to that without plunging into the book itself. If the style of analysis that I tried to formulate in it is admissible, one should be able to define the theoretical model to which not only my book, but those which belong to the same configuration of knowledge (*savoir*) also belong. No doubt it is one that permits us today to treat history as a set of statements actually articulated, to treat language as an object of description and as a set of relationships in reference to discourse and to statements which make up the object of interpretation. It is our period and it alone that makes possible the appearance of this set of texts that treat grammar, natural history and political economy as so many objects.

So much in fact that the author, in that and only in that, constitutes that of which he speaks. My book is a pure and simple "fiction": it's a novel, but it's not I who invented it; it is the relationship between our period and its epistemological configuration and this mass of statements. So much that the subject is indeed present in the totality of the book, but he is the anonymous "one" who speaks today in all that is said.

Q: How do you understand the status of this anonymous "one"?

MF: Perhaps we are undoing little by little, and not without great difficulty, the great distrust in allegory. I mean

## *The Discourse of History 21*

by that the simple idea that consists in demanding from a text nothing but what the text says *truly* beneath what it *really* says. No doubt that's the heritage of an ancient exegetical tradition: underneath everything said, we suspect that another thing is being said. The laic version of this allegorical mistrust has had the effect of assigning to every commentator the task of discovering everywhere the true thought of the author, what he said without saying it, meant without succeeding to say it, wanted to hide and yet allowed to appear. One perceives that today there are many other possibilities for dealing with language. Thus the contemporary critic—and this is what distinguishes him from what was done still very recently—is formulating, according to the diverse texts that he studies, his object-texts, a sort of new combinatory. Instead of reconstituting its immanent secret, he grasps the text as a set of elements (words, metaphors, literary forms, a set of narratives) among which one can make absolutely new relations appear insofar as they have not been mastered by the writer's project and are made possible only through the work as such. The formal relations that one thus discovers were not present in the mind of anyone, they do not constitute the latent content of statements, their indiscreet secret; they are a construction, but an exact construction as long as the relations thus described can actually be assigned to the materials treated. We have learned to put the words of men into yet unformulated relationships stated by us for the first time, and yet objectively exact.

Thus the contemporary critic is abandoning the great myth of interiority: *intimior intimo ejus*. He finds himself totally displaced from the old themes of locked enclosures, of the treasure in the box that he habitually sought in the depth of the work's container. Placing himself at the exterior of the text, he constitutes a new exterior for it, writing texts out of texts.

## 22 *The Discourse of History*

Q: In terms of that description it seems to me that modern literary criticism, in its very richness and multiple contributions, is guilty of marking in one sense a curious regression in relation to one in whom it found the essential of its demands: I mean Maurice Blanchot. For if Blanchot, under the name of "Literature," actually won for the space of modern thought the imperious exteriority of the text, he in no way attributed to himself this facility that tends to avoid the violence of the work as place of the name and of a biography whose secret, precisely, is to be diversely traversed by the irreducible and abstract force of the literature whose vigorous itinerary Blanchot retraces, in each case, without caring to describe it as such in the logic of its forms, as a more learned critic would want to.

MF: It's true that it is Blanchot who has made all discourse on literature possible. First of all because he's the one who has shown above all that works are linked to one another through this exterior face of their language where "literature" appears. Literature is thus what constitutes the outside of every work, what ploughs up every written language and leaves on every text an empty claw mark. It is not a mode of language, but a hollow that traverses like a great movement all literary languages. By making this instance of literature appear as a "common place," an empty space where works come to lodge themselves, I believe that he has assigned to the contemporary critic what must be his object, what makes his work both of exactitude and invention possible.

One can affirm on the other hand that Blanchot has made it possible by instituting between the author and the work a mode of relationship that had remained unsuspected. We now know that the work does not belong to the author's project, nor even to the one of his existence, that it maintains with him relationships of negation and destruction, that it is

## *The Discourse of History 23*

for him the flowing of an eternal outside, and that yet there exists between them this primordial function of the name. It is through the name that in a work a modality irreducible to the anonymous murmur of all other languages is marked. It is certain that the contemporary literary critic has not yet really investigated this existence of the name that Blanchot has proposed for him. He really ought to deal with it, since the name marks for the work its relations of opposition, of difference with other works, and since it characterizes absolutely the mode of being of the literary work in a culture and in institutions like ours. After all, it's now been five or six centuries since the anonymous, apart from exceptional cases, has disappeared completely from literary language and its functioning.

Q: It's for that reason, I think, that the lesson of Blanchot, compared with the technical critiques towards which he maintains an equal distance, finds a more accurate echo in an interpretation of the psychoanalytic type, which maintains itself by definition in the space of the subject, than in the linguistic type of interpretation, where often the risk of mechanical abstraction arises.

What is precisely important and problematic in certain research of the "scientific" type like yours is a somewhat new relationship of familiarity that they appear to maintain with the more explicitly "subjective" works of literature.

MF: It would be very interesting to know of what the designatable, "nameable" individuality of a scientific work consists; those of Abel or Lagrange for example are marked by characteristics of writing that individualize them, as surely as a painting by Titian or page of Chateaubriand. And similarly for the philosophic or descriptive writings of Linnaeus or Buffon. They are caught up however in the network of all those who speak of "the same thing," who are contemporary to

## 24 *The Discourse of History*

them or follow them: this network that envelops them outlines these great figures without a social identity that one calls "mathematics," "history," or "biology."

The problem of the singularity or the relation between the name and the network is an old problem, but in former times there existed certain kinds of channels and marked paths that separated literary works, works on physics or mathematics and historical works from one another; each one evolved on its own level and in some way in the territory where it was assigned, in spite of a whole set of overlappings, borrowings and resemblances. One can note today that all this dividing up, this separation, is being effaced or being reconstituted in another mode altogether. Thus the relations between linguistics and literary works, between music and mathematics, the discourse of historians and economists are no longer simply of an order of borrowing, imitation or involuntary analogy, nor even of structural isomorphism; these works and progressions are formed in relation to one another and exist for one another. There is a literature of linguistics and not an influence of grammarians on the grammar and the vocabulary of novelists. In the same way, mathematics is not applicable to the construction of musical language, as at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th; it actually constitutes the formal universe of the musical work itself. In such a way that one is witness to a general and vertiginous effacement of the old distribution of languages.

One says gladly that nothing else today interests us but language and that it has become the universal object. We must not make a mistake there: this sovereignty is the provisional, equivocal, precarious sovereignty of a tribe in migration. Of course we are interested in language; yet it's not that we have finally entered into its possession, but rather that it escapes us more than ever before. Its boundaries have collapsed and its calm universe has entered into fusion; and if we

## *The Discourse of History 25*

are submerged, it is not so much through its intemporal vigor as through the movement today of its wave.

Q: How do you situate yourself personally in this mutation that pulls the most demanding works of knowledge (*savoir*) into a sort of novehstic adventure?

MF: In conttast to those whom one calls structuralists, I am not so interested in the formal possibilities offered by a system like language. Personally I am rather haunted by the existence of discourse, by the fact that particular words have been spoken; these events have functioned in relation to their original situation, they have left traces behind them; they subsist and exercise, in this subsistence even within history, a certain number of manifest or secret functions.

Q: Thus you yield to the passion proper to the historian who wants to respond to the infinite rumor of the archives.

MF: Yes, for my object is not language but the archive, that is to say the accumulated existence of discourse. Archeology, such as I intend it, is kin neither to geology (as analysis of the sub-soil), nor to genealogy (as descriptions of beginnings and sequences); it's the analysis of discourse in its modality of *archive*.

A nightmare has pursued me since childhood: I have under my eyes a text that I can't read, or of which only a tiny part can be deciphered; I pretend to read it, but I know that I'm inventing; then the text suddenly blurs completely, I can no longer read anything or even invent, my throat constricts and I wake up.

I don't know what tiere can be of the personal in this obsession with language, which exists everywhere and escapes

## 26 *The Discourse of History*

us in its very survival. It survives by turning its look away from us, its face inclined toward a night of which we know nothing.

How justify these discourses on discourse that I undertake? What status do we give them? One begins to perceive, above all on the side of logicians and the students of Russell and Wittgenstein, that language can be analyzed in terms of its formal properties only on the condition of taking account of its concrete functioning. Language is very much a set of structures, but discourses are unities of function, and the analysis of language in its totality cannot fail to confront this essential demand. To this extent what I do is located in the general anonymity of all the research which today turns around language, that is to say not only the language that permits us to speak, but the discourses that have been spoken.

Q: More precisely, what do you mean by this idea of the anonymous?

MF: I wonder if we're not discovering again today, in the relationship of the name to the anonymous, a certain transposition of the old classic problem of the individual and the truth, or of the individual and beauty. How is it that an individual born at a given moment, having such a history and such a face, can discover, by himself and for the first time, some truth, perhaps even the truth? That's the question to which Descartes responds in the *Meditations*: how could I discover the truth? And many years later we find it again in the romantic theme of the genius; How can an individual lodged in a fold of history discover the forms of beauty in which the whole truth of a period or of a civilization is expressed? The problem today is no longer posed in these terms: we are no longer in the truth but in the coherence of discourse, no longer in beauty, but in the complex relations of forms. It's

## *The Discourse of History 27*

a question now of knowing how an individual, a name, can be the support of an element or group of elements that, in being integrated into the coherence of discourses or the indefinite network of forms, comes to efface or at least to render empty and useless this name, this individuality of which he bears however to a certain point, for a certain time and in certain respects, the mark. We have to conquer the anonymous, to justify for ourselves the enormous presumption of one day finally becoming anonymous, a little like the classics had to justify for themselves the enormous presumption of having found the truth, and of attaching their names to it. The problem in the past for the one who wrote was to tear himself out of the anonymity of everything; nowadays, it's to succeed in effacing one's own name and of coming to lodge one's voice in this great anonymous murmur of discourses held today.

Q: Does it not seem to you however that it's there, as soon as the movement is pushed to the extreme, that we enter into the double game of affirmation and effacement of the word and silence, of which Blanchot makes the essence of the literary act, when he assigns to the work the chosen function of a rich abode of silence facing the insupportable immensity of speech without which, however, it would not exist? When Lévi-Strauss says of *The Raw and the Cooked*:<sup>^</sup> "Thus this book on myths, is, in its way, a myth" he has seen the sovereign impersonality of myth, and yet few books, from this very fact, are as personal as his *Mythologies*. You are, in a very different way, in a similar situation in relation to history.

MF: What gives books like those which have no other pretension than to be anonymous so many marks of singularity and individuality are not the privileged signs of a style, nor the mark of a singular or individual interpretation, but the rage to apply the eraser by which one meticulously

## 28 *The Discourse of History*

effaces all that could refer to a written individuality. Between writers and people who write (*écrivants*) there are the effacers.®

Bourbaki is at bottom the model. The dream for all of us would be, each in his own domain, to make something like this Bourbaki, where mathematics is elaborated under the anonymity of a fantastic name. Perhaps the irreducible difference between research in mathematics and our activities is that the eraser marks intended to attain the anonymous indicate more surely the signature of a name than the ostentatious penholder. And yet one could say that Bourbaki has his style and very much his own way of being anonymous.

Q: Like your reference to the classic relation of the individual, this leads me to think that the author's position in this kind of research seems like a doubling of that of the philosopher, always ambiguous, between science and literature. In this sense, what do you think is the modern status of philosophy?

MF: It seems to me that philosophy no longer exists; not that it has disappeared, but it has been disseminated into a great number of diverse activities. Thus the activities of the axiomatician, the linguist, the anthropologist, the historian, the revolutionary, the man of politics can be forms of philosophical activity. In the 19th century the reflection that investigated the condition of possibility of objects was philosophical; today philosophy is every activity that makes a new object appear for knowledge or practice—whether this activity stems from mathematics, linguistics, anthropology or history.

Q: Nevertheless, in the last chapter of *The Order of Things*, where you deal with the human sciences today, you accord to history a privilege over all other disciplines. Would

## *The Discourse of History 29*

it therefore be a new way of rediscovering this power of synthetic legislation that used to be the proper privilege of philosophic thought, and that Heidegger already recognized not as that of traditional philosophy, but as “history of philosophy”?

MF; Indeed, history does retain, in relation to my investigation, a privileged position. It's because in our culture, at least for several centuries, discourse has been linked together through history as a mode: we receive things which have been spoken as if they come from a past where they succeeded one another, were opposed, influenced, replaced, engendered and accumulated. The cultures “without history” are obviously not those where there was neither event, nor evolution, nor revolution, but where discourses were not added together according history as a mode; they are juxtaposed; they replace one another; they are forgotten; they are transformed. On the other hand, in a culture like ours, every discourse appears against the background of the disappearance of every event.

That's why in studying a set of theoretical discourses concerning language, economy and living beings I did not want to establish *a priori* the possibilities or impossibilities of such knowledges—this is an element of birth, that of survival, etc. I wanted to do an historian's work by showing the simultaneous functioning of these discourses and the transformations which accounted for their visible changes.

But history for all that does not have to play the role of a philosophy of philosophy, to pride itself in being the language of languages, as the historicism which tended to pass to the account of history the legislative and critical power of philosophy wanted it in the 19th century. If history possesses a privilege, it would be rather to the extent to which it would play the role of an internal ethnology of our culture and of our rationality, and would consequently incarnate the very possibility of every ethnology.

### 30 *The Discourse of History*

Q: I would like, after this long detour, to return to the book, and to ask you the reason for this gap that one senses in your position when one passes from the analysis of the 17th and 18th centuries to that of the 19th and 20th centuries, a gap which has been the object of some of the most lively reservations formulated towards your work.

MF: Yes, something seems to change with the 19th century in the arrangement of the book. The same thing occurred in *Madness and Civilization*: people assumed that I wanted to attack modern psychiatry and in *The Order of Things* that I was being polemical towards the thought of the 19th century. In fact there is a very big difference in the two analyses. I can indeed define the classical age in its own configuration through the double difference that opposes it to the 16th century on one hand and to the 19th on the other. On the other hand, I can define the modern age in its singularity only by opposing it to the 17th century on one hand and to us on the other; it is necessary, therefore, in order to be able to continuously establish the division, to make the difference that separates us from them surge up under each one of our sentences. From this modern age which begins around 1790-1810 and goes to around 1950, it's a matter of detaching oneself, whereas for the classical age it's only a matter of describing it.

The apparently polemical character stems from the fact that it's a question of hollowing out the whole mass of discourse that's accumulated under our feet. One can discover from a gradual movement the old latent configurations; but as soon as it's a matter of determining the system of discourse within which we are still living, at the moment we are obliged to put into question the words that still resonate in our ears and which are indistinguishable from those we are trying to speak, then the archeologist, like the Nietzschean philosopher, is forced to resort to the blows of the hammer.

## *The Discourse of History 31*

Q: The unique and enthusiastic status that you accord to Nietzsche—^is it not the most manifest sign of this irre-mediabile gap?

MF: If I had to begin again this book that I finished two years ago, I would try not to give Nietzsche this ambiguous status, absolutely privileged and meta-historical, that I gave him out of weakness. It is due to the fact that no doubt my archeology owes more to the Nietzschean genealogy than to structuralism properly called.

Q: But how, in this case, can you render Nietzsche to the archeologist without the risk of being as false towards the one as towards the other? It seems that there is in the very fact an insurmountable contradiction. I see it, in your book, in the figured form of a conflict in principle between Nietzsche and *Las Meninas*. For, without resorting to a facile play on your predilection for spatial metaphors, it is clear that the painting proves to be the privileged place, as it is, in one sense, for all structuralism: it is there, I think, that you compare the anonymity of the present with that of the 17th century, in the name of an idea of reading that can arrange history in a painting as well as in the Borges text on the Chinese encyclopedia where your book has its “place of birth,” in the very movement of historical evolution. That’s why the 19th century, where history is invented in the form of a gap between signs and men, is the object of debate, and our period the hope of a new resolution through an attempt to re-integrate the historical subject into, the space of the painting in a new anonymity.

Is not Nietzsche precisely the place where all the signs converge in the irreducible dimension of a subject, anonymous by dint of being himself, anonymous by dint of incorporating the totality of voices in the form of a fragmentary

### ***32 The Discourse of History***

discourse; and is it not in that the extreme and exemplary form of thought and of all expression as autobiography without remainder, which is always lacking in the space of the painting just as in the time of history, where it is and is not, for one cannot say it but in the sense of its own madness and not through recourse to an exterior law? Thus the fact that Nietzsche, and with him a certain truth of literature, escapes your book, which owes him so much and brings so much to him, doesn't this fact bear witness of the impossibility of all discourse at the same level? And even that, in the form of your presence in the book, is it not to the exact measure of the impossible anonymity you don, which to be total, can only signify today a world without the written word or, to the point of madness, the circular literalness of Nietzsche?

MF: It is difficult to respond to this question; for it is from it, at bottom, that all your questions come, and as a consequence our whole dialogue; it is what supports the passionate interest, a little aloof, that you bring to all that is happening around you, and to the generations that precede you; from this question comes your desire to write and to ask questions. Here then begins the interview with Raymond Bellour conducted by Michel Foucault, an interview that has gone on for several years and from which perhaps one day *Les Lettres françaises* will publish a fragment. A

Translated by John Johnston

## *The Discourse of History 33*

### Notes

Georges Dumézil inaugurated a new era in the study of Indo-European mythologies and religions.

Fernand Braudel, François Furet, Denis Richet and Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie belong to the Annales school of French historians, founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929, which champions the study of “total history”. See Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), and Leroy-Ladurie’s *The Mind and Method of the Historian* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981),

Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1979).

The epistemological break is a concept introduced into the philosophy of science by Gaston Bachelard, and employed by Althusser in his reading of Marx.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Octagon, 1979).

The distinction between writers and *écrivants* (people who use writing for other purposes) was introduced by Roland Barthes in *Critical Essays* (Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1972).

# 3

## Foucault Responds to Sartre

Q: Michel Foucault, it is said, perhaps against your will, that you are a philosopher. What is philosophy for you?

MF: There was the great period of contemporary philosophy, that of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, in which a philosophical text, a theoretical text, finally had to tell you what life, death, and sexuality were, if God existed or not, what liberty consisted of, what one had to do in political life, how to behave in regard to others, and so forth. One has the impression that this kind of philosophy is now obsolete, that philosophy if you like has if not vanished has at least been dispersed, and that there is a theoretical work that somehow joins together in the plural. Theory, the philosophic activity, is being produced in different domains that are separate from one other. There is a theoretical activity produced in the field of mathematics, a theoretical activity that manifests itself in the domain of linguistics or mythology or the history of religion, or simply in the domain of history itself. Finally, it is in this kind of plurality of theoretical work that a philosophy is being carried out which has not yet found its unique thinker and its unity of discourse.

### 36 *Foucault Responds to Sartre*

Q: When did this rupture between the two moments occur?

MF: It was around 1950-55, at a time moreover exactly when Sartre himself renounced, I believe, what one could call philosophical speculation properly speaking, and when finally he invested his own philosophical activity in behavior that was political.

Q: You wrote in the conclusion of your work *The Order of Things* that man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed to human knowledge (*savoir*). Man, you say, is an invention of which the archeology of our thought shows the recent date and perhaps the coining end. It's one of the sentences that has stirred up readers the most. In your opinion what is man's date of birth in the space of knowledge?

MF: The 19th century was the century when a certain number of very important things were invented, microbiology and electromagnetism for example; it's also the century when the human sciences were invented. To invent the human sciences apparently meant to make of man the object of a possible knowledge (*savoir*). It was to constitute man as an object of knowledge (*connaissance*). Yet, in this same 19th century one hoped, one dreamed the great eschatological myth of the 19th century, which was somehow to make this knowledge (*connaissance*) of man exist so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations, liberated from all the determinations of which he was not the master, so that he could, thanks to this knowledge of himself, become again or for the first time master of himself, self-possessed. In other words, one made of man an object of knowledge so that man could become subject of his own liberty and of his own existence.

## *Foucault Responds to Sartre 37*

Yet what happened—and for this reason one can say that man was born in the 19th century—was that insofar as these investigations into man as a possible object of knowledge (*savoir*) were deployed, something very serious was discovered: that this famous man, this human nature, this human essence or this essential human feature (*ce propre de l'homme*) was never discovered. When one analyzed for example the phenomena of madness or neurosis, what was discovered was an unconscious, an unconscious completely traversed by impulses and instincts, an unconscious that functioned according to mechanisms and according to a topological space which had absolutely nothing to do with what one could expect of the human essence, of freedom or human existence, an unconscious that functioned like a language, as has been said recently. And consequently, insofar as man was sought out in his depths, to that extent he disappeared. The further one went, the less one found. And similarly for language. From the beginning of the 19th century the human languages had been investigated in order to try and discover some of the great constants of the human mind. It was hoped that, by studying the life of words, the evolution of grammars, by comparing languages to one another, somehow man himself would be revealed, either in the unity of his face or in his different profiles. Yet, by penetrating into language, what did one find? One found structures, correlations, a system that is in some way quasi-logical, and man, in his liberty, in his existence, there again had disappeared.

Q: Nietzsche announced the death of God. You foresee, it would seem, the death of his murderer, man. It's a just tum of things. Isn't the disappearance of man contained in the disappearance of god?

### ***38 Foucault Responds to Sartre***

MF: This disappearance of man at the very moment that we sought him in his roots doesn't mean that the human sciences will disappear. I never said that, but rather that the human sciences will now be deployed within a space whose horizon is no longer closed or defined by this humanism. Man disappears in philosophy, not as object of knowledge (*savoir*) but as subject of freedom and existence. Yet, man as subject of his own consciousness and of his own liberty is really a sort of correlative image of god. Man of the 19th century is god incarnated in humanity. There was a kind of theologizing of man, a re-descent of god to earth in which god became 19th century man theologized. When Feuerbach said that "we must recuperate on earth the treasures that have been spent in the heavens," he placed in the heart of man the treasures that man had formerly attributed to god. And Nietzsche was the one who by denouncing the death of god at the same time denounced this divinized man that the 19th century never ceased to dream. And when Nietzsche announced the coming of the superman, what he announced was not the coming of a man who would resemble a god more than a man, but rather the coming of a man who would no longer have any relation with this god whose image he continued to bear.

Q: Is this the reason that when you speak of the end of this recent invention, you say "perhaps"?

MF: Of course. I am sure of all this only insofar as it's a matter of doing (of my doing) a diagnosis of the present.

You were asking me a while ago how and in what way philosophy had changed. Well, perhaps one could say this: philosophy from Hegel to Sartre has essentially been a totalizing enterprise, if not of the world or of knowledge (*savoir*), at least of human experience. I would say that perhaps if there is now an autonomous philosophical activity, if there can

## *Foucault Responds to Sartre 39*

be a philosophy that is not simply a sort of theoretical activity within mathematics or linguistics or ethnology or political economy, if there is a philosophy free or independent of all these domains, then one could define it as a diagnostic activity. To diagnose the present is to say what the present is, and how our present is absolutely different from all that is not it, that is to say, from our past. Perhaps this is the task for philosophy now.

Q: How do you define structuralism today?

MF: When you ask those who are classified under the rubric of “structuralism”—like Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser and the linguists, etc.—they answer that they have nothing in common with one another, or very little in common. Structuralism is a category that exists for others, for those who are not structuralists. It’s from the outside that one can say that so and so are structuralists. You must ask Sartre who the structuralists are, since he thinks that Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Dumézil, Lacan and me constitute a coherent group, a group constituting some kind of unity that we ourselves don’t perceive.

Q: Well then, how would you define your work?

MF: My own work? As you know, it’s very limited. Very schematically, it consists of trying to discover in the history of science and of human knowledge (*des connaissances et du savoir humain*) something that would be like its unconscious. My working hypothesis is roughly this: the history of science and of knowledge (*des connaissances*) doesn’t simply obey the general law of reason’s progress; it’s not human consciousness or human reason that somehow possesses the laws of its history. Underneath what science itself knows there is something it does not know; and its history, its prog-

## 40 Foucault Responds to Sartre

ress (*devenir*), its periods and accidents obey a certain number of laws and determinations. These laws and determinations are what I have tried to bring to light. I have tried to unearth an autonomous domain that would be the unconscious of science, the unconscious of knowledge (*savoir*), that would have its own laws, just as the individual human unconscious has its own laws and determinations.

Q: You just alluded to Sartre. You have saluted his magnificent efforts, efforts which you have said are those of a man of the 19th century trying to think in the 20th. He was even, you have said, the last Marxist. Since then Sartre has responded to you. He reproaches the structuralists for constituting a new ideology, which he calls the last barrier the bourgeoisie can still erect against Marx. What do you think of this?

MF: I would say two things in response. First, Sartre is a man with too much important work to do—^literary, philosophical, political—to have the time to read my book. In fact, he hasn't read it. Consequently, what he says about it can't seem very pertinent to me. Secondly, I'll confess something to you. I was in the Communist Party some time ago for a few months, or a little more than several months, and at that time Sartre was defined for us as the last rampart of bourgeois imperialism, the last stone of the edifice, etc. So it's with amused astonishment that I find this phrase coming from Sartre's pen now, fifteen years later. Let's say that he and I have turned around the same axis.

Q: You don't find any originality there?

MF: No, it's a phrase that's been around for twenty years; he uses it, that's his right. He's giving back change for money we once passed to him\_\_\_

## *Foucault Responds to Sartre 41*

Q: Sartre reproaches you, and other philosophers as well, for neglecting and showing contempt for history. Is it true?

MF: No historian has ever reproached me for this. There is a sort of myth of History for philosophers. Philosophers are generally very ignorant of all other disciplines outside their own. There is a mathematics for philosophers, a biology for philosophers, and also a History. For philosophers. History is a kind of grand and extensive continuity where the liberty of individuals and economic and social determinations come to be intertwined. If you touch one of these great themes—continuity, the effective exercise of human freedom, the articulation of individual liberty with social determinations—then right away these grave gentleman begin to cry rape, and that history has been assassinated. In fact, it was some time ago that people as important as Marc Block, Lucien Fevre and the English historians put an end to this myth of History. They write history in a completely different mode. The philosophical myth of History, this philosophical myth that I am accused of having murdered, well, I would be delighted if I have killed it, since that was exactly what I wanted to do. But not at all history in general. One doesn't murder history, but history for philosophy. That's what I wanted to kill.

Q: Who are the thinkers, scholars and philosophers who have marked or influenced your intellectual formation?

MF: I belong to a generation of people for whom the horizon of reflection was defined by Husserl in a general way, Sartre more precisely and Merleau-Ponty even more precisely. It's clear that around 1950-55, for reasons that are equally political, ideological and scientific, and very difficult to straighten out, this horizon toppled for us. Suddenly it van-

## *42 Foucault Responds to Sartre*

ished and we found ourselves before a sort of great empty space inside which developments became much less ambitious, much more limited and regional. It's clear that linguistics in the manner of Jakobson, the history of religions and mythologies in the manner of Dumézil, were for us invaluable points of support.

Q: How could your position in regard to action and politics be defined?

MF: The French left has lived on a myth of sacred ignorance. What has changed is the idea that political thought can be politically correct only if it is scientifically rigorous. And in this sense, I think that the whole effort made today by a group of communist intellectuals to re-evaluate Marx's concepts, to finally grasp them at their roots in order to analyze them and to define the use that one can and must make of them, I think this whole effort is both political and scientific. And the idea that to devote oneself as we are doing now to properly theoretical and speculative activities is to tum away from politics strikes me as completely false. It's not because we are tuming away from politics that we are occupied with such stricdy and meticulously defined theoretical problems, but rather because we realize that every form of political action can only be articulated in the strictest manner with a rigorous theoretical reflection.

Q: A philosophy like existentialism encouraged people to action and engagement. You are reproached for having the opposite attitude.

MF: Well, that is a reproach. It's normal. But once again, the difference is not that we have now separated politics from theory, but rather to the contrary: insofar as we bring

## *Foucault Responds to Sartre 43*

theory and politics more closely together, we refuse this politics of learned ignorance that I believe characterizes the one that is called engagement.

Q: Is it a language or vocabulary that today separates the philosophers and scholars from the great public and the people with whom they live as contemporaries?

M.: It seems to me, on the contrary, that today more than ever the transmission of knowledge (*savoir*) is extensive and efficacious. Knowledge in the 14th and 15th centuries, for example, was defined in a social space that was circular and restricted. Knowledge was a secret, and the authenticity of knowledge was at the same time guaranteed and protected by the fact that this knowledge didn't circulate or circulated only among a strictly defined number of people; as soon as knowledge was made public, it ceased to be knowledge and consequently ceased to be true.

Today we are at a very developed stage of a mutation that began in the 17th and 18th centuries when knowledge finally became a kind of public thing. To know was to see clearly what every individual placed in the same conditions could see and verify. To that extent the structure of knowledge became public. Everyone possessed knowledge; it's simply not always the same knowledge, with the same degree of formation or precision, etc. But there weren't ignorant people on one side and scholars on the other. What happens at one point in knowledge is very quickly reflected at another point. And to this extent, I believe, knowledge has never been more specialized, yet never has it communicated with itself more quickly. A

Translated by John Johnston



# The Archeology of Knowledge

Q: You have entitled your book *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Why “archeology”?

MF: For two reasons. I first used the word somewhat blindly, in order to designate a form of analysis that wouldn't at all be a history (in the sense that one recounts the history of inventions or of ideas) and that wouldn't be an epistemology either, that is to say, the internal analysis of the structure of a science. This other thing I have called therefore “archeology.” And then, retrospectively, it seemed to me that chance has not been too bad a guide: after all, this word “archeology” can almost mean—and I hope I will be forgiven for this—description of the *archive*. I mean by archive the set (*l'ensemble*) of discourses actually pronounced: and this set of discourses is envisaged not only as a set of events which would have taken place once and for all and which would remain in abeyance, in the limbo or purgatory of history, but also as a set that continues to function, to be transformed through history, and to provide the possibility of appearing in other discourses.

## 46 *The Archeology of Knowledge*

Q: Isn't there also in archeology the idea of excavation, of a search into the past?

MF: No doubt. The word "archeology" bothers me a little, because it recovers two themes that are not exactly mine. First, the theme of a beginning (*commencement*), as *arche* in Greek signifies. Yet I try not to study the beginning in the sense of the first origin, of a foundation starting from which the rest would be possible. I am not searching for the first solemn moment beginning from which all of Western mathematics becomes possible, for example. I don't go back to Euclid or Pythagoras. It's always the relative beginnings that I am searching for, more the institutionalizations or the transformations than the foundings or foundations. And then I'm equally bothered by the idea of excavations. What I'm looking for are not relations that are secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than the consciousness of men. I try on the contrary to define the relations on the very surface of discourse; I attempt to make visible what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things.

Q: You are interested, that is, in the phenomena, and refuse interpretation.

MF: I'm not looking underneath discourse for the thought of men, but try to grasp discourse in its manifest existence, as a practice that obeys certain rules—of formation, existence, co-existence—and systems of functioning. It is this practice, in its consistency and almost in its materiality, that I describe.

Q: So you refuse psychology.

MF: Absolutely. One must be able to make an historical analysis of the transformation of discourse without hav-

## *The Archeology of Knowledge* 47

ing recourse to the thought of men, to their mode of perception, their habits and the influences to which they have submitted, etc.

Q: You begin your book with the observation that history and the human sciences have been inversely transformed. Instead of searching for the events that would constitute the ruptures, history now searches for continuities, whereas the human sciences search for discontinuities.

MF: Indeed, historians today—and I am thinking of course of the *Annales* school, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Ferdinand Braudel—have tried to enlarge the periodizations that historians usually make. Braudel, for example, has succeeded in defining a notion of material civilization that would have an extremely slow evolution: the material universe of European peasants from the end of the Middle Ages to the 18th century—the landscape, techniques, tools and crafted objects, their customs—has been modified in an extremely slow manner; one might say that it has developed on a very gradual incline. These great blocks, much more massive than the events one ordinarily isolates, have now become part of the objects that historians can describe. Thus one sees large continuities appearing that until this work had never been isolated. On the other hand, the historians of ideas and of the sciences, who used to speak above all in terms of the continuous progress of reason, of the progressive advent of rationalism, etc., now insist on discontinuities and ruptures. For example, the break between Aristotelian and Galilean physics, the absolute eruption represented by the birth of chemistry at the end of the 18th century. It's from this paradox that I started: the regular historians were revealing continuities, while the historians of ideas were liberating discontinuities. But I believe that they are two symmetrical and inverse effects of the same methodological renewal of history in general.

## *48 The Archeology of Knowledge*

Q: Which is to say that when you attack those who mythologize history, by showing that they are attaching themselves again to the traditional philosophy of transcendental consciousness, of man as sovereign, you attack them on their own ground, which is that of history. Whereas the structuralists, who attack them equally, do it on another terrain.

MF: I don't believe that the structuralists have ever attacked the historians, but a certain historicism, a certain reaction and historicist mistrust with which their work collided. A certain number of traditional thinkers have been frightened by structural analysis. Not, to be sure, because one began to analyze the formal relations among indifferent elements; that was done a long time ago, and there was no cause for alarm. But these traditional thinkers felt very strongly that what was in question was the status of the subject. If it is true that language and the unconscious can be analyzed in structural terms, then what is there of this famous speaking subject, this man reputed to put language to work, to speak it, to transform it, to make it live! What is there of this man, reputed to have an unconscious, capable of becoming conscious of this unconscious, of assuming its burden and making a history of his fate! I believe that the belligerence or in any case the bad feelings that structuralism raised among the traditionalists was linked to the fact that they felt that the status of the subject had been put back into question.

And they sought refuge on a terrain that appeared for their cause, infinitely more solid, that of history. And they said: let's admit that a language, considered outside its historical evolution, outside of its development, consists in effect of a set of relations; let's admit that the unconscious in an individual functions like a structure or set of structures, that the unconscious can be located starting from structural facts; there is at least one thing on which the structure will never catch:

## *The Archeology of Knowledge 49*

that's history. For there is a becoming (*devenir*) that structural analysis will never account for, a progress which on the one hand is made of a continuity, whereas the structure by definition is discontinuous, and on the other hand is made by a subject: man himself, or humanity, or consciousness, or reason, it matters little. For them, there is an absolute subject of history that makes history, that assures its continuity, that is the author and guarantor of this continuity. As for the structural analyses, they can never take place but in the synchronic cross section cut out from this continuity of history subject to man's sovereignty.

When one tries to put into question the primacy of the subject in the very domain of history, then there is a new panic amongst all the old faithful, for that was their line of defense, the point from which they could limit structural analysis—stop the “cancer”—by restricting the power of its disturbance. If, in regard to history, and precisely in regard to the history of knowledge (*savoir*) or of reason, one manages to show that it doesn't at all obey the same model as consciousness; if one succeeds in showing that the time of knowledge or of discourse is not at all organized or laid out like the time of lived experience, that it presents discontinuities and specific transformations; if finally, one shows that there is no need to pass through the subject, through man as subject, in order to analyze the history of knowledge (*connaissance*), one raises great difficulties, but one touches perhaps on an important problem.

Q: As a result, you were led to challenge the philosophy of the last two hundred years, or, what is worse for it, to leave it aside.

MF: Indeed, at present this whole philosophy, which since Descartes has given primacy to the subject, is falling apart before our eyes.

## ***50 The Archeology of Knowledge***

Q: And do you date the onset of this decline from Nietzsche?

MF: It seems to me that one could fix this moment starting from Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.

Q: In addition, in your book, you denounce the anthropologizing interpretation of Marx and the interpretation of Nietzsche in terms of a transcendental consciousness as a refusal to take into consideration what is new in their contributions.

MF: Exactly.

Q: I quote the following passage from your introduction; "To make of historical analysis the discourse of continuity and to make of human consciousness the originary subject of all progress and of every practice are two phases of the same system of thought, where time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never but the assumptions of consciousness." Aren't you directly attacking Sartre there, all the more as the assumption of consciousness and totalization belong especially to his vocabulary?

MF: In using those words Sartre only takes up a general style of analysis that one can find in the work of Lucien Goldmann, Georg Lukács, Dilthey and the Hegelians of the 19th century. The words are certainly not specific to Sartre.

Q: Sartre would simply be one of the end points of this transcendental philosophy that is falling apart?

MF: That's right.

## *The Archeology of Knowledge* 51

Q: But apart from the structuralists, who find themselves in a position analogous to your own, there are few philosophers who are conscious of the end of transcendental philosophy.

MF: On the contrary, I believe there are many, among whom I would put Gilles Deleuze in the first rank.'

Q: When, in *The Order of Things*, you wrote that man is to be cast aside, you unleashed "diverse movements." Yet, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, you say that not only things but even words are to be cast aside.

MF: That's what I meant. My title *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*) was perfectly ironic. No one saw it clearly; doubtlessly because there wasn't enough play in my text for the irony to be sufficiently visible. There is a problem: how can it happen that real things, things that are perceived, can come to be articulated by words within a discourse. Is it that words impose on us the outline of things, or is it that things, through some operation of the subject, come to be transcribed on the surface of words. That's not at all the old problem that I wanted to treat in *The Order of Things*. I wanted to displace it: to analyze the discourses themselves, that is, these discursive practices that are intermediary between words and things; these discursive practices starting from which one can define what are the things and mark out the usage of words. Let's take a very simple example. In the 17th century the naturalists multiplied the descriptions of plants and animals. One can write a history of these descriptions in two ways. Either by starting with things and saying: the animals being what they are, the plants being such as we see them, how is it that the people of the 17th and 18th centuries saw them and described them? What did they observe?

## 52 *The Archeology of Knowledge*

What did they omit? What have they seen, what have they not seen? Or one can do the analysis in the inverse direction, by establishing the semantic field of the 17th and 18th centuries, by seeing what words and consequently what concepts they then had available, what the rules of usage for these words were, and starting from there, determining what grille or pattern was placed over the whole set of plants and animals. These are the two traditional analyses.

I have tried to do something else, to show that in a discourse, as in natural history, there were rules of formation for objects (which are not the rules of utilization for words), rules of formation for concepts (which are not the laws of syntax), rules of formation for theories (which are neither deductive nor rhetorical rules). These are the rules put into operation through a discursive practice at a given moment that explain why a certain thing is seen (or omitted); why it is envisaged under such an aspect and analyzed at such a level; why such a word is employed with such a meaning and in such a sentence. Consequently, the analysis starting from things and the analysis starting from words appear at this moment as secondary in relation to a prior analysis, which would be the discursive analysis.

In my book there are no analyses of words and no analyses of things. And a number of people—the oafs and hedgehoppers—have said it's scandalous, that in a book called *Les mots et les choses* there are no "things." And the more subtle ones have said that there is no semantic analysis. Well, to be sure: I didn't want to do either.

Q: Since your scientific trajectory begins with a sort of empirical groping, how did you arrive—by what itinerary—at this completely theoretical book which is *The Archeology of Knowledge*?

## *The Archeology of Knowledge* 53

MF; Yes, of course, it started with empirical research on madness, sickness and mental illness, on medicine in the 18th and 19th centuries, and on the set of disciplines (natural history, general grammar, and the exchange of money) that I treated in *The Order of Things*. Why has this research led me to construct the theoretical machinery of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, which seems to me to be a rather difficult book for the reader? I encountered several problems: when one did a history of the sciences one treated in a privileged, almost exclusive fashion the beautiful, very formal sciences like mathematics and theoretical physics. But when one broached disciplines like the empirical sciences, one was very constricted, most often being content with a sort of inventory of discoveries; it was said that these disciplines were only in sum a mix of truths and errors; in these knowledges that are so imprecise, the minds of men, their prejudices, mental habits and the influences to which they submit, the images in their heads, their dreams—all that prevents them from acceding to the truth; and the history of these sciences was finally only the history of the mixture of these massive and numerous errors with some nuggets of truth, the problem being to know how one day someone had discovered a nugget.

Such a description bothers me for several reasons. First because, in the real historical life of men, these famous empirical sciences that the historians or the epistemologists neglect have a colossal importance. The progress of medicine has had consequences for human life, for the human species, for the economy of societies, and for the social organization certainly as great as those that the discoveries of theoretical physics have had. I regretted that these empirical sciences had not been studied.

On the other hand, it seemed interesting to me to study these empirical sciences insofar as they are more closely linked to social practices than the theoretical sciences are. For

## 54 *The Archeology of Knowledge*

example, medicine or political economy are disciplines perhaps lacking a high degree of scientificity, compared to mathematics; but their articulations onto social practices are very numerous and that's precisely what interested me. *The Archeology* that I just described is a kind of theory for a history of empirical knowledge (*savoir*).

Q: Hence your choice, for example, of a history of madness (*Madness and Civilization*).

MF: Exactly.

Q; The advantage of your method, among others, is thus to function in two dimensions: diachronically and synchronically. For example, for *Madness and Civilization (Histoire de la folie)* you go back in time and study the modifications, whereas in the case of natural history in the 17th and 18th centuries, in *The Order of Things*, you study this science in a state that is not completely static, but more immobile.

MF: Not exactly immobile. I tried to define the transformations: to show the discoveries, inventions, changes of perspective and theoretical upheavals that could occur starting from a certain system of regularities. One can show for example what makes possible the appearance of the idea of evolution in the 18th century in the discursive practice of natural history; or what makes possible the emergence of a theory of the organism, which was unknown to the first naturalists. Thus when certain people, happily very few in number, accused me of only describing states of knowledge and not the transformations, it was simply because they hadn't read the book. If they had, if only leafing through it in a cursory fashion, they would have seen that it deals only with transformations and with the order in which these transformations occur.

## *The Archeology of Knowledge 55*

Q: Your method studies the practice of discourse, a method that you base, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, on the statement, which you distinguish radically from the grammatical sentence and the logical proposition. What do you mean by the statement (*énoncé*)!

MF: The sentence is a grammatical unity of elements linked together by Unguistic rules. What the logicians call a proposition is a set of symbols constructed such that one can say if it is true or false, correct or not. What I call a statement is a set of signs that can be a sentence or a proposition, but envisaged at the level of its existence.

Q: You deny being a structuralist even if for the common consciousness you are part of the group. But your methodology has two points in common with the structural method: the refusal of an anthropological discourse and the absence of a speaking subject. Insofar as what is in question is the place and status of man, that is, of the subject, don't you align yourself automatically on the side of the structuralists?

MF: I think that structuralism is inscribed today within a great transformation of knowledge (*savoir*) in the human sciences, and that this transformation is directed less toward the analysis of structures than toward the putting into question of the anthropological status, the status of the subject, and the privileges of man. And my method is inscribed within the framework of this transformation in the same way that structuralism is—along side of the latter but not in it.

Q: You speak of structuralism's "legitimate limits." Yet, one has the impression that structuralism tends to absorb everything: myths with Lévi-Strauss, the unconscious with Lacan, then literary criticism—^all the human sciences pass through it.

## 56 *The Archeology of Knowledge*

MF: I don't have to speak for the structuralists. But it seems to me that one could say this in response to your question: structuralism is a method of which the field of application is not defined *a priori*. What is defined at the start are the rules of the method and the level at which one inserts oneself in order to apply them. It may very well be that one can do structural analyses in domains that are absolutely unforeseen at this point. I don't believe that one can set *a priori* limits to the expanse of this research. A

Translated by John Johnston

### Note

'Gilles Deleuze is the author (with Félix Guattari) of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (New York; Viking, 1977), and *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis; Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987). See also *On the Line* and *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York; Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1983 and 1987.

# 5

## The Birth of a World

Q; Michel Foucault, you are known today as one of the great theoreticians of the immense field of investigations constituted by epistemology, and above all as the author of two books enthusiastically received by a vast public: *Madness and Civilization* and *The Order of Things*. You just recently published *The Archeology of Knowledge*. If you are willing I would like for you to try to specify what unites them.

MF: The three books that I wrote before this last one—*Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things* and *The Birth of the Clinic*—I wrote in a state of happy semi-consciousness, with a great deal of naivete and a little innocence. At the last moment, while editing *The Order of Things*, I realized that these three series of studies were not unrelated and that, moreover, they raised a large number of problems and difficulties, so much in fact that even before finishing *The Order of Things* I felt obliged to write another book which would clarify the unity of the preceding ones and which would attempt to resolve the problems raised. When I became aware of this I was very disappointed. When writing one always thinks that it's the last time, but in fact it's not true. The questions posed and the objections made have forced me to go

## 58 *The Birth of a World*

back to work, reasonably stimulated, either out of amusement or interest, and sometimes out of irritation. This book, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, is at once a resumption of what I have already attempted, motivated by the desire to correct the inaccuracies and carelessness contained in the precedent books, and an attempt to trace in advance the path of a later work that I really hope never to write, owing to unforeseen circumstances!

Q: Could you clarify this concept of archeology which is essential to your undertaking?

MF: I have used it as a play on words to designate something that would be the description of the *archive* and not at all the discovery of a beginning or the bringing to light of the bones of the past.

By the archives, I intend first the mass of things spoken in a culture, conserved, valorized, re-used, repeated and transformed. In brief, this whole verbal mass that has been fashioned by men, invested in their techniques and in their institutions and woven into their existence and their history. I envisage this mass of things said not on the side of language and the linguistic system that they put to work, but on the side of the operations which give it birth. My problem could be stated as follows: How does it happen that at a given period one could say this and that something else has never been said? It is, in a word, the analysis of the historical conditions that account for what one says or of what one rejects, or of what one transforms in the mass of spoken things.

The “archive” appears then as a kind of great practice of discourse, a practice which has its rules, its conditions, its functioning and its effects.

The problems posed by the analysis of this practice are the following:

## *The Birth of a World 59*

- What are the different particular types of discursive practice that one can find in a given period?
- What are the relationships that one can establish between these different practices?
- What relationships do they have with non-discursive practices, such as political, social or economic practices?
- What are the transformations of which these practices are susceptible?

Q: You have been reproached—I am thinking of Sartre in particular—^for wanting to substitute archeology for history, for replacing “the cinema with the magic lantern” (Sartre). Is your vision the opposite of a historical and dialectical thought like Sartre’s? How does it contradict the latter’s?

MF: I am completely opposed to a certain conception of history which takes for its model a kind of great continuous and homogenous evolution, a sort of great mythic life.

Historians now know very well that the mass of historic documents can be combined according to different modes which have neither the same traits nor the same kind of evolution. The history of material civilization (fanning techniques, habitat, domestic tools, means of transport) doesn’t unfold in the same manner as the history of political institutions or as the history of monetary flows. What March Bloch, Febvre and Braudel have shown for history *tout court* can be shown, I think, for the history of ideas, of knowledge (*connaissance*), and of thought in general. Thus it is possible to write a history of general paralysis, the history of Pasteur’s thought; but one can also, at a level that has been rather neglected until the present, undertake the analysis of medical discourse in the 19th century or in the modern era. This history will not be one of discoveries and of errors, it will not be one of influences and originalities, but the history of condi-

## 60 *The Birth of a World*

tions that make possible the appearance, the functioning and the transformation of medical discourse.

I am also opposed to a form of history which assumes change as a given and which proposes itself as the task of discovering its cause. I believe that there is a preliminary task for the historian, more modest if you like, or more radical, which consists in posing the question of what this change constitutes exactly. This means:

Are there not between several levels of change certain modifications that are immediately visible, that leap to the eye as highly individualized events, and certain others, very exact however, that are located at buried levels where they appear much less evident? In other words, the first task is to distinguish different types of events. The second is to define the transformations that have actually been produced, the system according to which certain variables have remained constant while others have been modified. For the great mythology of change, evolution and the *perpetuum mobile* we must substitute a serious description of types of events and systems of transformation, and the establishment of series and series of series. Obviously this is not cinema.

Q: Your work has often been brought together with the research of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan under the label of “structuralism.” To what extent do you accept this grouping? Is there a real convergence in your different researches?

MF: It’s for those who use the label to designate very diverse works to say what makes us “structuralists.” You know the joke: what’s the difference between Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin? There is no difference, since they both have a beard, with the exception of Chaplin of course.

## *The Birth of a World 61*

Q: In *The Order of Things* you speak of the “death of man,” which has provoked vivid emotional reactions and innumerable controversies among our good humanists. What do you think of all this?

MF: The death of man is nothing to get particularly excited about. It’s one of the visible forms of a much more general decease, if you like. I don’t mean by it the death of god but the death of the subject, of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of Knowledge (*savoir*), of Liberty, of Language and History.

One can say that all of Western civilization has been subjugated (*assujettie*), and philosophers have only certified the fact by referring all thought and all truth to consciousness, to the Self, to the Subject. In the rumbling that shakes us today, perhaps we have to recognize the birth of a world where the subject is not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified. ▲

## Rituals of Exclusion

Q: Mr. Foucault, it's been said that you've given us a new way of studying events. You've formulated an archeology of knowledge, the sciences of man, objectifying literary, or non-literary, documents of a period, and treating them as "archives." And you're also interested in current politics. How do you live out your science; how do you apply it to what's going on today? In other words, how do you uncover today's discourse? How do you perceive changes taking place at this moment?

MF: In the first place, I am not at all sure that I have invented a new method, as you were so kind to assert; what I am doing is not so different from many other contemporary endeavors, American, English, French, German. I claim no originality. It is true, though, that I have dealt especially with phenomena of the past; the system of exclusion and the confinement of the insane in European civilization from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the establishment of medical science and practice at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the organization of sciences of man in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But I was interested in them—in fact, profoundly interested—because I saw in them ways of thinking and behaving that are still with us.

## 64 *Rituals of Exclusion*

I try to show, based upon their historical establishment and formation, those systems which are still ours today and within which we are trapped. It is a question, basically, of presenting a critique of our own time, based upon retrospective analyses.

Q: In terms of what's been happening in higher education around the world, do you see us, yourself, all of us, imprisoned in some kind of system?

MF: The form in which societies pass on knowledge is determined by a complex system: it hasn't yet been fully analyzed, but it seems to me that the system is being shattered; more under the influence of a revolutionary movement, in fact, than of mere theoretical or speculative criticism. There's a significant difference between the insane and the sick on the one hand, and students on the other, in this respect: in our society it is difficult for the insane who are confined or the sick who are hospitalized to make their own revolution; so we have to question these systems of exclusion of the sick and the insane from the outside, through a technique of critical demolition. The university system, however, can be put into question by the students themselves. At that point criticism coming from the outside, from theoreticians, historians or archivists, is no longer enough. And the students become their own archivists.

Q: Several years ago, a document appeared here called *The Student as Nigger*. Are there parallels aside from the master-slave relationship between the student as an excluded figure and the madman? And are there other "pariahs" defined and set by society in order to maintain its own rationality and cohesion?

## *Rituals of Exclusion 65*

MF: Your question is far-reaching and difficult to answer. At any rate, it concerns me greatly because it points essentially in the same direction as my work. Until now, it seems to me that historians of our own society, of our own civilization, have sought especially to get at the inner secret of our civilization, its spirit, the way it establishes its identity, the things it values. On the other hand, there has been much less study of what has been rejected from our civilization. It seemed to me interesting to try to understand our society and civilization in terms of its systems of exclusion, of rejection, of refusal, in terms of what it does not want, its limits, the way it is obliged to suppress a certain number of things, people, processes, what it must let fall into oblivion, its repression-suppression system. I know very well that many thinkers—though if only since Freud—have already tackled the problem. But I think there are exclusions other than the suppression of sexuality that have not been analyzed. There's the exclusion of the insane. There is, up to a certain point, the exclusion whereby we short-circuit those who are sick and reintegrate them in a sort of marginal circuit, the medical circuit. And there is the student: to a certain extent he is caught similarly inside a circuit which possesses a dual function. First, a function of exclusion. The student is put outside of society, on a campus. Furthermore, he is excluded while being transmitted a knowledge traditional in nature, obsolete, "academic" and not directly tied to the needs and problems of today. This exclusion is underscored by the organization, around the student, of social mechanisms which are fictitious, artificial and quasi-theatrical (hierarchical relationships, academic exercises, the "court" of examination, evaluation). Finally, the student is given a gamelike way of life; he is offered a kind of distraction, amusement, freedom which, again, has nothing to do with real life; it is this kind of artificial, theatrical society, a society of cardboard, that is being built around him; and thanks to this.

## ***66 Rituals of Exclusion***

young people from 18 to 25 are thus, as it were, neutralized by and for society, rendered safe, ineffective, socially and politically castrated. There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial society, he becomes “absorbable”: society can consume him. Insidiously, he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behavior, so that this ritual of exclusion will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption. In this sense, the university is no doubt little different from those systems in so-called primitive societies in which the young men are kept outside the village during their adolescence, undergoing rituals of initiation which separate them and sever all contact between them and real, active society. At the end of the specified time, they can be entirely recuperated or reabsorbed.

Q: Could you then study the university the way you studied hospitals? Hasn't the system of the university changed somewhat? For example, are there not in recent history, and for various reasons, exclusions that were initiated by the excluded themselves?

MF: What I have just said is obviously only a very rough outline: it needs to be tightened up, for the mode of exclusion of students was certainly different in the nineteenth from that in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, higher education was only for the children of the bourgeoisie, or that fringe of the petite-bourgeoisie which the higher echelon needed for its industry, its scientific development, its technical skills, etc. Universities now have a greater number of students from poorer groups of the petite-bourgeoisie. Thus we have, inside the university, explosive conflicts between, on

## *Rituals of Exclusion 67*

the one hand, a lower-middle class which finds itself politically and socially more and more proletarianized by the very development of this higher bourgeoisie, for its development depends upon technology and science, that is, upon those contributions to it that are made by students and scientists sought from the ranks of the lower-middle class. This end result is that the upper-middle class, in its universities, recruits and enrolls, in order to make them scientists or technicians, people already undergoing a proletarian conversion and who consequently arrive at the university bearing a revolutionary potential: the enemy is within the gates.

So the status of the university becomes problematical. The upper-middle class must see to it that universities remain environments of exclusion where students are cut off from their real milieu, that is, from one which is undergoing a proletarian change. Concomitantly, universities must increasingly provide rituals of inclusion inside a system of capitalistic norms. Thus we have the strengthening of the old traditional university, with its character of both theatricality and initiation. However, as soon as they enter the system, students understand that they are being played with, that someone is trying to tum them against their true origins and surroundings; there follows a political awareness, and the revolutionary explosion.

Q: Aesthetics aside, do you see in what's happening in the university a parallel with Peter Weiss's play, *MaratSade*<sup>^</sup>—there also is a director-producer who sought to put on a play acted out by mental patients who try to tum the play against the spectators?

MF: That's a very interesting reference. I believe that play tells what is happening now better than many theoretical essays. When Sade was an inmate at Charenton, he

## ***68 Rituals of Exclusion***

wanted to have plays acted by the inmates. In Sade's mind, his plays were to question his own confinement; in fact, what happened was that the inmates acting out his plays questioned not only the system of confinement, but the system of oppression, the values which Sade enforced upon them as he made them act out his plays. To a certain extent, Sade plays today's professor, the liberal professor who says to his students, "Well, why don't you just question all the bourgeois values they want to impose upon you," and the students, acting out this theater of academic liberalism, end up questioning the professor himself.

Q: This is just what I wanted to ask you about the relation between faculty and students: are not professors in a way themselves excluded? After all, professors and administrators live in the university community as well as students. Of course, one could say that administrators are only representatives of society, but in most cases, they are professors who have become administrators, and often temporarily. Are there differences between faculty and students?

MF: I don't know the American university system well enough to give you even the beginning of an answer. In France, a professor is a public official and therefore is a part of the state apparatus. Whatever personal opinions he may hold, the professor, as a public official, maintains the system of transmission of knowledge required by the government, that is, by the bourgeois class whose interests are represented by the government. In the United States, it is probably different because of the open market for professors. I don't know whether the American academic is more threatened, more exploited, or more ready to accept the values imposed upon him. The position of professor is almost untenable at the present, as is perhaps that of the lower-middle class: are not professors

## *Rituals of Exclusion 69*

the most striking manifestation of this class which, in the nineteenth century, at least in France, succeeded in having the upper-middle class delegate to it the right to exercise power? There existed what has been called a republic of professors, and the political framework of the Third Republic was borrowed directly from the teaching profession, or from professions of the same type, physicians, lawyers, etc. Now that the Republic is functioning in a quite different framework, the lower-middle class in France is losing all control of the state apparatus. Therein lies its sense of misfortune, and its simultaneous wavering between the temptation to join the students and their revolutionary struggle, and the temptation to regain power, to seduce once more that upper-middle class which no longer is willing to accept it except in a role as technician.

Q: Before coming to Buffalo, you were teaching at Vincennes, an avant-garde university, talked about by some as being in complete chaos, seeking to adapt itself to the process you just described. You were saying that the position of professor is becoming untenable—from this perspective, on coming from Vincennes to Buffalo, did you find yourself in a strange, exotic land?

MF: When I arrived in Buffalo, I thought that I still was in Vincennes: in spite of relatively superficial differences in behavior, dress, gestures and speech, it seemed to me that the same struggle was being waged in France and the United States. However, I believe that, as far as tactics and political strategy are concerned, American students are in a much different position from their French counterparts. French students, in fact, have to deal with a large, organized working class which, through its unions and political organizations, clamors its allegiance to Marxism: French workers are perhaps ready to listen to students and understand their struggle, but at

## *70 Rituals of Exclusion*

the same time, French students have to fight the conservative influence of the Communist Party and the C.G.T.^ The situation of American students appears very different: it seems to me that the working class in America relates less easily to the students' cause. It must be more difficult for an American student to militate together with workers. On the other hand, the advantage in America is that there are no great conservative forces like the Communist Party and the C.G.T. In prohibiting and prosecuting the Communist Party for so many years, I think that the American government rendered, in a sense, a sort of service to the revolutionary cause; it kept open the possibility of ties between the students and the workers. Obviously, there is also in America a specific stress point, the racial problem that we also have in France, but on a much smaller scale (one must not forget that there is in France a rather sizable group of African, Algerian or black workers constituting a numerically important subproletariat).

Q: Has there been an intensified chauvinism in France in the last few years, an increased refusal of anything that comes from the outside? It's true that America is a melting pot; does it make a difference?

MF: Well, it seems to me that, at least in intellectual circles, one does not encounter in America the unbearable chauvinism one finds in France. One must not forget that we are a small country caught between the two great models, the United States on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. We had to struggle for a long time against these two models. It was the Communist Party which suggested and imposed the Russian one, and the struggle against the Party's conservative influence brought a somewhat systematic refusal of the Soviet model; on the other hand, a certain liberal bourgeoisie tied up with American interests never stopped putting

## *Rituals of Exclusion 71*

forward the American model, against which it was also necessary to struggle. At that moment, I think, the mechanisms of chauvinism appeared inside the French Left. These are mechanisms that are not always conscious; they manifest themselves by a game of exclusion, of refusal and oversight. American literature, for instance, is very little read in France. One does not read American philosophy, history and criticism at all; American books are translated after an enormous delay. One must not allow the struggle against American economic influence and relations to affect relations with American intellectuals. We must have a selective nationalism. I believe that a small country like France is necessarily bound to be somewhat nationalistic in its politics and economy if it wants to preserve some degree of independence; on the other hand, we must understand that a struggle which today is ideological but will become some day openly revolutionary is tuming up in every comer of the world. Cultural chauvinism must be abandoned.

Q: This has been your first trip to America, your first teaching assignment in an American university. In relation to the cultural change which you just spoke about, how will these two months affect you?

MF: My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners; what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent. Therefore, the more I travel, the more I remove myself from my natural and habitual centers of gravity, the greater my chance of grasping the foundations I am obviously standing on. To that extent any trip—not of course in the sense of a sightseeing trip nor even a survey—any movement away from my original frame of reference, is fruitful. It is always good for me to change language and

## 72 *Rituals of Exclusion*

country. A simple example; in New York I was struck, as any foreigner would be, by the immediate contrast between the “good sections” and the poverty, even the misery, that surround them on the right and the left. North and South. I well know that one finds that same contrast in Europe, and that you too, when in Europe, are certainly shocked by the great misery in the poor sections of Paris, Hamburg or London, it doesn’t matter where. Having lived in Europe for years, I had lost a sense of this contrast and had ended up believing that there had been a general rise in the standard of living of the whole population; I wasn’t far from imagining that the proletariat was becoming middle class, that there were really no more poor people, that the social struggle, the struggle between classes, consequently, was coming to an end. Well, seeing New York, perceiving again suddenly this vivid contrast that exists everywhere but which was blotted out of my eyes by familiar forms of it, that was for me a kind of second revelation; the class struggle still exists, it exists more intensely. A

### Notes

- 1 Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat, as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton, under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, Translated by Geoffrey Skelton and Adrian Mitchell, (New York; Atheneum, 1966).
- 2 The C.G.T. (General Confederation of Workers) is a powerful trade-union very close to the French Communist Party. Cf. A. Beiden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York; Autonomedia, 1988).

# 7

## An Historian of Culture

Q: Professor Foucault, you have said that philosophy, as a discourse, is above all a diagnostic enterprise. I would like to ask you a question about this. Doesn't performing a diagnosis perhaps involve placing oneself outside, elevating oneself to a different level of reflection, a level superior to the level of the objective field to which the diagnosis is applied?

MF; I would like to add that there exist various means of knowing diagnostically. By diagnostic knowledge I mean, in general, a form of knowledge that defines and determines differences. For example, when a doctor makes a diagnosis of tuberculosis, he does it by determining the differences that distinguish someone sick with tuberculosis from someone sick with pneumonia or anyother disease. In this sense diagnostic knowledge operates within a certain objective field defined by the sickness, the symptoms, etc.

## 74 *An Historian of Culture*

Q: Yet it is outside the sickness: the doctor speaks of the sickness but doesn't live it; and his discourse is not in fact a symptom of this or that sickness.

MF: Yes, within an objective field yet outside of the sickness. However, there are forms of diagnostic knowledge that are not located within an objective field but which, on the contrary, permit a new objective field to appear. For example, when Saussure defined what *langue* was with respect to *parole* or what synchronic was with respect to diachronic, he opened up a new sector of potential studies, a new objective field which did not exist before.' And this too is knowledge through diagnosis, though much different from the first type.

Q: At any rate, it is necessary to resort to a metalanguage, a language to describe a language.

MF: Not always. It depends on the science with which one is dealing. I do not believe that one can call a medical diagnosis a metalanguage.

Q: If we consider the symptoms of a sickness as signs, the doctor's discourse is metalinguistic with respect to these signs.

MF: If you give to metalanguage the very general meaning of a discourse about a system of signs, it is true that one is dealing with a metalanguage. But only if one accepts this very general definition.

Q; Metalanguage is a discourse about a discourse.

MF: Yes, but now I am a little worried because today the term metalanguage is employed in a very wide and

## *An Historian of Culture 75*

general sense which lacks rigor. One speaks of metalanguage in dealing with literary criticism, the history of science, the history of philosophy, etc. Naturally, one can talk about it in dealing with medicine as well. I wonder whether it might not be preferable to return to the more rigorous definition of metalanguage, one which says that it is the discourse through which the elements and the rules of construction of a language are defined.

Q: In fact, in mathematics, metalanguage is the language through which mathematics is formalized. But beyond the definition, the most important aspect of the question is something else: that is, that the structure of the metalanguage can be different from that of the language.

MF: Possibly.

Q: But I am constructing my discourse within the *episteme* of my civilization, or outside it?

MF: What meaning are you giving to the term *episteme*?

Q: The same one you gave to it.

MF: Yes, and I'd like to know what that meaning is.

Q: For my part, as a good neo-Kantian, I intend to refer to the categories.

MF: Now we're at the crux. What I called *episteme* in *The Order of Things* has nothing to do with historical categories, that is with those categories created in a particular historical moment. When I speak of *episteme*, I mean all those

## 76 *An Historian of Culture*

relationships which existed between the various sectors of science during a given epoch. For example, I am thinking of the fact that at a certain point mathematics was used for research in physics, while linguistics or, if you will, semiology, the science of signs, was used by biology (to deal with genetic messages). Likewise the theory of evolution was used by, or served as a model for historians, psychologists, and sociologists of the 19th century. All these phenomena of relationship between the sciences or between the various scientific sectors constitute what I call the *episteme* of an epoch. Thus for me *episteme* has nothing to do with the Kantian categories.

Q: Yet when you speak of the concept of “order” in the 17th century, aren’t you dealing with a category?

MF: I simply noted that the problem of order (the problem, not the category), or rather the need to introduce an order among series of numbers, human beings, or values, appears simultaneously in many different disciplines in the 17th century. This involves a communication between the diverse disciplines, and so it was that someone who proposed, for example, the creation of a universal language in the 17th century was quite close in terms of procedure to someone who dealt with the problem of how one could catalog human beings. It’s a question of relationships and communication among the various sciences. This is what I call *episteme*, and it has nothing to do with the Kantian categories.

Q: I call these categories, because they are formal, universal, and empty.

MF: Do you consider historicity, for example, to be a category?

## *An Historian of Culture 77*

Q: Yes, it's a category of 19th century culture.

MF: But this isn't Kant's meaning of "category."

Q: It depends on how one reads Kant.

MF: Then I recognize that even my own are categories in this sense.

Q: Let's go on now to another topic. I would like to ask you a question concerning your interest in Nietzsche. What is the Nietzsche that you like?

MF: Clearly, it is not that of *Zarathustra*. It is that of *The Birth of Tragedy*, of *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Q: The Nietzsche of origins, then?

MF: I would say that in Nietzsche I find a questioning of the historical type which does not refer in any way to the "original" as do many of the analyses of Western thought. Husserl and Heidegger bring up for discussion again all of our knowledge and its foundations, but they do this by beginning from that which is original. This analysis takes place, however, at the expense of any articulated historical content. Instead, what I liked in Nietzsche is the attempt to bring up for discussion again the fundamental concepts of knowledge, of morals, and of metaphysics by appealing to a historical analysis of the positivistic type, without going back to origins. But clearly this is not the only thing that interests me in Nietzsche.

In your writings, I find another more important aspect; the return to the discussion of the primacy, or, if you prefer, of the privilege of the subject in the Cartesian or Kantian sense, of the subject as consciousness.

## 78 *An Historian of Culture*

Q: It's precisely on that point that I wanted to ask you another question. I have the impression that for you, as for the majority of French philosophers, the subject coincides with consciousness.

MF: For me this isn't true; but it is true that the overwhelming majority of philosophers from the 17th to the 19th century has equated subject and consciousness. I would say, rather, that this holds true also for the French philosophers of the 20th century, including Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. I think that this equation of subject-consciousness at the transcendental level is a characteristic of Western philosophy from Descartes to our own time. Nietzsche launched one of the first, or at least one of the most vigorous, attacks against this equation.

Q: It's a question of consciousness as the subject of "I think." But what I don't understand is the position of consciousness as object of an *episteme*. The consciousness, if anything, is "epistemizing," not "epistemizable."

MF: Are you speaking of the transcendental consciousness?

Q: Yes.

MF: Well, I am not Kantian or Cartesian, precisely because I refuse an equation on the transcendental level between subject and thinking "I." I am convinced that there exist, if not exactly structures, then at least rules for the functioning of knowledge which have arisen in the course of history and within which can be located the various subjects.

Q: I am afraid that all this may be a trap in which we are prisoners. What you are saying is undoubtedly true, but on

## *An Historian of Culture 79*

the other hand, it is exactly this transcendental consciousness which conditions the formation of our knowledge. It is true that transcendental consciousness arises in a particular phase of our history and civilization, in a particular situation; but it is also true that, once arisen, it manifests itself as a constituting and not a constituted thing.

MF: I understand your position, but it is exacty on this point that our views diverge. You seem to me Kantian or Husserlian. In all of my work I strive instead to avoid any reference to this transcendental as a condition of possibility for any knowledge. When I say that I strive to avoid it, I don't mean that I am sure of succeeding. My procedure at this moment is of a regressive sort, I would say; I try to assume a greater and greater detachment in order to define the historical conditions and transformations of our knowledge. I try to historicize to the utmost in order to leave as little space as possible to the transcendental. I cannot exclude the possibility that one day I will have to confront an irreducible *residuum* which will be, in fact, the transcendental.

Q: Let's try to look at the question fi-om another point of view. Since it is said that you are a structuralist (forgive me for saying this), I would like to know whether you think that some kind of relationship exists between the concept of "structure" and the Freudian notion of the "unconscious."

MF: I'll answer you in an offhand way, though I will begin by making a statement of principles: I am absolutely not a structuralist.

Q: I know that, but public opinion has linked you to the structuralists.

## *80 An Historian of Culture*

MF: I am obliged to repeat it continually. I have never used any of the concepts which can be considered characteristic of structuralism. I have mentioned the concept of structure several times, but I have never used it. Unfortunately critics and journalists are not like philosophers; they do not recognize the difference between “mention” and “use.” Thus if I now speak of structure and the unconscious I do so from a completely external standpoint; nor do I consider myself bound by the answer that I give. Anyway I am quite incompetent in this field. I will say that it seems to me that in recent years (I am speaking as a historian of culture) an unexpected discovery has occurred: I mean the discovery of the existence of formal relationships, which can indeed be called structures, exactly in areas that appear in all respects under the control of consciousness, for example in language and formal thought. It has also been observed that these relationships existed and operated even when the subject was not truly conscious of them—conscious first in the psychological sense of the word, but also in the Kantian or Cartesian sense. Thus through linguistics, logic and ethnology one arrives at the discovery of a sector which stands outside consciousness in the usually accepted meaning of that word. Is it necessary to fit this sector into the realm of the unconscious, understood in the Freudian sense? Students of psychoanalysis have found themselves with two choices. The first involves asserting that this “structural” unconscious, if we want to term it that, is subordinate to the Freudian unconscious. Fortunately many investigators have avoided this error, or should I say ingenuousness, and have put the problem in different terms.

The problem is to find out whether the Freudian unconscious is not itself a locus in which this system of formal relationships operates. These relationships are operative in language, in formal thought, and even in certain social structures. Perhaps the Freudian unconscious as well is, shall we

## *An Historian of Culture 81*

say, “touched” by this structural unconscious. This is the point at which many psychoanalytic investigations have arrived.

Q: But doesn't this “structural” unconscious perhaps coincide with the unconscious as defined by Jung?

MF: Certainly not. One can say with confidence that we are not speaking of an individual unconscious, in the sense that psychoanalysis generally understands that notion. Yet neither is it a collective unconscious, which would be a kind of collection or reservoir of archetypes at the disposition of everyone. The “structural” unconscious is neither of these things.

Q: Please explain to me your interest in a writer like Sade. Does it have to do with the dissolution of the “ego” in his work, or perhaps with his eroticism, with that kind of algebraic combination which eroticism undergoes in him?

MF: Sade's great experiment, even with all that might be considered pathetic in it, lies in the fact that he seeks to introduce the disorder of desire into a world dominated by order and classification. This is precisely the meaning of what he calls “libertinism.” The libertine is a man gifted with a desire strong enough and a mind cold enough to allow him to succeed in fitting all the potentialities of his desire into an absolutely exhaustive combination of events.

Q: But according to you, doesn't one perhaps arrive at the death of desire in Sade? These combinations which know neither time nor the dynamics of desire, but only some abstract sexual acts—don't these combinations of all possible modes of behavior lead us perhaps to a situation in which Eros no longer exists, in which Eros becomes only a pretext?

## 82 *An Historian of Culture*

MF: I'll say only a few things in reference to this. It is evident that if I want to make love (or rather, when I want to make love) I do not resort to Sade's prescribed methods, to his combinations; not so much because I wouldn't like to try, but because I've never had the opportunity. Thus I agree with you that in these perfect successive combinations it is not possible that desire should be multiplied or divided as it is in Sade's works. But in Sade I don't seek a formula for making love or a stimulus leading to it. For me Sade is a symptom of a curious movement which becomes evident within our culture at that moment when a thought, which was basically dominated by representation, calculation, order and classification, gives way, simultaneously with the French Revolution, to an element which up to then had never been conceived in this way, that is desire or voluptuousness...

Q: Thus, according to you, Sade is the last defender of the *esprit de geometrie*?

MF: Exactly. I see in Sade the last representative of the 18th century (the milieu from which he came also testifies to this), rather than a prophet of the future. Perhaps the real question is why we today should be so passionately interested in him. At any rate, I don't make Sade out to be a god, and I don't make him the prophet of our age; my interest in him has been constant principally because of the historical position he occupies, which is at a point of transition between two forms of thought.

Q: Why is our era so interested in Sade?

MF: The reason probably is that Sade sought to insert into the combinations of representations the infinite power of desire, and when he did so he was obliged, almost as an

## *An Historian of Culture 83*

afterthought, to take away the ego's privileged position. The ego became just one element within a combination. In the philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries, the ego was king. Later, in the 19th century, with the philosophy of will, the ego remains king, though in a different way. Yet at the moment at which these two currents are joined, the ego is dissociated and dispersed among the various combinations. I believe that one of the most noteworthy characteristics of our era is that the sovereignty of the ego has been put in doubt. The dissociation which characterizes our own time was already present in Sade.

Q: But don't you think that the popularity of Sade is due rather to the pansexuality which reigns in our day, the opposition to all order and all morality? I feel that for many people Sade represents above all the liberation of Eros, a spirit that mocks virtuousness, or the victory of the anarchistic Juliette ("Vice") over the timid and conformist Justine ("Virtue").

MF: That's true. However, I maintain that the desire to liberate oneself from sexual taboos has always existed, in all epochs. People have always been famished, from the sexual point of view; there are no societies which do not regulate sex, and thus all societies create the hope of escaping from such regulations. The point is to decipher what form that hope takes today. It's true, today we set Juliette against Justine. But when we do that, aren't we perhaps admitting, or agreeing to, a kind of sexuality which goes beyond the subject, which stands behind the ego, so to speak, or which supersedes it? Thus the kind of sexuality that we recognize today in practice contributes to the dissociation of the ego, at least in the form in which that term is understood from Descartes onward. So we see that in fact the basic theme of Sade's *Juliette* is this: "I will do with you anything that my desire wants, though it is agreed that you will do the same with me. No part of you will escape my

## *84 An Historian of Culture*

desire, but the same goes for me.” Thus neither of the two controls his or her own body anymore, and the loss of one communicates with the loss of the other even if the subject itself does not exercise any real control. It is exactly this orgasmic quality of contemporary sexuality that has raised the question of the subject’s position.

Q: But many, for example Marcuse, speak of the liberation of Eros as an affirmation of the ego.

MF: I think that Marcuse is trying to use the ancient themes inherited from the 19th century to salvage the ego, understood in the traditional sense.

Q: Again, for me things appear differently. Pansexuality is a phenomenon analogous to protest; it is a refusal of authority, of morality. The struggle is not so much against the subject as against constituted society, the “establishment.”

MF: When I speak of the particular forms which eroticism assumes today, I don’t mean to say that it is the only factor leading to a dissolution of the individual. I believe that we are passing through a profound crisis of our civilization, in the course of which the ego, the individual person as understood in traditional terms, has come to be questioned.

Q: You have written that moral problems today are entirely reducible to political and sexual problems. Why?

MF: It often happens that I say something just so that I won’t have to think about it anymore; then, for this reason, I have some trouble in justifying it. Nevertheless, I made this statement because I was thinking about it and also in order to continue thinking about it.

## *An Historian of Culture 85*

Q: But you went further; you said that sexuality could ultimately be connected to politics.

MF: This I stated simply as hypothesis. But here is what I meant. Today, in our time (and I speak to you as a historian, even if my goal is to be a historian of the present), moral problems concern sex and politics exclusively. I'll give you an example. For a very long time, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the problem of work, or the lack of work, was or seemed to be a moral problem by nature. Those who did not work were not considered unfortunates who could not find work, but lazy evil creatures who did not want to work. In short, there existed a work ethic but it's hardly necessary for me to say this, because Max Weber said it all, and much better than I could. Today we know quite well that whoever is not working cannot find work, is unemployed. Work has left the domain of morality and entered into that of politics.

Q: It's clear that you are not Italian.

MF: Be that as it may, to me it seems difficult to deny that today work is no longer a moral problem. In short, I would like you to give me an example of a moral problem recognized as such by everyone or by many people, and one which is not connected to sex or politics. Do you think that my reduction is a bit too radical?

Q: I'm from another school. For me, morality is a hierarchy of values, of all values; every time we are forced to choose between values we find ourselves in the midst of a moral problem.

MF: But don't you believe that in the present world sex and politics define these values?

## 86 *An Historian of Culture*

Q: They define the most visible and most discussed part of moral problems. I would say that they define rather the ethicality (Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*). You're right as far as *Sittlichkeit* is concerned, but not for the case of morality (Hegel's *Moralität*). The two things are not identical. Ethicality is custom: habitual behavior, or at least the behavior expected from a person within a social group, in his relations with the members and the institutions of that group, in his dealings with them. Custom has its duties and its prohibitions, its idols and its taboos, which vary through history, from epoch to epoch, from place to place (a customs barrier suffices to mark a change in ethics). Morality is much wider, and includes ethics as one of its particular, determined aspects. But it actually signifies a general respect for values as such (for "all" values) inasmuch as they are objects of the will ("ends"); moreover, it is a respect for the hierarchy of values, and whenever the realization of some of these values appears impossible, there will be a conflict (the necessity of choosing). Robinson Crusoe, on his desert island, doesn't have ethical problems; but he continues to have a morality, and eventually moral problems as well. Morality is a category of the objective spirit, while ethicality is only a particular value (and perhaps it is merely an instrumental thing, if it is true, as I happen to think, that the individual represents a higher value than the group).

MF: Here we find ourselves dealing with the same problem as before; you believe in the transcendental and I don't.

Q: But how, in your view, can sexuality be reduced to politics?

MF: This is a question that I have asked myself, but I am not really sure. Perhaps one could say that, if certain as-

## *An Historian of Culture 87*

pects of our sexual lives (marriage, the family, the corruption of minors, etc.) raise moral problems, that happens as a function of the particular political situation.

Q: But everything we do has a relationship to the political situation. We are no longer in the midst of Rousseau's forest; in all aspects of our lives we are confronted with laws and institutions.

MF: I wasn't speaking of that. I was wondering how sexuality could raise moral problems; I'm not talking about problems of repression, but exclusively of moral problems. In what sense can leaving a woman or not leaving her constitute a moral problem? I'm not thinking of laws, which vary from one country to another. I think that such things can be because certain acts have connections with the political relationships that define our societies.

Q: According to you, what is the difference between political and social relationships?

MF: I label political everything that has to do with class struggle, and social everything that derives from and is a consequence of the class struggle, expressed in human relationships and in institutions.

Q: For me politics is everything connected to the struggle for power and therefore constitutes perhaps only one aspect of class struggle. The social refers to everything connected to relationships between people in general.

MF: If we give to the term "political" the meaning that you attribute to it—and yours is the more precise definition, I must admit—then my definition cannot stand. I also

## ***88 An Historian of Culture***

want to give politics the meaning of a struggle for power; but it's not power understood only as government or state, but economic power as well. A

Translated by Jared Becker and James Cascaito.

### Note

1 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966). *Langue* (language) is the system of language; *parole* (speech) is the individual utterance.

# 8

## Film and Popular Memory

Q: Let's start from the journalistic phenomenon of the "retro" style, the current fad for the recent past. Basically, we can put the question like this: how is it that films like Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* or *The Night Porter* can be made today? Why do they meet with such a fantastic response? We think the answer has to be sought on three levels:

(1.) Giscard d'Estaing has been elected. A new kind of approach to politics, to history, to the political apparatus is coming into existence, indicating very clearly—in such a way that everyone can see it—that Gaullism is dead. So it's necessary, insofar as Gaullism remains very closely linked to the period of the Resistance, to look at how this is translated in the films which are being made.

(2.) How is it possible for bourgeois ideology to attack the weak points of orthodox Marxism (rigid, economic, mechanical—the terms don't matter much) which has for so long provided the only framework for interpreting social phenomena?

(3.) Lastly, what does all this mean for political militants? Given that militants are consumers and sometimes also makers of films.

## 88 *An Historian of Culture*

want to give politics the meaning of a struggle for power; but it's not power understood only as government or state, but economic power as well. A

Translated by Jared Becker and James Cascaito.

### Note

1 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966). *Langue* (language) is the system of language; *parole* (speech) is the individual utterance.

# 8

## Film and Popular Memory

Q: Let's start from the journalistic phenomenon of the "retro" style, the current fad for the recent past. Basically, we can put the question like this: how is it that films like Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* or *The Night Porter* can be made today? Why do they meet with such a fantastic response? We think the answer has to be sought on three levels:

(1.) Giscard d'Estaing has been elected. A new kind of approach to politics, to history, to the political apparatus is coming into existence, indicating very clearly—in such a way that everyone can see it—that Gaullism is dead. So it's necessary, insofar as Gaullism remains very closely linked to the period of the Resistance, to look at how this is translated in the films which are being made.

(2.) How is it possible for bourgeois ideology to attack the weak points of orthodox Marxism (rigid, economic, mechanical—the terms don't matter much) which has for so long provided the only framework for interpreting social phenomena?

(3.) Lastly, what does all this mean for political militants? Given that militants are consumers and sometimes also makers of films.

## 90 *Film and Popular Memory*

The thing is, that after Marcel Ophuls' film *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the floodgates have been open. Something hitherto completely repressed or forbidden has flooded out. Why?

MF: I think this comes from the fact that the history of the war, and what took place around it, has never really been written except in completely official accounts. These official histories are to all intents and purposes centered on Gaullism, which, on the one hand, was the only way of writing history in terms of an honorable nationalism; and, on the other, the only way of introducing the Great Man, the man of the right, the man of the old 19th-century nationalisms, as an historical figure.

It boils down to the fact that France was exonerated by de Gaulle, while the right (and we know how it behaved at the time of the war) was purified and sanctified by him.

What has never been described is what was going on in the very heart of the country from 1936, and even from the end of the 1914 war, up until Liberation.

Q; So what has come about since *The Sorrow and the Pity* is some kind of return to truth in history. The point is really whether it is the truth.

MF: This has to be linked to the fact that the end of Gaullism means an end to this exoneration of the right by de Gaulle and by this brief period. The old right of Petain and Maurras, the old reactionary and collaborating right, which disguised itself behind de Gaulle as best it could, now feels entitled to write its own history. This old right which, since Tardieu, had been upstaged both historically and politically, is now coming back into the limelight.

It openly supported Giscard. There's no longer any

## *Film and Popular Memory 91*

need for it to rely on disguises, it can write its own history. And among the factors which account for the present acceptance of Giscard by half of France (a majority of 200,000), we mustn't forget to include films like those we're discussing—whatever their makers' intentions. The fact that it's been possible to show everything has enabled the right to carry out a certain regrouping. In the same way that, conversely, it's really the healing of the breach between the national right and the collaborating right which has made these films possible. The two are inextricably linked.

Q: This history, then, is being rewritten both in the cinema and on television. It seems this rewriting of history is being carried out by film-makers who are thought of as more or less left-wing. This is a problem we should look at more closely.

MF: I don't think it's that simple. What I've just said is very schematic. Let's go over it again.

There's a real fight going on. Over what? Over what we can roughly describe as popular memory. It's an actual fact that people—I'm talking about those who are barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, fi'om drawing up their own historical accounts—that these people nevertheless do have a way of recording history, or remembering it, of keeping it fresh and using it. This popular history was, to a certain extent, even more alive, more clearly formulated in the 19th century, where, for instance, there was a whole tradition of struggles which were transmitted orally, or in writing or songs, etc.

Now, a whole number of apparatuses have been set up ("popular literature," cheap books and the stuff that's taught in school as well) to obstruct the flow of this popular memory. And it could be said that this attempt has been pretty

## ***92 Film and Popular Memory***

successful. The historical knowledge the working class has of itself is continually shrinking. If you think, for instance, of what workers at the end of the 19th century knew about their own history, what the trade union tradition (in the strict sense of the word) was like up until the 1914 war, it's really quite remarkable. This has been progressively diminished, but although it gets less, it doesn't vanish.

Today, cheap books aren't enough. There are much more effective means like television and the cinema. And I believe this was one way of reprogramming popular memory, which existed but had no way of expressing itself. So people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been.

Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles. Just what the Resistance was, must no longer be known...

I think we have to understand these films in some such way as this. Their theme is, roughly, that there's been no popular struggle in the 20th century. This assertion has been successively formulated in two ways. The first, immediately after the war, simply said; "What a century of heroes the 20th century is! There's been Churchill, de Gaulle, those chaps who did the parachuting, the fighter squadrons, etc!" It amounted to saying: "There's been no popular struggle, because this is where the real struggle was." But still no one said directly, "There's been no popular struggle."

The other, more recent formulation—sceptical or cynical, as you prefer—consists in proceeding to the blunt assertion itself: "Just look at what happened. Where have you seen any struggles? Where do you see people rising up, taking up rifles?"

## *Film and Popular Memory 93*

Q: There's been a sort of half-rumor going around since, perhaps. *The Sorrow and the Pity*, to the effect that the French people, as a whole, didn't resist the Germans, that they even accepted collaboration, that they took it all lying down. The question is what all this finally means. And it does indeed seem that what is at stake is popular struggle, or rather the memory of that struggle.

MF: Exactly. It's vital to have possession of this memory, to control it, to administer it, tell it what it must contain. And when you see these films, you find out what you have to remember: "Don't believe all that you've been told. There aren't any heroes. And if there aren't any, it's because there's no struggle." So a sort of ambiguity arises; to start with, "there aren't any heroes" is a positive debunking of the whole war-hero mythology *la* Burt Lancaster. It's a way of saying, "No, that's not what war is about." So your first impression is that history is beginning to reappear; that eventually they're going to tell us why we're not all obliged to identify with de Gaulle or the members of the Normandy-Niemen squadron, etc. But beneath the sentence "There are no heroes" is hidden a different meaning, its true message; "There was no struggle." This is what the exercise is all about.

Q: There's another phenomenon which explains why these films are so successful. The resentment of those who really did struggle is used against those who didn't. The people who formed the Resistance, watching *The Sorrow and the Pity* for example, see the passive citizens of a town in central France, and they recognize their passivity. And then the resentment takes over; they forget that they themselves did struggle.

MF: In my view, the politically important phenomenon is, rather than any one particular film, that of the series.

## *94 Film and Popular Memory*

the network established by all these films and the place—excuse the pun—they “occupy.” In other words, the important thing is to ask: “Is it possible at the moment to make a positive film about the struggles of the Resistance?” Well, clearly the answer’s no. One gets the impression that people would laugh at a film like this, or else quite simply wouldn’t go to see it.

Q: Yes. It’s the first thing to be brought up against us when we attack a film like Malle’s. The response is always, “What would you have done, then?” And you’re right; it’s impossible to answer. We should be beginning to develop—how shall I put it — a left-wing perspective on all this, but it’s true that one doesn’t exist ready-made.

Alternately, this restates the problem of how one is to produce a positive hero, a new type of hero.

MF: The problem’s not the hero, but the struggle. Can you make a film about a struggle without going through the traditional process of creating heroes? It’s a new form of an old problem.

Q: Let’s go back to the “retro” style. From its own standpoint, the bourgeoisie has largely concentrated its attention on one historical period (the forties) which throws into focus both its strong and weak points. For on the one hand, this is where it’s most easily exposed (it’s the bourgeoisie which created the breeding ground of Nazism or of collaboration with it); while on the other hand, it’s here that it’s currently trying to justify its historical behavior—in the most cynical ways. The difficulty is how to reveal what, for us, is the positive content of this same historical period—for us, that is, the generation of the struggles of 1968 or LIP. Is the period of the Resistance really a weak point to be attacked, the point where some different kinds of ideological hegemony

## *Film and Popular Memory 95*

could emerge? For it's a fact that the bourgeoisie is simultaneously defensive and offensive about its recent history: strategically defensive, but tactically offensive because it's found this strong point from which it can best sow confusion. But do we have to be restricted (which is to be on the defensive) to simply re-establishing the truth about history? Isn't it possible to find some weak point where we might attack the ideology? Is this point necessarily the Resistance? Why not 1789 or 1968?

MF: Thinking about these films and their common subject, I wonder whether something different couldn't be done. And when I say "subject," I don't mean showing the struggles or showing they didn't exist. I mean that it's historically true that while the war was going on there was a kind of rejection of it among the French masses. Now where did this come from? From a whole series of episodes that no one talks about—the right doesn't, because it wants to hide them; and the left doesn't, because it's afraid of being associated with anything contrary to "national honor."

A good seven or eight million men went through the 1914-18 war. For four years they lived a horrifying existence, seeing millions upon millions of men die all around them. And what do they find themselves facing again in 1920? The right-wing in power, full-scale economic exploitation and finally an economic crisis and the unemployment of 1932. How could these people, who'd been packed into the trenches, still feel attracted by war in the two decades of 1920-30 and 1930-40? If the Germans still did, it's because defeat had reawakened such a national feeling in them that the desire for revenge could overcome this sort of repulsion. But even so, people don't enjoy fighting these bourgeois wars, with middle-class officers and these kind of benefits resulting from them. I think this was a crucial experience for the working class. And when, in 1940, these guys tossed their bikes into the ditch and said.

## 96 *Film and Popular Memory*

“I’m going home”—you can’t simply say “They’re yellow!” and you can’t hide from it either. You have to find a place for it in this sequence of events. This non-compliance with national instructions has to be fitted in. And what happened during the Resistance is the opposite of what we’re shown. What happened was that the process of repoliticization, remobilization and a taste for fighting reappeared little by little, in the working class. It gradually reappeared after the rise of Nazism and the Spanish Civil War. Now what these films show is just the opposite process: namely, that after the great dream of 1939, which was shattered in 1940, people just gave up. This process did really take place, but as part of another, much more extended process which was going in the opposite direction: starting from a disgust with war, it ended up, in the middle of the occupation, as a conscious awareness of the need to struggle.

I think there was a positive political meaning to this noncompliance with the demands of the national armed struggles. The historical theme of *Lacombe Lucien* and his family takes on a new light if you look back to Ypres and Douaumont...

Q: This raises the problem of popular memory: of a memory working at its own pace, a pace quite detached from any seizure of central power or from the outbreak of any war...

MF: This has always been the aim of the history taught in schools: to teach ordinary people that they got killed and that this was very heroic. Look at what’s been made of Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars...

Q: A number of films, including those of Malle and Cavani, leave off talking about history or the struggle over Nazism and fascism; usually, they talk instead, or at the same time, about sex. What’s the nature of this discourse?

## *Film and Popular Memory 97*

MF: But don't you make a sharp distinction between *Lacombe Lucien* and *Night Porter* on this? It seems that the erotic, passionate aspect of *Lacombe Lucien* has a quite easily identifiable function. It's basically a way of making the anti-hero acceptable, of saying he's not as anti as all that.

In fact, if all the power relations in his life are distorted, and if it's through him that they keep on running, on the other hand, just when you think he's distorting all the erotic relations, a true relationship suddenly appears and he loves the girl. On the one hand, there's the machinery of power which, starting with a flat tire, carries Lacombe closer and closer to something crazy. On the other hand, there's the machinery of love, which seems hooked up to it, which seems distorted, but which, on the contrary, has just the opposite effect and in the end restores Lucien as the handsome naked youth living in the fields with a girl.

So there's a fairly elementary antithesis between power and love. While in *Night Porter* the question is—both generally and in the present situation—a very important one: love for power.

Power has an erotic charge. There's an historical problem involved here. How is it that Nazism—which was represented by shabby, pathetic puritanical characters, laughably Victorian old maids, or at best, smutty individuals—how has it now managed to become, in France, in Germany, in the United States, in all pornographic literature throughout the world, the ultimate symbol of eroticism? Every shoddy erotic fantasy is now attributed to Nazism. Which raises a fundamentally serious problem: how do you love power? Nobody loves power any more. This kind of affective, erotic attachment, this desire one has for power, for the power that's exercised over you, doesn't exist any more. The monarchy and its rituals were created to stimulate this sort of erotic relationship towards power. The massive Stalinist apparatus, and even that of

## *98 Film and Popular Memory*

Hitler, were constructed for the same purpose. But it's all collapsed in ruins and obviously you can't be in love with Brezhnev, Pompidou or Nixon. In a pinch you might love de Gaulle, Kennedy or Churchill. But what's going on at the moment? Aren't we witnessing the beginnings of a re-eroticization of power, taken to a pathetic, ridiculous extreme by the porn-shops with Nazi insignia that you can find in the United States, and (a much more acceptable but just as ridiculous version) in the behavior of Giscard d'Estaing when he says, "I'm going to march down the streets in a lounge suit, shaking hands with ordinary people and kids on half-day holidays"? It's a fact that Giscard has built part of his campaign not only on his fine physical bearing but also on a certain eroticizing of his character, his stylishness.

Q: That's how he's portrayed himself on an electoral poster—one where you see his daughter turned towards him.

MF: That's right. He's looking at France, but she's looking at him. It's the restoration to power of seduction.

Q: Something that struck us during the electoral campaign, particularly at the time of the big televised debates between François Mitterand and Giscard, was that they weren't at all on the same level. Mitterand appeared as the old type of politico, belonging to the old left, let's say. He was trying to sell ideas, which were themselves dated and a bit old-fashioned, and he did it with a lot of style. But Giscard was selling the idea of power, exactly like an advertiser sells cheese.

MF: Even quite recently, it was necessary to apologize for being in power. It was necessary for power to be self-effacing, for it not to show itself as power. To a certain extent, this is how the democratic republics have functioned, where

## *Film and Popular Memory 99*

the aim was to render power sufficiently invisible and insidious for it to be impossible to grasp, to grasp what it was doing or where it was.

Q: Perhaps we have to talk about a certain powerlessness of traditional Marxist discourse to account for fascism. Let's say that Marxism has given an historical account of the phenomenon of Nazism in a deterministic fashion, while completely leaving aside what the specific ideology of Nazism was. So it's scarcely surprising that someone like Louis Malle, who's pretty familiar with what's going on on the left, can benefit from this weakness, and rush into the breach.

MF: Marxism has given a definition of Nazism and fascism: "an overt terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary fraction of the bourgeoisie." It's a definition that leaves out an entire part of the content and a whole series of relationships. In particular, it leaves out the fact that Nazism and fascism were only possible insofar as there could exist within the masses a relatively large section which took on the responsibility for a number of state functions of repression, control, policing, etc. This, I believe, is a crucial characteristic of Nazism; that is, its deep penetration inside the masses and the fact that a part of the power was actually delegated to a specific fringe of the masses. This is where the word "dictatorship" becomes true in general, and relatively false. When you think of the power an individual could possess under a Nazi regime as soon as he was simply S.S. or signed up in the Party! You could actually kill your neighbor, steal his wife, his house! This is where *Lacombe Lucien* is interesting, because it's one side it shows up well. The fact is that contrary to what is usually understood by dictatorship—the power of a single person—you could say that in this kind of regime the most repulsive (but in a sense the most intoxicating) part of

## *100 Film and Popular Memory*

power was given to a considerable number of people. The S.S. was that which was given the power to kill, to rape...

Q: This is where orthodox Marxism falls down. Because it's obliged to talk about desire.

MF: About desire and power...

Q: It's also where films like *Lacombe Lucien* and *Night Porter* are relatively "strong." They can talk about desire and power in a way which seems coherent...

MF: It's interesting to see in *Night Porter* how under Nazism the power of a single person is taken over and operated by ordinary people. The kind of mock trial which is set up is quite fascinating. Because on the one hand, it has all the trappings of a psychotherapy group, while in fact having the power structure of a secret society. What they re-establish is basically an S.S. cell, endowed with a judicial power that's different from, and opposed to, the central power. You have to bear in mind the way power was delegated, distributed within the very heart of the population; you have to bear in mind this vast transfer of power that Nazism carried out in a society like Germany. It's wrong to say that Nazism was the power of the great industrialists carried on under a different form. It wasn't simply the intensified central power of the military—it was that, but only on one particular level.

Q: This is an interesting side of the film, in fact. But what in our view seems very open to criticism is that it appears to say: "If you're a typical S.S. man, you'll act like this. But if, in addition, you have a certain inclination for the job, it will offer you incredible erotic experiences." So the film keeps up the seductiveness.

## *Film and Popular Memory 101*

MF: Yes, this is where it meets up with *Lacombe Lucien*. Because Nazism never gave people any material advantages, it never handed out anything but power. You still have to ask why it was, if this regime was nothing but a bloody dictatorship, that on May 3rd, 1945, there were still Germans who fought to the last drop of blood; whether these people didn't have some form of emotional attachment to power. Bearing in mind, of course, all the pressuring, the denunciations... In *Lacombe Lucien*, as in *Night Porter*, this excess of power they're given is converted back into love. It's very clear at the end of *Night Porter*, where a miniature concentration camp is built up around Max in his room, where he starves to death. So here love has converted power, surplus power, back into a total absence of power. In one sense, it's almost the same reconciliation as in *Lacombe Lucien* where love turns the excess of power in which he's been trapped into a rustic poverty far removed from the Gestapo's shady hotel, and far removed, too, from the farm where the pigs were being butchered.

Q: So we now have the beginnings of an explanation for the problem you were posing at the start of our discussion: why is Nazism, which was a repressive, puritanical system, nowadays associated with eroticism? There's a sort of shift of emphasis: the central problem of power, which one doesn't want to confront head on, is dodged, or rather shoved completely into the question of sexuality. So that this eroticising is ultimately a process of evasion, or repression...

MF: The problem's really very difficult and it hasn't been studied perhaps enough, even by Reich. What leads to power being desirable, and to actually being desired? It's easy to see the process by which this eroticising is transmitted, reinforced, etc. But for the eroticising to work, it's necessary that the attachment to power, the acceptance of power by those over whom it is exerted, is already erotic.

## *102 Film and Popular Memory*

Q: It's that much more difficult since the representation of power is rarely erotic. De Gaulle or Hitler are not particularly seductive.

MF: True—and I wonder if the Marxist analyses aren't victims to some extent to the abstractedness of the notion of liberty. In a regime like the Nazi regime, it's a fact that there's no liberty. But not having liberty doesn't mean not having power...

There's a battle for and around history going on at this very moment which is extremely interesting. The intention is to reprogram, to stifle what I've called the "popular memory," and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present. Up to 1968, popular struggles were part of folklore. For some people, they weren't even part of their immediate concept of reality. After 1968, every popular struggle, whether in South America or in Africa, has found some echo, some sympathetic response. So it's no longer possible to keep up their separation, this geographical "*cordon sanitaire*." Popular struggles have become for our society, not part of the actual, but part of the possible. So they have to be set at a distance. How? Not by providing a direct interpretation of them, which would be asking to be exposed. But by offering an historical interpretation of those popular struggles which have occurred in France in the past, in order to show that they never really happened! Before 1968, it was: "It won't happen here because it's going on somewhere else." Now it's: "It won't happen here because it never has! Take something like the Resistance even, this glorious past you've talked about so much, just look at it for a moment...Nothing. It's empty, a hollow facade!" It's another way of saying, "Don't worry about Chile, it's no different; the Chilean peasants couldn't care less. And France too: the bulk of the population isn't interested in anything a few malcontents might do."

## *Film and Popular Memory 103*

Q: When we react to all this—against it all—^it’s important that we don’t hmit ourselves to re-establishing the truth, to saying, about the Resistance, for example, “No, I was there and it wasn’t like that!” If you’re going to wage any effective ideological smuggle on the kind of ground dictated by these films, we believe you have to have a much broader, more extensive and positive frame of reference. For many people this consists in reappropriating the “history of France” for instance. It was with this in mind that we undertook a close reading of /, *Pierre Rivière*; because we realized that, paradoxically enough, it was useful to us in understanding *La-combe Lucien*, that their comparison was not unproductive. A significant difference between them, for example, is that Pi-erre Rivière is someone who writes, who commits a murder and who has a quite extraordinary memory. While Malle, on the other hand, treats his hero as a half-wit, as someone who goes through everything—history, the war, collaboration—without accumulating any experience. This is where the theme of memory, of popular memory, can help to separate off someone like Pierre Rivière from the character created by Malle (and Patrick Modiano, in *La Place de l’Etoile*)? Pierre Rivière, having no way of making his voice heard, takes the floor and is obliged to kill before he wins the right to speak. While Malle’s character proves, precisely by making nothing of what has happened to him, that there’s nothing worth the ffouble of remembering. It’s a pity you haven’t seen *The Courage of the People*. It’s a BoHvian film made with the exphcit aim of becoming evidence on a criminal record. The characters in this film—^which has been shown throughout the world (but not in Bolivia, thanks to the regime)—are played by the very people who were part of the real drama it re-enacts (a miner’s strike and its bloody repression). They themselves take charge of their picture, so that nobody shall forget...

There are two things going on in the cinema at the moment. On the one hand there are historical documents.

## 104 *Film and Popular Memory*

which have an important role. In *A Whole Life*, for instance, they play a very big part. Or again, in the films of Marcel Ophuls, or of Harris and Sedouy, it's very moving to watch the reality to Duclos in action in 1936 or 1939. And on the other hand, there are fictional characters who, at a given moment of history, condense within themselves the greatest possible number of social relations, of links with history. This is why *Lacombe Lucien* is so successful. Lacombe is a Frenchman under occupation, an ordinary Joe with concrete connections to Nazism, to the countryside, to local power, etc. And we shouldn't ignore this way of personifying history, of incarnating it in a character or a collection of characters who embody, at a given moment, a privileged relation to power.

There are lots of figures in the history of the workers' movement that aren't known; there are plenty of heroes in the history of the working class who've been completely driven out of memory. And I think there's a real issue to be fought here. There's no need for Marxism to keep on making films about Lenin, we've got plenty already.

MF: What you say is important. It's a trait of many Marxists nowadays—^ignorance of history. All these people, who spend their time talking about the misrepresentation of history, are only capable of producing commentaries on texts. What did Marx say? Did Marx really say that? Look, what is Marxism but a different way of analyzing history itself? In my opinion, the left in France has no real grasp of history. It used to have. At one time in the 19th century, Michelet might have been said to represent the left. There was Jaurès, too, and after them there grew up a kind of tradition of left-wing, social democratic historians (Mathiez, etc.). Nowadays it's dwindled to a trickle; whereas it could be a formidable wave, carrying along writers, film-makers. True, there has been Aragon and *Les Cloches de Bale*—& very great historical novel. But there

## *Film and Popular Memory 105*

are relatively few things, compared to what it could be like in a society where, after all, one can say that the intellectuals are more or less impregnated with Marxism.

Q: In this respect, the cinema offers something new: history captured “Live.” How do people in America relate to history, seeing the Vietnam war on television every evening while they’re eating.

MF: As soon as you start seeing pictures of war every evening, war becomes totally acceptable. That’s to say, thoroughly tedious, you’d really love to see something else. But when it becomes boring, you put up with it. You don’t even watch it. So how is this particular reality on film to be reactivated as an existing, historically important reality?

Q: Have you seen *The Camisards*?

MF: Yes, I liked it very much. Historically, it’s impeccable. It’s well made, intelligent and it makes a lot of things clear.

Q: I think that’s the direction we have to take in making films. To come back to the films we were talking about at the beginning—^we must raise the question of the extreme left’s confusion in the face of certain aspects of *Lacombe Lucien* and *Night Porter*, particularly the sexual one; and how this confusion can be of benefit to the right...

MF: As for what you call the extreme left, I find myself in considerable difficulty. I’m not at all sure that it still exists. Nonetheless, there really needs to be a thorough summing-up of what the extreme left has done since 1968, both negatively and positively. It’s true that this extreme left has

## ***106 Film and Popular Memory***

been the means of spreading a whole number of important ideas; on sexuality, women, homosexuality, psychiatry, housing, medicine. It's also been the means of spreading methods of action, where it continues to be of importance. The extreme left has played as important a role in the forms of activity as in its themes. But there's also a negative summing-up to be made, concerning certain Stalinist and terrorist organizational practices. And a misunderstanding, too, of certain broad and deeply-rooted processes which recently resulted in 13 million people backing Mitterrand, and which have always been disregarded, on the pretext that this was the politics of the politicians, that this was the business of the parties. A whole heap of things have been ignored; notably, that the desire to defeat the right has been a very important political factor within the masses for a number of months and even years. The extreme left hasn't sensed this desire, thanks to a false definition of the masses, a wrong appreciation of what this will to win really is. Faced with the risks a co-opted victory would involve, it prefers not to take the risk of winning. Defeat, at least, can't be co-opted. Personally, I'm not so sure. **A**

Translated by Martin Jordin

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Lacombe Lucien*, a film by Louis Malle, is the story of a French collaborator during the German occupation. *Night Porter*, a film by Liliana Cavani, is a sado-masochistic love story involving a former Nazi camp worker and prisoner.

<sup>^</sup> LIP, *a cause célèbre* in France, involved the take-over by workers of a factory. Cf. A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988).

<sup>^</sup> P. Modiano, *La Place de l'Etoile* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

# 9

## Sorcery and Madness

Q: For twenty years Thomas S. Szasz has developed the theme that there are fundamental analogies between the persecution of heretics and witches in former times and the persecution of the mad and mentally ill today. It's the principle subject of his book *The Manufacture of Madness*, which shows that the therapeutic state has been substituted for the theological state.' Psychiatrists and more generally workers in the field of mental health have succeeded in bringing back the Inquisition and in setting it up as a new scientific panacea. Does the parallel between the Inquisition and psychiatry appear to you to be historically justified?

MF: When will we be delivered from these witches and misunderstood madnesses that a society without psychiatrists unfortunately condemned to the stake? When will we be rid of this commonplace that so many books are still recounting today?

What's strong and important in Szasz's work is to have shown that the historical continuity doesn't go from witches to madness, but from the institution of witches to the one of psychiatrists. It's not the witch, with her tawdry chimeras and power over the shades, who has finally been recognized as the alienated one by a tardy but beneficent science.

## 108 *Sorcery and Madness*

Szasz shows that a certain kind of power is exercised through the surveillances, interrogations and decrees of the Inquisition; and that through successive transformations it interrogates us still, questions our desires and our dreams, disturbs our nights, hunts down secrets and traces boundaries, designates what's abnormal, undertakes purifications and assures the functioning of order.

Szasz, I hope, has definitively displaced the old question—^were witches the mad ones?—and reformulated it in these terms: What, in the psychiatric set-up, is still recognizable as the effect of a power linked to the prying work of the Inquisitors, with their long muzzles and sharp teeth? *The Manufacture of Madness*, I think, is an important book in the history of the related techniques of power and knowledge.

Q: In *The Manufacture of Madness* Szasz describes the insatiable curiosity of the Inquisitors concerning the sexual fantasies and activities of their victims, the witches, and compares it to that of psychiatrists. Do you think this comparison is justified?

MF: We're really going to have to rid ourselves of the "Marcuseries" and "Reichianisms" which encumber us and which would have us believe that of all things sexuality is the most obstinately "repressed" and "overrepressed" by our "bourgeois," "capitalist," "hypocritical" and "Victorian" society.^ Since the Renaissance there is nothing that has been more studied, questioned, extorted, brought to light and into dis-course, forced into confession, required to express itself and praised, finally, when it found the words. No civilization has chattered so much about sexuahty as ours. And many people still believe that they are subverting it when they are only obeying this injunction to confess, this secular requisition that subjects us—^we other men of the West—to say all about our

## *Sorcery and Madness 109*

desire. Since the Inquisition, through penitence, the examination of conscience, spiritual guidance, education, medicine, hygiene, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, sexuality has always been suspected of holding over us a decisive and profound truth. Tell us what your pleasure is, don't hide anything of what happens between your heart and your sex, and we will know what you are and what you are worth.

Szasz has seen very clearly I think how the "questioning" of sexuality was not simply the morbid interest of Inquisitors crazed by their own desire, but that what was taking shape there was a modern kind of power and control over individuals. Szasz is not an historian and perhaps one can quarrel with him, but at a time when the discourse on sexuality fascinates so many historians, it was good that a psychoanalyst retraced in historical terms the interrogation of sexuality. And many of Szasz's intuitions confirm what Le Roy Ladurie reveals in his remarkable book *Montaillou*.

Q: What do you think of Szasz's idea that in order to understand the psychiatric institution—and all mental health movements—it's advisable to study the psychiatrists themselves and not the so-called sick?

MF: If it's a question of studying the psychiatric institution, he's obviously right. But I think Szasz goes much further. Everyone dreams of writing a history of the mad, of going over to the other side and tracing the great evasions or the subtle retreats into delirium from the beginning. Yet, under the pretext of tuning in and letting the mad themselves speak, one already accepts the division between the two as a fact. It's necessarily better to put oneself at the point where the machinery that makes these qualifications and disqualifications is actually functioning, and putting the mad and the non-mad on two sides facing each other. Madness is no less an effect of

## *110 Sorcery and Madness*

power than non-madness; it doesn't dart through the world like a furtive beast until its course is halted and it's put in the cage of an asylum. It's a tactical response, in the form of an infinite spiral, to the tactics that invest it. In another of Szasz's books. *The Myth of Mental Illness*, there's a chapter that I think is exemplary on this subject, where hysteria is shown to be a product of psychiatric power, but also as the reply that opposes it and the trap into which it falls.

Q: If the therapeutic state has replaced the theological state, and if medicine and psychiatry have today become equally the most restrictive and underhanded means of social control isn't it necessary from the point of view of an individualist and libertarian like Szasz to fight for the separation of medicine and the State?

MF: On this point I have some difficulty. I wonder if Szasz is not identifying, in a way that's too forced, power with the State.

Perhaps this identification is explained by Szasz's double experience: the European experience, in a totalitarian Hungary where all forms and mechanisms of power were jealously controlled by the State, and an experience of an America penetrated with this conviction that liberty begins where the centralized intervention of the State ceases.

In fact, I don't believe that power is only the State, or that the non-State is therefore liberty. It's true (here Szasz is right) that the circuits of psychiatrizing and psychologizing, even if they pass through the parents, the peer group and the immediate surroundings, are finally supported by a vast medico-administrative complex. But the "free" medicine of the "liberal" doctor, the private psychiatrist or home psychologist are not an alternative to institutional medicine. They are part of the network, even in the case where they are poles

## *Sorcery and Madness 111*

apart from the institution. Between the therapeutic state Szasz talks about and “liberated” medicine there is a whole play of support and complex cross-reference.

The analyst listening silently in his chair is not so foreign to the insistent questioning and the close surveillance in the asylum. I don't think one can apply the word “libertarian”—Does Szasz himself do it? I don't remember—to a doctor who is “liberal,” that is, linked to an individual profit that the State protects all the more since it profits from it too. Szasz cites very effectively the anti-State interventions of these liberal doctors, and they have had salutary effects. But it seems to me that there you have the combative utilization—against “general abuses”—of a medicine whose destination rather is to assure, conjointly with the State and with its support, the well functioning of a normalizing society. Rather than the therapeutic State, it's the normalizing society, with its institutional and private wheels, that it is necessary to study and criticize. Robert Castel's book *Le Psychanalysme*\* seems to me to have cast a very accurate light on this great continuous web which reaches from the sad dormitory to the profit-making couch. A

Translated by John Johnston

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>^</sup> Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which takes this anti-Reichian stand, came out at the time of this interview.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

\*Robert Castel, *Le Psychanalysme* (Paris: Maspéro, 1973).

# 10

## On Literature

Q: What is the place or status of literary texts in your research?

MF: In *Madness and Civilization* and in *The Order of Things*, I only mention literary texts, or point to them in passing, as a kind of dawdler who says, "Now, there you see, one cannot fail to speak of *Rameau's Nephew*." But these allusions play no role in the economy of the process.

For me, literature was on each occasion the object of a report, not part of an analysis nor a reduction nor an integration into the domain of analysis. It was a point of rest, a halt, a blazon, a flag.

Q: You didn't want these texts to play the role of expressing or reflecting historical processes?

MF: No...The question would have to be broached on another level.

There has never really been an analysis of how, given the mass of things that are spoken, given the set of discourses actually held, a certain number of these discourses (literary discourse, philosophical discourse) are sacralized and given a particular function.

## 114 On Literature

It seems that traditionally literary or philosophical discourse has been made to function as a substitute or as a general envelope for all other discourses. Literature had to assume the value for all the rest. People have written histories of what was said in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by passing through Fontenelle, Voltaire, Diderot or *The New Heloise*, etc. Or else they have thought of these texts as the expression of something that in the end failed to be formulated on a more quotidien level.

In regard to this attitude, I passed from a state of uncertainty—citing literature where it was, without indicating its relationship with the rest—to a frankly negative position, by trying to make all the non-literary or para-literary discourses that were actually constituted in a given period reappear positively, and by excluding literature. In *Discipline and Punish* it's a matter only of bad literature.

Q: How does one distinguish good from bad?

MF: Exactly. That's just what will have to be considered one day. We will have to ask ourselves just what is this activity that consists of circulating fictions, poems, and narratives in a society. We also ought to analyze a second operation: among all these narratives (*récits*), what is it that sacralizes a certain number and makes them begin to function as "literature"? They are quickly taken up in the interior of an institution that at its origin was very different: the institution of the university. Now it begins to be identified with the literary institution.

This is a very visible line of decline in our culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the university was the medium at the center of which a literature said to be classic was constituted. This literature was by definition not a contemporary literature, and was valorized simultaneously as both the only base for contemporary literature and as its critique. Hence a very curious

play in the 19th century between literature and the university, between the writer and the academic.

And then, little by little, the two institutions, which underneath their petty squabbles were in fact profoundly akin, tended to become completely indistinguishable. We know perfectly well that today the literature said to be avant-garde is only ever read by academics; that a writer over thirty has students around him who are doing their theses on his work; and that writers live for the most part by giving courses and by being academics. Thus the truth about something is already evident there, in the fact that literature functions thanks to a play of selection, sacralization, and institutional valorization of which the university is at once both the operator and the receiver.

Q: Are there intrinsic criteria for [evaluating] texts, or is it only a matter of sacralization by the university as institution?

MF; I know nothing about it. I would simply say this; in order to break with a certain number of myths, like the one of literature's expressive character, it has been very important to establish the great principle that literature is concerned only with itself. If it has anything to do with its author, it's according to a mode of death, silence, and the very disappearance of the one who writes.

The reference here to Blanchot or Barthes matters little. The essential thing is the importance of the principle; the intransitivity of literature. It was indeed the first stage thanks to which one could get rid of the idea that literature was the place of all transits, or the point where all transits ended up, the expression of totalities.

But it seems to me that this was still only a stage. Yet, to maintain the analysis at this level is to risk not disman-

## 116 *On Literature*

ting the set of sacralizations by which literature has been affected. On the contrary, one risks sacralizing it even worse. And that's actually what has happened, even up to 1970. We have seen a certain number of the themes of Blanchot and Barthes used for a kind of exaltation, at once ultra-lyrical and ultra-rationalizing, of literature as a structure of language susceptible to analysis only in itself and in its own terms.

The political implications were not absent from this exaltation. Thanks to it, one succeeded in saying that literature in itself was at this point freed from all determinations, that the fact of writing was in itself subversive, that the writer possesses, in the very gesture of writing, an imprescribable right to subversion! Consequently, the writer was a revolutionary, and the more the writing was Writing (*l'écriture était écriture*), the more it plunged into intransitivity, the more it produced in doing so the revolution! You know that these things were unfortunately said...

In fact, Blanchot's and Barthes' trajectory tended toward a desacralization of literature by breaking the connections that put it in a position of absolute expression. This rupture implied that the next movement would be to desacralize it absolutely, and to try to see how, in the general mass of what was said, at a given moment and in a certain mode, this particular area of language could be constituted, an area that must not be asked to bear the decisions of a culture, but rather how it can be that a culture has decided to give it this position so singular and so strange.

. Q: Why strange?

MF; Our culture accords to literature a part which is in one sense extraordinarily limited: how many people read literature? What place does it actually have in the general expansion of discourse?

## *On Literature 117*

But this same culture imposes on all its children, as a touting towards culture, this passage through a whole ideology, a whole theology of literature, during their studies. There is a kind of paradox there.

And it's not unrelated to the affirmation that writing is subversive. That someone affirms it, in such and such a periodical, has no importance and no effect. But if at the same moment all instructors from high school teachers to university professors tell you, explicitly or not, that the great decisions of a culture, the points where it changes...these must be found in Diderot, Sade, Hegel or Rabelais, you see very well that it's finally a matter of the same thing. Both make literature function in the same way. At this level, the effects of reinforcement are reciprocal. The so-called avant-garde groups and the gross mass at the university are in agreement. That leads to a very heavy political blockage.

Q; How have you escaped this blockage?

MF: My manner of taking up the problem was on the one hand the book on Raymond Roussel and then above all the book on Pierre Rivière. Between the two there is the same investigation; what is this threshold starting from which a discourse (whether that of a sick person, a criminal, etc.) begins to function in a field described as literature?

In order to know what is literature, I would not want to study internal structures. I would rather grasp the movement, the small process through which a non-literary type of discourse, neglected, forgotten as soon as it is spoken, enters the literary domain. What happens there? What is released? How is this discourse modified in its efforts by the fact that it is recognized as literary?

## ***118 On Literature***

Q: You have however devoted texts to literary works about which this question is not posed. I am thinking notably of your essays in *Critique* on Blanchot, Klossowski and Bataille. If they were collected in a single volume, perhaps they would give your transversal an unexpected image...

MF; Yes, but.... It would be rather difficult to speak of them. At bottom, Blanchot, Klossowski and Bataille, who were finally the three who interested me in the 1960s, were for me much more than literary works or discourses interior literature. They were discourses exterior to philosophy.

Q; That is to say...

MF; Let's take Nietzsche, if you like. Nietzsche represents, in relation to academic philosophical discourse, which ceaselessly refers to him, the outside edge. Of course a whole channel of Western philosophy can be found in Nietzsche's works. Plato, Spinoza, the philosophers of the 18th century, Hegel...all that passes through Nietzsche. And yet, in relation to philosophy, there is in Nietzsche's work a roughness, a rustic simplicity, an outsidersness, a kind of mountain peasantsness that allows him, with a shrug of the shoulder and without appearing in any way ridiculous, to say with unavoidable force: "What non-sense all that is!"

To rid oneself of philosophy necessarily implies such an offhandedness. It's not by remaining in philosophy, it's not by refining it to the maximum, it's not by turning it against itself that one exits from it. No. It's by opposing it with a kind of astonished and joyful stupidity, a sort of incomprehensible burst of laughter that in the end understands, or in any case, breaks. Yes...it breaks more than it understands.

To the extent that I was nevertheless an academic, a professor of philosophy, what remained of traditional philo-

sophic discourse hampered me in the work I had done on madness. There was an Hegelianism there that dragged. To make objects appear that were as derisory as relations with the police, measures of internment and the cries of the mad, that did not suffice inevitably to exit from philosophy. For me, Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot and Klossowski were ways of exiting fi'om philosophy.

In the violence of Bataille, in the sort of insidious and disturbing softness of Blanchot, in Klossowski's spirals, there was something that began with philosophy, put it into play and into question, then left it and came back... Something like the theory of breathing in Klossowski is connected by I don't know how many lines to all of Western philosophy. And then, through the staging (*mis en scène*), the formulation, the way in which all that functions in *Le Baphomet*, philosophy leaves it entirely.

These comings and goings around the position of philosophy finally rendered permeable—and thus finally derisory—the frontier between philosophy and non-philosophy. A

Translated by John Johnston

# 11

## The Politics of Soviet Crime

Q: Guard towers, barded-wire fences, police dogs, prisoners transported in trucks like so many animals... When the first filmed reports of life in a Soviet detention camp to reach the West were shown on French television, these were some of the scenes witnessed by viewers—scenes all too characteristic of our century. Soviet spokesmen at first denied the film's authenticity. Later admitting the existence of the camp in question, they added, by way of justification, that only non-political prisoners were interned there. The response of the French public was on the whole one of relief: "Oh well, since they're only common criminals...." What were your reactions to the film and to the responses it elicited?

MF: One early statement on the part of the Soviet authorities impressed me enormously. They claimed that the very existence of the camp in plain view in the middle of a city proved that there was nothing shocking about it. As though the fact that a concentration camp could exist undisguised in the middle of Riga constituted an excuse. (The Germans, after all, sometimes felt the need to hide their camps.) As though the shamelessness of not hiding from the people of Riga what they do in that city entitled the Soviet authorities to demand silence everywhere else and to enforce their demand.

## *122 Politics of Soviet Crime*

It's the logic of Cyrano de Bergerac, cynicism as censorship; "You're not allowed to mention my nose because it's right in the middle of my face." As though it were possible not to see the Riga camp for what it is, a symbol of shamelessly exercised power, just as we see our own city halls, courts, and prisons as emblems on the escutcheon of power.

Setting aside for a moment the question of whether its inmates are political or non-political prisoners, the camp's high visibility and the fear inherent in that visibility are in themselves political. Barbed wire, searchlight beams, and the echoing footsteps of prison guards—that is political. And that is policy.

I was also struck by the Soviet rationalization you quoted; "These are not political prisoners; they are common criminals." Now, as a matter of fact, the Soviet vice-minister of Justice has said that the notion of political imprisonment does not even exist in his country. The only ones who may be prosecuted are those who seek to weaken the social order and the state by means of high treason, espionage, terrorism, vilifying propaganda, or the dissemination of misinformation. In short, he defines as non-political precisely those acts which the rest of the world considers political.

The Soviet definition is at once logical and bizarre. The obliteration of the distinction between political and non-political offenses in the Soviet Union would be a logical development. But at that point, it seems to me, all offenses become political. In a socialist state, any breach of law—robbery, the most petty of thefts—is not a crime against private property, but against the property of the people, against society itself, socialist production, and the body politic. I would understand if the Soviet authorities had said that there were no longer any non-political prisoners because all crime is by definition political. As it is, we must not only accuse the vice minister of lying (because he knows there are political prison-

## *Politics of Soviet Crime 123*

ers in the Soviet Union), but also ask him how after sixty years of socialism they still have a criminal code for non-political crimes.

However, if we define criminality in purely political terms, we necessarily forego the traditional contempt for “common” criminals that is an essential element of the penal system itself. And if we consider all crime to be political, then our response to it must be equally political. But in fact, the guard towers, the police dogs, and the endless gray barracks are only “political” in so far as they are sinister evocations of Hitler and Stalin, who used them to dispose of their enemies. The penal methods themselves—incarceration, deprivation, forced labor, brutality, humiliation—are not far removed from those invented by eighteenth-century Europe. Those who break the laws of the Soviet Union are subject to bourgeois penal techniques some two hundred years old. And far from changing these techniques, the Soviets have made them more atrocious and carried them to their logical extreme. What so moved those who saw the Riga documentary was not only the specter of Dachau, but beyond it, the endless procession of human beings condemned to penal servitude—a two-hundred-year spectacle used by those in power for the purpose of instilling fear.

Q: I think the explanation of these paradoxes lies in the fact that the Soviet Union claims to be a socialist state but is in reality not at all socialist. The hypocrisy of Soviet leaders and the incoherence of their official statements follows logically from this fact. It has been evident for some time now that if the Soviet Union has been unable to evolve along lines that the Twentieth Congress seemed to suggest, it is because the weaknesses of the Soviet society are structural and lie in the mode of production, and not simply in a more-or-less bureaucratized leadership.

## *124 Politics of Soviet Crime*

MF: It is undoubtedly true that although the Soviets indeed changed the distribution of property and the role of the state in the control of production, they merely adopted certain power and management techniques perfected by nineteenth-century European capitalism. The particular morality, esthetic forms, and disciplinary methods that already functioned effectively by 1850 in European bourgeois society—^its forms of social control—^were adopted wholesale by the Soviets. I think the system of imprisonment was invented as a generalized penal system during the eighteenth century and consolidated in the nineteenth century in connection with the development of capitalist societies and states. Moreover, the prison system was only one of the techniques of power necessary to the development and control of the forces of production. The disciplined life—discipline in school, at work, in the army— is also a technical innovation of that period. And techniques are easily transplanted. Just as the Soviets adopted the principles of scientific management and other related management techniques developed in the West, they also adopted our disciplinary techniques, adding one new weapon—^party discipline—to the arsenal we had perfected.

Q: It seems to me that Soviet citizens have even more difficulty than Europeans in understanding the political significance of these mechanisms. I see proof of this in the unfortunate prejudice of Soviet dissidents against non-political prisoners. Solzhenitsyn's descriptions of the latter are absolutely chilling. His "ordinary" criminals are subhuman creatures incapable of expressing themselves in any known language. The least we can say about his attitude is that he shows them no compassion.

MF: The hostility shown toward "ordinary" criminals by those who consider themselves political prisoners can

## *Politics of Soviet Crime 125*

seem shocking to those of us who think that poverty, rebellion, and the rejection of exploitation and humiliation are at the root of delinquency. But we must try to look at things in terms of their tactical relevance. We must take into account the fact that in the Soviet Union, just as in France or elsewhere, the criminal element is controlled, infiltrated, and manipulated by those in power. Among criminals as among non-criminals, rebels are a minority and conformists a majority. Do you think that a system of punishment that provides recidivism could have been maintained if criminal behavior did not serve some function? Early in the nineteenth century it became obvious that in most cases imprisonment turned the condemned into lifetime offenders. Other methods of punishment would certainly have been invented, were it not for the fact that the professionalization of crime created a kind of reserve army useful to those in power for providing services such as prostitution, for example, and for providing informers, strike-breakers, lackeys, *agents-provocateurs*, and even bodyguards for electoral, and even presidential candidates. In short, there is a historical conflict between political and non-political offenders—in so far as those in power have always sought to implicate both groups in the same base, selfish, and savage criminality.

I do not mean to imply that non-political criminals are the faithful handmaidens of the Soviet regime. But given the extreme difficulty of the dissidents' struggle, I wonder whether it is not necessary for them to distinguish themselves from the others, to show that their cause is not that of the "thieves and murderers" with which the regime tries to identify them. This may be only a tactical maneuver on the part of the dissidents. In any case, I find it difficult to condemn the attitude of the Soviet dissenters who are careful not to be confused with the "ordinary" criminals. I believe there were many members of the French resistance who when arrested refused—for political reasons—to be taken for black-market-

## *126 Politics of Soviet Crime*

eers, even though the latter could expect a far less cruel fate.

However, if you were to ask me about a country like France, my answer would be different. Here must point out the existence of a broad spectrum of illegalities that extends from the sometimes honored, always tolerated wheelings and dealings of politicians and the merchant princes of drugs and munitions (who all use the law), to the prosecuted and punished offenses of the small-time thief who rebels against the law, is ignorant of it, or even baited by it. And we must also point out the unequal treatment handed out by our penal system. The important distinction here is not between political and non-political offenders, but between the profitable illegalities perpetrated with impunity by those who use the law, and the simple illegalities that the penal system uses to create a standing army of criminals.

Q: But it is also true that in the Soviet Union, just as in France, there is a profound rupture between the ordinary people and those found guilty of petty crimes. I recently saw a program on Italian television that ended with scenes of a prison cemetery where those who died while serving their sentences are buried in tombs hardly worthy of the name. The prisoners' families almost never claim their dead—undoubtedly because transportation is too expensive, but also because they are ashamed. For me, the scene had profound social implications.

MF: The break between public opinion and criminals has the same origin as the prison system itself. Or, rather, it is one of the great benefits that the power structure has reaped from that system. In fact, the hostile relationship that we see today between criminals and the lower strata of society did not exist until the eighteenth century—and in some parts of Europe not until the nineteenth or even early twentieth century.

## *Politics of Soviet Crime 127*

The gap between rich and poor was so wide that the thief—the redistributor of wealth—was welcome among the poor. Until the seventeenth century, thieves and bandits were popular heroes, some of whom remain as shadowy but positive figures in our mythology. The same is true of the bandits of Corsica and Sicily and the thieves of Naples. But in an urban industrial setting, pilfering and petty theft became too costly, and these infractions tolerated by the masses began to be seen as a serious threat. At that point, a new form of economic discipline calling for honesty, accuracy, punctuality, thrift, and an absolute respect for property was imposed at all levels of society. It became necessary on the one hand to assure more efficient protection of wealth, and on the other to create in the popular mind an openly hostile attitude toward illegality. Thus with the aid of prisons, those in power created a hard core of criminals who had no real communication with the masses and were no longer tolerated by them. This isolation facilitated both the infiltration of the criminal element by the police and the development, in the course of the nineteenth century, of an underworld ideology. The contempt, suspicion, and hatred aroused by criminals should not come as any surprise: it is the result of 150 years of effort on the part of politicians, ideologues, and the police. One should not be surprised either by the fact that the same phenomenon is found in the USSR.

Q: One month after the Riga documentary was shown on French television, the release of the mathematician Leonid Plyushch focused attention on another all too familiar aspect of Soviet repression: the imprisonment of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals.

MF: The internment of dissidents in mental hospitals constitutes an extraordinary paradox in a country that calls itself socialist. In the case of a murderer or child molester, a

## *128 Politics of Soviet Crime*

search for the psychological roots of the crime and an attempt to cure the perpetrator can be justified; the procedure in any case is not illogical. But the dissenter—I mean the one who does not accept the regime, repudiates it, or does not understand it—is of all Soviet citizens the one who should not be considered mentally ill. Instead, he should be the object of political instruction designed to make him open his eyes, to raise his level of consciousness, to make him understand in what way Soviet reality is intelligible and necessary, desirable and pleasant. However, dissidents are subjected to psychiatric treatment more frequently than anybody else. Does this not mean that it is not possible, to convince someone in rational terms, that his opposition is unfounded? Does it not mean that the only way that Soviet reality can be made acceptable to those who don't like it is by authoritarian methods—through the use of drugs that affect hormones and neurons? The paradox is a revealing one: Soviet reality is only pleasant under the effects of Thorazine. And if only tranquilizers can make it acceptable, then perhaps there is a real cause for anxiety. Haven't the Soviet leaders renounced the rationality of their revolution, worrying only about maintaining docility? The punitive techniques employed in the Soviet Union reveal this renunciation of all that is basic to a socialist project.

Q: But there has been a certain amount of change in the Soviet Union. There is less repression now. In Stalin's time, everyone was terrified; one day you were the head of a factory, the next day you found yourself in a prison camp. Now, a certain element can act with impunity. If you are an academician, you no longer go to prison. Not only is Sakharov still fi-ee, but out of a total of 600 Soviet academicians, only seventy signed the denunciation of him. This means that the others felt free to refuse to sign. Twenty years ago this would have been unthinkable.

## *Politics of Soviet Crime 129*

MF: I agree that the reign of terror has abated somewhat. However, terror is not the apogee of discipline, but rather its failure. Under Stalin, the head of the NKVD himself could be executed as he left a cabinet meeting. (In fact, no head of the NKVD ever died of natural causes.) Change and upheaval were inherent in the system itself. Fear is circular: those who unleash terror inevitably become its victims. But once the ministers, police officials, academicians, and other party leaders become entrenched and no longer fear for themselves, discipline in the ranks below them will function effectively without even the slightest risk of upheaval.

I would like to return to the issue of punishment in a more general sense. The questions of what to punish and how to punish have been debated for a long time. Now, however, we are beginning to ask ourselves some strange new questions. "Is punishment necessary?" "What do we mean by punishment?" "Why is there a connection—until now taken for granted—between crime and punishment?" The idea that crime must be punished is so familiar, so necessary to us, and yet, there is something somewhere that makes us doubt. Consider the cowardly relief of judge, jury, journalists, spectators, etc., when a psychiatrist or psychologist tells them not to be afraid to find a defendant guilty, that they will not be punishing the offender, but merely providing for his/her rehabilitation and cure. The defendant is found guilty, sentenced, imprisoned. The court is acquitted.

To suggest an alternative to punishment is to avoid the issue, which is not the judicial context of punishment, nor its techniques, but the power structure that punishes. This is why I find the problem of criminal justice in the Soviet Union so interesting. It is easy to mock the theoretical contradictions that characterize the Soviet penal system, but these are theories that kill, and blood-stained contradictions. One can also be surprised that they weren't able to come up with new ways of

## *130 Politics of Soviet Crime*

dealing with crime and political opposition; one must be indignant that they adopted the method of the bourgeoisie in its most rigid period, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that they pushed it to a degree of meticulousness that is overwhelming.

Their dimensions unknown, the mechanisms of power in the Soviet Union—systems of control, of surveillance, punishment—are versions of those used on a smaller scale and with less consistency by the bourgeoisie as it struggled to consolidate its power. One can say to many socialisms, real or dreamt: Between the analysis of power in the bourgeois state and the idea of its future withering away, there is a missing term—the analysis, criticism, destruction, and overthrow of the power mechanism itself. Socialism and socialist societies have no need for new declarations of human rights and freedoms: simple, thus unnecessary. But if they want to be worthy of love and no longer rejected, they must address themselves to the question of power and its exercise. Their task is to invent a way in which power can be exercised without instilling fear. That would be a true innovation. A

Translated by Mollie Horwitz

# 12

## I, Pierre Rivière

Q: If you like, we can begin by discussing your interest in the publication of the dossier on Pierre Rivière, and in particular your interest in the fact that at least in part it has been made into a film.

MF: For me the book was a trap. You know how much people are talking now about delinquents, their psychology, their drives and desires, etc. The discourse of psychiatrists, psychologists and criminologists is inexhaustible on the phenomenon of delinquency. Yet it's a discourse that dates back about 150 years, to the 1830s. Well, there you had a magnificent case: in 1836 a triple murder, and then not only all the aspects of the trial but also an absolutely unique witness, the criminal himself, who left a memoir of more than a hundred pages. So, to publish this book was for me a way of saying to the shrinks in general (psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists): well, you've been around for 150 years, and here is a case contemporary with your birth. What do you have to say about it? Are you better prepared to discuss it than your 19th century colleagues?

In a sense I can say I won; I won or I lost, I don't know, for my secret desire of course was to hear criminologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists discuss the case of

## *130 Politics of Soviet Crime*

dealing with crime and political opposition; one must be indignant that they adopted the method of the bourgeoisie in its most rigid period, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that they pushed it to a degree of meticulousness that is overwhelming.

Their dimensions unknown, the mechanisms of power in the Soviet Union—systems of control, of surveillance, punishment—are versions of those used on a smaller scale and with less consistency by the bourgeoisie as it struggled to consolidate its power. One can say to many socialisms, real or dreamt; Between the analysis of power in the bourgeois state and the idea of its future withering away, there is a missing term—the analysis, criticism, destruction, and overthrow of the power mechanism itself. Socialism and socialist societies have no need for new declarations of human rights and freedoms: simple, thus unnecessary. But if they want to be worthy of love and no longer rejected, they must address themselves to the question of power and its exercise. Their task is to invent a way in which power can be exercised without instilling fear. That would be a true innovation. A

Translated by Mollie Horwitz

# 12

## I, Pierre Rivière

Q: If you like, we can begin by discussing your interest in the publication of the dossier on Pierre Rivière, and in particular your interest in the fact that at least in part it has been made into a film.

MF: For me the book was a trap. You know how much people are talking now about delinquents, their psychology, their drives and desires, etc. The discourse of psychiatrists, psychologists and criminologists is inexhaustible on the phenomenon of delinquency. Yet it's a discourse that dates back about 150 years, to the 1830s. Well, there you had a magnificent case: in 1836 a triple murder, and then not only all the aspects of the trial but also an absolutely unique witness, the criminal himself, who left a memoir of more than a hundred pages. So, to publish this book was for me a way of saying to the shrinks in general (psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists): well, you've been around for 150 years, and here is a case contemporary with your birth. What do you have to say about it? Are you better prepared to discuss it than your 19th century colleagues?

In a sense I can say I won; I won or I lost, I don't know, for my secret desire of course was to hear criminologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists discuss the case of

## *132 I, Pierre Rivière*

Rivière in their usual insipid language. Yet they were literally reduced to silence: not a single one spoke up and said: “Here is what Rivière was in reality. And I can tell you now what couldn’t be said in the 19th century.” Except for one fool, a psychoanalyst, who claimed that Rivière was an illustration of paranoia as defined by Lacan. With this exception no one had anything to say. But I must congratulate them for the prudence and lucidity with which they have renounced discussion of Rivière. So it was a bet won or lost, as you like...

Q: But more generally, it’s difficult to discuss the event itself, both its central point which is the murder and also the character who instigates it.

MF: Yes, because I believe that Rivière’s own discourse on his act so dominates, or in any case so escapes from every possible handle, that there is nothing to be said about this central point, this crime or act, that is not a step back in relation to it. We see there nevertheless a phenomenon without equivalent in either the history of crime or discourse: that is to say, a crime accompanied by a discourse so strong and so strange that the crime ends up not existing anymore; it escapes through the very fact of this discourse held about it by the one who committed it.

Q: Well how do you situate yourself in relation to the impossibility of this discourse?

Nff: I have said nothing about Rivière’s crime itself and once more, I don’t believe anyone can say anything about it. No, I think that one must compare Rivière with Lacenaire, who was his exact contemporary and who committed a whole heap of minor and shoddy crimes, mostly failures, hardly glorious at all, but who succeeded through his very intelligent

## *I, Pierre Rivière 133*

discourse in making these crimes exist as real works of art, and in making the criminal, that is, Lacenaire himself, the very artist of criminality. It's another tour de force if you like: he managed to give an intense reality, for dozens of years, for more than a century, to acts that were finally very shoddy and ignoble. As a criminal he was a rather poor type, but the splendor and intelligence of his writing gave a consistency to it all. Rivière is something altogether different: a really extraordinary crime which was revived by such an even more extraordinary discourse that the crime ended up ceasing to exist, and I think moreover that this is what happened in the minds of the judges.

Q: Well then, do you agree with the project of René Allio's film, which was centered on the idea of a peasant seizing the opportunity for speech? Or had you already thought about that?

MF: No, it's to AUio's credit to have thought of that, but I subscribe to the idea completely. For by reconstituting the crime from the outside, with actors, as if it were an event and nothing but a criminal event, the essential would be lost. It was necessary that one be situated, on the one hand, at the interior of Rivière's discourse, that the film be a film of memory and not the film of a crime, and on the other hand that this discourse of a litde Normand peasant of 1835 be taken up in what could be the peasant discourse of that period. Yet, what is the closest to that form of discourse, if not the same one that is spoken today, in the same voice, by the peasants Uving in the same place. And finally, across 150 years, it's the same voices, the same accents, the same maladroit and raucous speech that recounts the same thing with almost nothing transposed. In fact Alho chose to commemorate this act at the same place and almost with the same characters who were there 150

## 134 I, *Pierre Rivière*

years ago; these are the same peasants who in the same place repeat the same act. It was difficult to reduce the whole cinematic apparatus, the whole filmic apparatus, to such a thinness, and that is really extraordinary, rather unique I think in the history of the cinema.

What's also important in Allio's film is that he gives the peasants their tragedy. Basically, the tragedy of the peasant until the end of the 18th century was still hunger. But, beginning in the 19th century and perhaps still today, it was, like every great tragedy, the tragedy of the law, of the law and the land. Greek tragedy is a tragedy that recounts the birth of the law and the mortal effects of the law on men. The Rivière affair occurred in 1836, that is, twenty years after the *Code Civil* was set into place: a new law is imposed on the daily life of the peasant and he struggles in this new juridical universe. The whole drama of Rivière is a drama about the law, the code, legality, marriage, possessions, and so forth. Yet, it's always within this tragedy that the peasant world moves. And what is important therefore is to show peasants today this old drama which is at the same time the one of their lives: just as Greek citizens saw the representation of their own city on the stage.

Q: What role can this fact play, the fact that the Normand peasants of today can keep the spirit, thanks to the film, of this event, of this period?

MF: You know that there is a great deal of literature about the peasants, but very little peasant literature, or peasant expression. Yet, here we have a text written in 1835 by a peasant, in his own language, that is, in one that is barely literate. And here is the possibility for these peasants today to play themselves, with their own means, in a drama which is of their generation, basically. And by looking at the way Allio

## *I, Pierre Rivière 135*

made his actors work you could easily see that in a sense he was very close to them, that he gave them a lot of explanations in setting them up, but that on the other side, he allowed them great latitude, in the manner of their language, their pronunciation, their gestures. And, if you like, I think it's politically important to give the peasants the possibility of acting this peasant text. Hence the importance also of actors from outside to represent the world of the law, the jurors, the lawyers, etc., all those people from the city who are basically outside of this very direct communication between the peasant of the 19th century and the one of the 20th that Allio has known how to visualize, and, to a certain point, let these peasant actors visualize.

Q: But isn't there a danger in the fact that they begin to speak only through such a monstrous story?

MF: It's something one could fear. And Allio, when he began to speak to them about the possibility of making the film, didn't dare tell them what was really involved. And when he told them, he was very surprised to see that they accepted it very easily; the crime posed no problem for them. On the contrary, instead of becoming an obstacle, it was a kind of space where they could meet, talk and do a whole lot of things which were actually those of their daily lives. In fact, instead of blocking them, the crime liberated them. And if one had asked them to play something closer to their daily lives and their activity, they would have perhaps felt more theatrical and stagey than in playing this kind of crime, a little far away and mythic, under the shelter of which they could go all out with their own reality.

Q: I was thinking rather of a somewhat unfortunate symmetry; right now it's very fashionable to make films about

## *136 I, Pierre Rivière*

the turpitudes and monstrosities of the bourgeoisie. So in this film was there the risk of falling into the trap of the indiscreet violence of the peasantry?

MF; And link up again finally with this tradition of an atrocious representation of the peasant world, as in Balzac and Zola. . . I don't think so. Perhaps just because this violence is never present there in a plastic or theatrical way. What exists are intensities, rumblings, muffled things, thicknesses, repetitions, things hardly spoken, but not violence. . . There is none of that lyricism of violence and peasant abjection that you seem to fear. Moreover, it's like that in Allio's film, but it's also like that in the documents, in history. Of course there are some firenetic scenes, fights among children that their parents argue about, but after all, these scenes are not very frequent, and above all, running through them there is always a great finesse and acuity of feeling, a subtlety even in the wickedness, often a delicacy. Because of this, none of the characters have that touch of unrestrained savagery of brute beasts that one finds at a certain level in the literature on the peasantry. Everyone is terribly intelligent in this film, terribly delicate, and, to a certain point, terribly reserved. A

Translated by John Johnston

# 13

## The End of the Monarchy of Sex

Q: You inaugurate with *The History of Sexuality* a study of monumental proportions. How do you justify today, Michel Foucault, an enterprise of such magnitude?

MF: Of such magnitude? No, no, rather of such exiguity. I don't wish to write the chronicle of sexual behaviors throughout so many ages and civilizations. I want to follow a much finer thread: the one which has linked in our societies for so many centuries sex and the search for truth.

Q: In precisely what sense?

MF; The problem is in fact the following: how is it that in a society such as ours, sexuality is not simply that which permits us to reproduce the species, the family, and the individual? Not simply something which procures pleasure and enjoyment? How is it that sexuality has been considered

## *138 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

the privileged place where our deepest “truth” is read and expressed? For this is the essential fact: that since Christianity, Western civilization has not stopped saying, “To know who you are, know what your sexuality is about.” Sex has always been the center where our “truth” of the human subject has been tied up along with the development of our species.

Confession, the examination of conscience, all of the insistence on the secrets and the importance of the flesh, was not simply a means of forbidding sex or of pushing it as far as possible from consciousness, it was a way of placing sexuality at the heart of existence and of connecting salvation to the mastery of sexuality’s obscure movements. Sex was, in Christian societies, that which had to be examined, watched over, confessed and transformed into discourse.

Q: Hence the paradoxical thesis which supports the first volume: far from making sexuality their taboo, their major interdiction, our societies have not ceased to speak about sexuality, to make it speak...

MF: They could speak well and often about it, but only to forbid it.

But I wished to underline two important things. First, that the bringing to light, the “clarification” of sexuality, did not happen only in discussions, but in the reality of institutions and practices.

Secondly, that numerous strict prohibitions exist. But they are part of an economic complex where they might mingle with incitements, manifestations and valorizations. These are the prohibitions that we always insist upon. I would like to refocus the perspective somewhat: seizing in any case the entire complex of operative mechanisms.

And then, you know all too well, that they’ve made me into the melancholy historian of prohibitions and repres-

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 139*

sive power, someone who recounts history according to two categories: insanity and its incarceration, anomaly and its exclusion, delinquency and its imprisonment. But my problem has always been on the side of another category: truth. How did the power unfolding in insanity produce psychiatry's "true" discourse? The same thing applies to sexuality: how to recapture the will to know how power exerted itself on sex? I don't want to write the sociological history of a prohibition but rather the political history of a production of "truth."

Q: A new revolution in the concept of history? The dawn of another "new history?"

MF: A few years ago, historians were very proud to have discovered that they could write not only the history of battles, of kings and institutions, but also of the economy. Now they're all dumbfounded because the shrewdest among them learned that it was also possible to write the history of feelings, of behaviors and of bodies. Soon they'll understand that the history of the West cannot be disassociated from the way in which "truth" is produced and inscribes its effects.

We live in a society which is marching to a great extent "towards truth"—mean a society which produces and circulates discourse which has truth as its function, passing itself off as such and thus obtaining specific powers. The establishment of "true" discourses (which however are incessantly changing) is one of the fundamental problems of the West. The history of "truth"—of the power proper to discourses accepted as true—has yet to be written.

What are the positive mechanisms which, producing sexuality in this or that fashion, bring with them misery?

In any case, what I would like to study for my part, are all of these mechanisms in our society which invite, incite and force us to speak about sex.

## 140 *End of the Monarchy of Sex*

Q: Some would respond that, despite such discourse, repression and sexual misery still exist...

MF: Yes, that objection has been made. You're right; we live more or less in this state of sexual misery. With this said, it's true that this objection is never treated in my book.

Q: Why? Is that a deliberate choice?

MF: When I undertake concrete studies in subsequent volumes on women, children and perverts, I will try to analyze the forms and conditions of misery. But for the moment, it is a question of establishing a method. The problem is to know whether this mystery should be explained negatively by fundamental interdiction or by a prohibition relative to an economic situation ("Work, don't make love"), or whether this misery is the effect of procedures which are much more complex and positive.

Q: What could a "positive" explanation be in this case?

MF: I'm going to make a presumptuous comparison. What did Marx do when in his analysis of capital he encountered the problem of working-class misery? He refused the usual explanation which regarded this misery as the effect of a rare natural cause or of a concerted theft. And he said in effect: given what capitalist production is in its fundamental laws, it can't help but to produce misery. Capitalism's *raison d'être* is not to starve the workers but it cannot develop without starving them. Marx substituted the analysis of production for the denunciation of theft.

Other things being equal, that's approximately what I

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 141*

wanted to say. It's not a question of denying sexual misery, but it's also not a question of explaining it negatively by repression. The whole problem is to understand which are the positive mechanisms that, producing sexuality in such or such a fashion, result in misery.

Here is one example that I will treat in a future volume: at the beginning of the eighteenth century enormous importance was suddenly accorded to childhood masturbation, which was persecuted everywhere as a sudden terrible epidemic threatening to compromise the whole human race.

Must we admit that childhood masturbation had suddenly become unacceptable for a capitalist society in the process of development? This is the position of certain recent "Reichians." It does not appear to me to be a satisfying one.

On the contrary, what was important at the time was the reorganization of the relations between children and adults, parents and educators: it was an intensification of intra-familial relationships, it was childhood which was at stake for the parents, the educational institutions, for the public health authorities; it was childhood as the breeding ground for the generations to come. At the crossroads of body and soul, of health and morality, of education and training, children's sexuality became at the same time a target and an instrument of power. A specific "children's sexuality" was established: it was precarious, dangerous, to be watched over constantly.

From this resulted a sexual misery of childhood and adolescence from which our generations have still not recovered. The objective was not to forbid. It was to constitute, through childhood sexuality suddenly become important and mysterious, a network of power over children.

Q: This idea that sexual misery arises from repression, and that in order to be happy we must liberate our sexualities, is a fundamental one for sexologists, doctors, and vice squads...

## *142 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

MF: Yes, and that is why they set a fearsome trap for us. They basically tell us: “You have a sexuality, this sexuality is both frustrated and mute, hypocritical prohibitions repress it. So, come to us, show us, confide in us your unhappy secrets...”

This type of discourse is in fact a formidable tool of control and power. As always, it uses what people say, feel and hope for. It exploits their temptation to believe that to be happy, it suffices to cross the threshold of discourse and remove a few prohibitions. It ends up in fact repressing and controlling movements of revolt and liberation.

Q: From this I suppose comes the misunderstanding of certain commentators: “According to Foucault, the repression and liberation of sexuality amounts to the same thing...” Or elsewhere: “Pro-abortion and pro-life movements employ basically the same discourse....”

MF: Yes! These matters have yet to be cleared up. They’ve had me saying in effect that there is no real difference between the language of condemnation and that of contra-condemnation, between the discourse of prudish movements and that of sexual liberation. They claimed that I was putting them all in the same bag to drown them like a litter of kittens. Completely false: that’s not what I wanted to say. The important thing is, however, I didn’t say it at all.

Q: But you agree all the same that there are some common standards and components...

MF: But a statement is one thing, discourse another. There are common tactics and opposing strategies.

Q: For example?



## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 143*

MF: I believe the so-called “sexual liberation” movements must be understood as movements of affirmation “beginning with” sexuality. Which means two things: these are movements which take off from sexuality, from the apparatus of sexuality within which we’re trapped, which make it function to the limit; but at the same time, these movements are displaced in relation to sexuality, disengaging themselves from it and going beyond it.

Q: What do these outbursts resemble?

MF: Take the case of homosexuality. In the 1870s psychiatrists began to make it into a medical analysis: certainly a point of departure for a whole series of new interventions and controls.

They began either to incarcerate homosexuals in asylums or attempted to cure them. They were formerly perceived as libertines and sometimes as delinquents (from this resulted condemnations which could be very severe—with burning; the stake still occurring in the eighteenth century, although very rarely). In the future we’ll all see them in a global kinship with the insane, suffering from sickness of the sexual instinct. But taking such discourses literally, and thereby even tumbling them around, we see responses appearing in the form of defiance: “All right, we are what you say we are, whether by nature or sickness or perversion, as you wish. And so if we are, let it be, and if you want to know what we are, we can tell you better than you can.” An entire literature of homosexuality, very different from libertine narratives, appeared at the end of the nineteenth century: think of Oscar Wilde and Gide. It is the strategic return of a “same” will to truth.

Q: That’s what is happening in fact for all minority women, youths, black Americans...

## *144 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

MF: Yes, of course. For a long time they tried to pin women to their sexuality. They were told for centuries: "You are nothing other than your sex." And this sex, doctors added, is fragile, almost always sick and always inducing sickness. "You are the sickness of man." And towards the eighteenth century this very ancient movement quickened and ended up as the pathologization of woman: the female body became the medical object par excellence. I will try later to write the history of this "gynecology" in the largest sense of the term.

But the feminist movements have accepted the challenge. Are we sex by nature? Well then, let it be but in its singularity, in its irreducible specificity. Let us draw the consequences from it and reinvent our own type of political, cultural and economic existence... Always the same movement: take off from this sexuality in which movements can be colonized, go beyond them in order to reach other affirmations.

Q: This strategy of double detente which you are describing, is it still a strategy of Uberation in the classic sense? Or shouldn't it rather be said that to liberate sex is henceforth to hate it and go beyond it?

MF: A movement is taking shape today which seems to me to be reversing the trend of "always more sex," of "always more truth in sex," a trend which has doomed us for centuries: it's a matter, I don't say of rediscovering, but rather of fabricating other forms of pleasure, of relationships, coexistences, attachments, loves, intensities. I have the impression of hearing today an "anti-sex" grumbling (I'm not a prophet, at most a diagnostician), as if a thorough effort were being made to shake this great "sexography" which makes us decipher sex as the universal secret.

Q: Some symptoms for this diagnosis?

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 145*

MF: Only one anecdote. A young writer, Hervé Guibert, had written some children's stories. No editor wanted them. He wrote another text, moreover very remarkable and apparently very "sexy." This was the condition for being heard and published (the book is *La Mort Propagande*). Read it: it seems to me to be the opposite of the sexographic writing that has been the rule in pornography and sometimes in good literature: to move progressively toward mentioning what is most unmentionable in sex. Hervé Guibert opens with the worst extreme—"You want us to speak about it, well then, let's go, and you will hear more about it than you ever have before"—and with this infamous material he constructs bodies, mirages, castles, fusions, acts of tenderness, races, intoxications... The entire heavy coefficient of sex has been volatilized. But this here is only one example of the "anti-sex" challenge, of which many other symptoms can be found. It is perhaps the end of this dreary dessert of sexuality, the end of the monarchy of sex.

Q: Provided that we aren't devoted or chained to sex as if to a fatal destiny. And since early childhood, as they say...

MF: Exactly. Look at what is happening as far as children are concerned. Some say: children's life is their sex life. From the bottle to puberty, that's all it is. Behind the desire to learn to read or the taste for comic strips, there is still and will always be sexuality. Well, are you sure that this type of discourse is actually liberating? Are you sure that it doesn't lock children into a sort of sexual insularity? And what after all if they just couldn't care less? If the liberty of not being an adult consisted exactly in not being enslaved to the law of sexuality, to its principles, to its commonplace, would it be so boring after all? If it were possible to have polymorphic rela-

## *146 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

tionships with things, people and bodies, wouldn't that be childhood? To reassure themselves, adults call this polymorphism perversity, coloring it thus with the monotonous monochrome of their own sexuality.

Q: Children are oppressed by the very ones who claim to liberate them?

MF: Read the book by Scherer and Hocquenghem: it shows very well that the child has a flow of pleasure for which the "sex" grid is a veritable prison.

Q: Is this a paradox?

MF: This ensues from the idea that sexuality is fundamentally feared by power; it is without a doubt more a means through which power is exerted.

Q: Look at authoritarian states however. Can we say that there power is exerted not against but through sexuality?

MF: Two recent facts, apparently contradictory. About ten months ago, China began a campaign against children's masturbation, along exactly the same lines as that carried out in eighteenth century Europe (masturbation prevents work, causes blindness, leads to the degeneration of the species...). On the other hand, before the year is out, the Soviet Union is going to host a congress of psychoanalysts for the first time (the Soviet Union has to host them, since they have none of their own). Liberalization? A thaw on the side of the subconscious? Springtime of the Soviet libido against the moral bourgeoisification of the Chinese?

In Peking's antiquated stupidities and the Soviet Union's new curiosities, I see mainly a double recognition of

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 147*

the fact that, formulated and prohibited, spoken and forbidden, sexuality is a relay station which no modern system of power can do without. We should greatly fear socialism with a sexual face.

Q: In other words, power is no longer necessarily that which condemns and encloses?

MF: In general terms, I would say that the interdiction, the refusal, the prohibition, far from being essential forms of power, are only its limits: the frustrated or extreme forms of power. The relations of power are, above all, productive.

Q: This is a new idea compared with your previous books.

MF: If I wanted to pose and drape myself in a slightly fictive coherence, I would tell you that this has always been my problem: effects of power and the production of "truth." I have always felt ill at ease with this ideological notion which has been used so much in recent years. It has been used to explain errors or illusions, shaded representations—in short, everything that impedes the formation of true discourses. It has also been used to show the relationship between what goes on in peoples' heads and their place in the relations of production. In all, the economy of untruth. My problem is the politics of truth. I have taken a lot of time in realizing it.

Q: Why?

MF: For several reasons. First, because power in the West is what displays itself the most, and thus what hides itself

## 148 *End of the Monarchy of Sex*

best. What we have called “political life” since the nineteenth century is (a bit like the court in the age of monarchy) the manner in which power gives itself over to representation. Power is neither there, nor is that how it functions. The relations of power are perhaps among the most hidden things in the social body.

On the other hand, since the nineteenth century, the critique of society has been essentially carried out, starting with the effectively determining nature of the economy. Certainly a healthy reduction of “pohtics,” but also with the tendency to neglect the relations of elementary power that could be constitutive of economic relations.

The third reason is the tendency, which is itself common to institutions, political parties, and an entire current of revolutionary thought and action, which consists in not seeing power in any other form than that of the state apparatus.

All of which leads, when one turns to individuals, to finding power only in their heads (under the form of representation, acceptance, or interiorization).

Q: And what did you want to do in the face of this?

MF: Four things: investigate what might be most hidden in power relations; anchor them in their economic infrastructures; trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in their infra-governmental or para-governmental ones; and recuperate them in their material play.

Q: At what point did you begin this type of study?

MF: If you want a bibliographical reference, it was in *Discipline and Punish*. But I would rather say that it began with a series of events and experiences since 1968 concerning psychiatry, delinquency, the schools, etc. But I believe that

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 149*

these elements themselves would never have been able to take their direction and intensity if there had not been those two gigantic shadows of fascism and Stalinism behind them. If proletarian misery—this sub-existence—caused political thought of the nineteenth century to revolve around the economy, then these super-powers fascism and Stalinism induce political anxiety about our present-day societies.

Hence two problems. Power—how does it work? Is it enough that it imposes strong prohibitions in order to function effectively? And does it always move from above to below and from the center to the periphery?

Q: I saw this in *The History of Sexuality*, this shifting, this essential sliding. This time you made a clean break with the diffuse naturalism that haunts your previous books...

MF: What you call “naturalism” designates two things, I believe. A certain theory, the idea that underneath power with its acts of violence and its artifice we should be able to recuperate things themselves in their primitive vivacity: behind the asylum walls, the spontaneity of madness; through the penal system, the generous fever of delinquency; under the sexual interdiction, the freshness of desire. And also a certain aesthetic and moral choice: power is evil, it’s ugly, poor, sterile, monotonous, dead; and what power is exercised upon is right, good, rich.

Q: Yes. And finally the theme common to the orthodox Marxist and to the New Left: “Under the cobblestones lies the beach.”

MF: If you like. There are moments when such simplifications are necessary. Such a dualism is provisionally useful to change the scenery from time to time and move from pro to contra.

## ***150 End of the Monarchy of Sex***

Q: And then comes the time to stop, the moment of reflection and of regaining equilibrium?

MF: On the contrary. The moment of new mobility and displacement must follow. Because these reversals of pro to contra are quickly blocked, unable to do anything except repeat themselves and form what Jacques Ranciere calls the “Leftist *doxa*.” As soon as we repeat indefinitely the same refrain of the anti-repressive ditty, things remain in place—anyone can sing the tune, without anyone paying attention. This reversal of values and of truths, which I was speaking about a while ago, has been important to the extent that it does not stop with simple cheers (long live insanity, delinquency, sex), but it permits new strategies. You see, what often bothers me today, in fact, what really troubles me, is that all the work done in the past fifteen years or so, often under hardship and solitude, functions only for some as a sign of belonging on the “good side” of insanity, children, delinquency, sex.

Q: There is no good side?

MF: One must pass to the other side—the “good side”—but in order to extract oneself from these mechanisms which make two sides appear, in order to dissolve the false unity, the illusory “nature” of this other side with which we have taken sides. This is where the real work begins, that of the historian of the present.

Q: You have already several times defined yourself as an historian. What does it mean? Why “historian” and not “philosopher?”

MF: Under a form as naive as a child’s tale, I will say that the question of philosophy has been for a long time:

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 151*

“In this world where all perishes, what doesn’t pass away? Where are we, we who must die, in relation to that which doesn’t?” It seems to me that, since the nineteenth century, philosophy has not ceased asking itself the same question: “What is happening right now, and what are we, we who are perhaps nothing more than what is happening at this moment?” Philosophy’s question is the question of this present age which is ourselves. This is why philosophy is today entirely political and entirely historical. It is the politics immanent in history and the history indispensable for politics.

Q: But isn’t there also a return today to the most classical, metaphysical kind of philosophy?

MF: I don’t believe in any form of return. I would say only this, and only half-seriously. The thinking of the first Christian centuries would have had to answer the question: “What is actually going on today? What is this age in which we live? When and how will this promised return of God take place? What can we do with this intervening time which is superfluous? And what are we, we who are in this transition?”

One could say that on this slope of history, where the revolution is supposed to hold back and has not yet come, we ask the same question: “Who are we, we who are superfluous in this age where what should happen is not happening?” All modern thought, like all politics, has been dominated by this question of revolution.

Q: Do you continue for your part to pose this question of revolution and reflect upon it? Does it remain in your eyes the question par excellence?

MF: If politics has existed since the nineteenth century, it’s because there was revolution. The current one is not a

## *152 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

variant or a sector of that one. It's politics that always situates itself in relation to revolution. When Napoleon said, "The modern form of destiny is politics," he was only drawing the consequences from this truth, for he came after the revolution and before the eventual return of another one.

The return of revolution—that is surely our problem. It is certain that without its return, the question of Stalinism would be only an academic one—a mere problem of the organization of societies or of the validity of the Marxist scheme of things. But it's really quite another question concerning Stalinism. You know very well what it is: the very desirability of the revolution is the problem today.

Q: Do you want the revolution? Do you want something more than the simple ethical duty to struggle here and now, at the side of one or another group of mental patients and prisoners, oppressed and miserable?

MF: I have no answer. But I believe that to engage in politics—aside from party politics—is to try to know with the greatest possible honesty whether or not the revolution is desirable. It is in exploring this terrible molehill that politics runs the danger of caving in.

Q: If the revolution were no longer desirable, would politics remain what you say it is?

MF: No, I don't believe so. It would be necessary to invent another one or something which could be a substitute for it. We are perhaps living the end of politics. For it's true that politics is a field which was opened by the existence of the revolution, and if the question of revolution can no longer be asked in these terms, then politics risks disappearing.

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 153*

Q: Let's return to your politics in *The History of Sexuality*. You say: "Where there is power, there is resistance." Are you not thus bringing back this nature which a while back you wanted to dismiss?

MF: I don't think so, because this resistance I am speaking of is not a substance. It is not anterior to the power which it opposes. It is coextensive with it and absolutely its contemporary.

Q: The inverse of power? That would come to the same thing. Always the cobblestones under the beach...

MF: It isn't that either. For if it were only that, it wouldn't resist. To resist, it would have to operate like power. As inventive, mobile and productive power. Like power, it would have to organize, coagulate, and solidify itself. Like power, it would have to come from "underneath" and distribute itself strategically.

Q: "Where there is power, there is resistance." It's almost a tautology, consequently...

MF: Absolutely. I am not positing a substance of resistance in the face of power. I am simply saying: as soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy.

Q: Power and resistance.. .tactics and strategy.. .Why this stock of military metaphors? Do you think that power from now on must be thought of in the form of war?

MF: For the moment, I really don't know. One thing seems certain to me; it is that to analyze the relationships of

## *154 End of the Monarchy of Sex*

power, we have at present only two models at our disposal: the one proposed by law (power as law, interdiction, the institution) and the military or strategic model in terms of power relations. The first has been much used and has proven its inadequate character, I believe. We know very well that law does not describe power.

I know that the other model is also much discussed. But we stop with words: we use ready-made ideas or metaphors (“war of all against all,” “struggle for life”), or again formal schemata (strategies are very much in fashion among certain sociologists or economists, especially Americans). I believe that this analysis of power relations should be tightened up.

Q: This military conception of power relations, was it already used by the Marxists?

MF: What strikes me about Marxist analyses is that it’s always a question of “class struggle,” but there is one word in the expression to which less attention is paid, namely “struggle.” Here again qualifications must be made. The greatest of the Marxists (starting with Marx himself) insisted a great deal on “military” problems (the army as an instrument of the state, armed insurrection, revolutionary war). But when they speak of “class struggle” as the mainspring of history, they worry especially about defining this class, where it is situated, who it encompasses, but never concretely about the nature of the struggle. With one exception, however: Marx’s own non-theoretical, historical texts, which are better in this regard.

Q: Do you think that your book can fill such a gap?

MF: I don’t make any such claim. In a general way, I think that intellectuals—^if this category exists, if it should

## *End of the Monarchy of Sex 155*

exist at all, which is not certain nor perhaps even desirable—are renouncing their old prophetic function.

And by that I'm not thinking only of their claim to say what is going to happen, but also of the legislative function which they've aspired to for so long: "See what must be done, see what is good, follow me. In the turmoil you're all in, here is the pivotal point, it's where I am." The Greek sage, the Jewish prophet, and the Roman legislator are still models that haunt those who practice today the profession of speaking and writing. I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who, in passing, contributes the posing of the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth it, and what kind (I mean what kind of revolution and what effort), it being understood that they alone who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can answer the question.

As for all the questions of classification and programming that we are asked: "Are you a Marxist?" "What would you do if you had power?" "Who are your allies and where are your sympathies?"—these are truly secondary questions compared with the one that I have just indicated. That is the question of today. **A**

Translated by Dudley M. Marchi

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *La Mort propagande* (Paris: R. Deforges, 1977).

<sup>^</sup> *Co-ire* (Paris: Recherches, 1976).

# 14

## The Anxiety of Judging

Jean Laplanche: The death penalty is absolute, in the sense that it abolishes the criminal at the same time as the crime.' Yet we no longer have the theological certainty, the blind faith, that would authorize us to pronounce such a penalty. For me it would be enough to know that, out of a thousand condemned to death there was a single innocent one, to make the abolition of the death penalty essential. When the court makes a mistake, there's no way to make reparations, since its "object"—the condemned man—no longer exists. I am therefore personally and unambiguously in favor of the suppression of the death penalty.

That said, my article was born of a disturbing astonishment. I perceived that in this great debate there was a tacit agreement to refer only to utilitarian arguments. To me that was particularly shocking on the part of people who, claiming to be mostly on the left, consider themselves partisans of the abolition of the death penalty. Before the deluge of statistics "showing" that the death penalty doesn't discourage crime and that it has no dissuasive power, I asked myself: how can something so serious be discussed by considering it only from the point of view of the fear it provokes, even if it is to try to show that the latter is ineffective? And if other statistics were to "demonstrate" that the penalty is dissuasive? Your conviction wouldn't change a bit!

## *158 The Anxiety of Judging*

Robert Badinter: In your article you alluded to the role of the defense in the jury trial and you reproach me for using “utilitarian” arguments. There’s much to say about that! But, before everything, I must make clear that for me a plea for the defense is dead the very moment it’s uttered. It’s an action, not a reflection. It can’t be dissociated from the trial of which it is part. I had a stenographer record all the debates in Patrick Henry’s trial. I thought, like everyone, that it was going to end with his death sentence. I wanted—and this will not surprise Michel Foucault—the debates to remain, as an historic document. Had Henry been condemned to death, I would have published this text immediately.

Michel Foucault: You just said something very important: no one really knows what happens in the course of a trial. Which is surprising if nothing else, insofar as it’s a public procedure, in principle. Because of the distrust of the secret and the written word—which were the two principles of penal justice under the monarchy—our trials since 1794 have supposedly been oral and public. The indictments of the prosecution are only preparatory documents. All must be played out in a theater with the public supposedly present. Yet, concretely, only fifty people, some journalists, a hurried judge, and an overwhelmed jury participate. There is no doubt that in France justice is a secret. And, after the verdict, it remains as such. It is nevertheless extraordinary that every day dozens of indictments are pronounced in the name of the “French people,” who are essentially ignorant of them.

A debate like the one at Troyes was extremely important. For months Patrick Henry’s crime was made the object of an unprecedented dramatization in all the press. And then, and I don’t know if we should be congratulating ourselves, during the trial the history of the death penalty became involved in the issue. Yet, in spite of all that, no one really knows what

## *The Anxiety of Judging 159*

was said about it, what argument hit home. In my opinion the uncensored publication of the debates is indispensable, whatever your reserves.

RB: What you just said encourages me to ask Jean Laplanche a preliminary question, a minor but very important question: Have you ever witnessed a great criminal trial?

JL: No, never.

RB: You neither, Michel Foucault?

MF: Never a big criminal trial. And *The Nouvel Observateur* never asked me to cover the Troyes trial, which I regret...

RB: Jean Laplanche has only seen artifice and cleverness where all those who were present at the trial felt exactly the contrary. In fact, for me it was only a matter of leading the jury to a state of lucidity about what the death penalty represented for them as human beings.

I said to myself: the true problem for the jury member is his personal, secret relationship to death. I wanted to make them feel that they represented, finally, only themselves, facing a man seated very close to them. And that they had the aberrant and exorbitant power to prohibit this man from continuing to live. Of course I spoke of the man "cut in two." But, contrary to what Jean Laplanche imagines, this was not done out of a taste for oratorical effect. I am horrified by every rhetorical exploitation of the guillotine and torture. It was exactly to avoid description that I sought the barest image to represent the decapitation of a man. And however you interpret it, at the end of the execution this man is in two pieces in the court of Sante. That's all. So, instead of going into a wealth

## 160 *The Anxiety of Judging*

of disturbing details—they're going to cut off his head and put it into a basket—chose extreme bareness.

That this image evokes fundamental notions like castration for a psychoanalyst is possible. But in what concerns me, it's the opposite of rhetorical artifice. That's why this article shocked and wounded me.

JL: Badinter seems to think that I reproached him for techniques and "effects." But it's not the sincerity of the lawyer that's in question. At bottom, it hardly matters whether or not I was present at the trial. The trials like the one at Troyes are spectator trials: all citizens, not just the audience, are summoned to them.

And this leads to my second remark: you are necessarily in a compromised position between your function as a defender of a man and your mission as reformer of a law. I very much admired your book *L'Execution*^ where you show that the defense of a man can be only an absolute witnessing, body to body, that no longer has to be concerned with justice. It's a redoubtable and admirable position. Assuming you have used certain "effects" to this end, I see nothing more to add. But your position is untenable when, at the same moment, you intend to take action against the death penalty. One of two things: either you still situate yourself in reference to the law and to justice—but that impedes your absolute defense; or it's the very notion of penalty that you contest; yet the critic of the death penalty who emphasizes its "efficacy" presupposes that justice has only the administration of the best possible relationships between men as its object.

RB: But finally the problem of the death penalty is not posed only in itself, abstractly! It is first posed very concretely at the moment when a man is there next to you, at risk of being condemned to death. It takes on all its meaning, be-

## *The Anxiety of Judging 161*

lieve me, only at the last bloody minute in the court of Sante. There's nothing theoretical about it, alas!

JL: You tell us that each jury member finally represents only himself. But one can claim the same thing for every pronouncement of a penalty, whatever it is! Let's suppose that the death penalty is abolished. Isn't it the same situation? Isn't the jury member then the person who slides the bolt on the prison cell? Don't we return, as in the case of the death penalty, to a "man-to-man" situation where no decision can be conceived but the one of vengeance? That's very much the reason why justice is only possible when rendered "in the name of..." If you suppress this reference that transcends the individual you suppress justice. But what is substituted for it is not liberty, but the obligatory administration of men, with its multiple faces: technical, psychiatric, the police, etc.

RB: At no moment in his life does a man dispose of a power comparable to the one when he says: "What am I going to do with him? Am I going to send him to prison for five years? Ten years?" And from that moment of course a lawyer's first duty is to recall to the jury the immensity of those five years. But, in the case of a prison term, which can easily be changed, nothing is really definitive. The trial will proceed in the shadow or within the framework of detention, sometimes a pardon or conditional freedom, etc. When it's a matter of death the choice is radical: it changes nature. After the decision—except for the possibility of pardon—^it's all over. When the jurors have to pronounce sentence, it's death that looks them in the face. And it is conjured away, erased, masked by the whole judicial ceremony.

JL: The ceremony is ridiculous and absolute only when deprived of its symbolic significance, of its reference "in

## *162 The Anxiety of Judging*

the name of..." You insist on individualizing the judicial decision. But, by doing that, you render every decision impossible—or criminal. Every day, aren't there numerous circumstances in which the decision of a single person leads to the death of thousands? Imagine that you are President of the RepubUc and that you have to decide whether to lower the speed limit on highways to 90 km/hour. There's reason to spend a few bad nights. There again, the filing of a charge is not a vain trifle but what allows culpability to be tied to every decision. Presidents, judges, jurors obsessively made to feel guilty: is that what we want? But then, in turn, police superintendents, technocrats, and the specialists "of the human soul" will disburden themselves of all scruples...

RB: I don't see the connection. How can the fact that certain political or strategic decisions invoke the life and death of others justify the judicial decision to put someone to death? It's true that the decision to keep a man in prison for five years more or less is a serious one. But how are we to admit the death penalty into today's system? At Troyes Patrick Henry escaped with his life. But Ranucci had just been guillotined, and, a week after Troyes, Carrein was sentenced, perhaps because some jurors felt frustrated by Henry's release. This relativism alone suffices to condemn capital punishment.

So, why not use all the arguments one has at one's disposal? There is the prosecutor, standing before you, saying: "If you don't condemn this man to death other innocent children will be savagely murdered." At that point of the trial, if you don't respond in kind, if you don't destroy his argument—which in reality is only a disguise for the death drive that works within us all—you are lost. Of course criminals aren't executed in order to protect other potential victims. They are killed for other reasons, reasons that I would like to hear you, as a psychoanalyst, explain to us. But before getting to the

## *The Anxiety of Judging 163*

heart of the issue, these pseudo-rational arguments have to be destroyed. If we don't take that approach it's not worth the trouble trying to save a man.

JL: To be sure, you're in touch with the reality of the court. But I wonder if this milieu of the court, with its arguments that move in a closed circle, is really connected to this other reality, that of the social body, and its need for justice that you have wrongly reduced to a need for vengeance. The exemplarity or inefficiency of the penalty—that's not what resonates at the level of the population. Or rather, to make a finer distinction, we ought to distinguish between two aspects of what is called "exemplarity." One is purely utilitarian: man is compared to a rat that one trains in a maze. If he gets a shock, he'll go in another direction. We know that this kind of conditioning—fortunately—is for man greatly inefficient. And there is a different exemplarity that one can call symbolic, which attests to the durability of a certain network of values: the value of human life for example. So I think that, if you go to the heart of things, the "real" dissuasion doesn't particularly interest the people who clamor, sometimes in a fidgety or vehement way, for criminals to be punished. What they want, simply, is that the crime be punished; the "example" of the punishment is there to attest to the durability of certain "taboos." Yet, on that level, you're not responding to them; you never say to them, at any point: "Do you really understand what the punishment is? Do you really know why you desire it so much?"

MF: Badinter's defense plea at Troyes seemed strong to me on precisely those points that Jean Laplanche is contesting. But I don't think that you, Monsieur Badinter, are giving but a minimal interpretation of what you have done. You said to the jurors: "In the end your conscience doesn't allow you to

## *164 The Anxiety of Judging*

condemn someone to death!" And you said equally; "You don't know this individual; the psychiatrists haven't been able to tell you anything about him, and you're going to condemn him to death!" You have also criticized the exemplarity of the punishment. Yet these arguments are possible only because penal justice doesn't function so much as the application of a law or a code than as a sort of corrective mechanism in which the psychology of the defendant and the conscience of the jurors interfere with one another.

If your strategy appears shrewd to me, it's because it puts the way penal justice has worked since the beginning of the 19th century into a trap. You have taken it literally. You have said to yourself: "According to our justice the jurors, these people chosen randomly, are reputed to be the universal conscience of the people. But there is no reason that twelve people can suddenly, by a kind of judicial grace, begin to function as the universal conscience." Having raised this challenge, you have said to them: "Monsieur Untel, you have your humors, your mother-in-law, your Uttle hfe. Can you take it upon yourself, such as you are, to kill someone?" And you were right to speak to them like that. For justice functions on the equivocation between the juror as universal conscience, as abstract citizen, and the individual juror drawn randomly according to a certain number of criteria.

Similarly, you have said: "At bottom, we judge people not so much according to their acts as according to their personality." The best proof: We bring in a psychiatrist, character witnesses, we ask the little sister if the accused was nice, we question his parents about his childhood. We judge the criminal more than the crime. And it's the knowledge we gain of the criminal that justifies whether we inflict such and such a punishment. But, continuing to raise the challenge, you have drawn the consequences: "The psychiatrists have not been capable of telling us about Patrick Henry, we don't really know him. We cannot therefore kill him."

## *The Anxiety of Judging 165*

Your arguments were tactically skillful, to be sure. But above all they had the merit of openly making use of the logic of the current penal system, and of turning it back against itself. You have demonstrated that the death penalty couldn't function within such a system. But then Jean Laplanche intervenes by saying that this system is dangerous.

JL: If I say that it's dangerous it's because it leads us to a conformism much worse than that of the law: that of conformity. Foucault emphasizes an evolution but he pushes also in the direction of the latter. The law whose death he announces is replaced, in an insidious way, by the manipulation of man in the name of a "norm" claimed to be rational. And the "norm" will not be so easily put off: it's the crabgrass that ceaselessly pushes back the ground "liberated" from the law.

MF: Let's imagine a justice that functions only according to a code: if you steal, your hand is cut off; if you commit adultery, your sex organs are slit; if you murder, your head is cut off. It's a system of arbitrary and obligatory relationships between the acts and the punishment that sanctions the crime in the person of the criminal. Thus it is possible to condemn someone to death.

But, if justice is concerned with correcting an individual, of gripping the depths of his soul in order to transform him, then everything is different: it's a man who is judging another and the death penalty is absurd. Monsieur Badinter has proved it; his defense, in this sense, is un-arguable.

JL: Not only does the death penalty become impossible but no punishment is truly possible.

MF: That's right. Today two systems are superimposed on one another. On the one hand, we are still living

## *166 The Anxiety of Judging*

under the old traditional system which says: we punish because there is a law. And then, on top of that, a new system has penetrated the first: we punish according to the law but in order to correct, to modify, to redress; for we are dealing with deviants and the abnormal. The judge thinks of himself as a therapist of the social body, a worker in the field of “public health” in the larger sense.

JL: I think it’s a little exaggerated to proclaim that we have finished with the law in order to enter the universe of the norm—even if it’s to contest it in its turn. For the people, in spite of everything, the notion of justice remains intact. There’s justice, there’s no justice. This man has acted badly, he must be punished: we hear this everywhere, all around us—the need for law manifesting itself in this great collective murmur. It’s striking to see our jurists and modern criminologists treat with contempt the notion of punishment as “retribution.”

In order to trace this current course or degradation back a little I alluded to Hegel, who anticipated the major objection: if one keeps to the level of materiality, of suffering, nothing justifies the addition of another crime and the further suffering that is imposed on the criminal. It doesn’t change anything, it doesn’t bring back the dead! The evil, far from being balanced, is only added to. Yet this objection, so powerful, can be transcended only through reference to another level, that of the law. The punishment, Hegel says forcefully, only makes sense if it abolishes, symbolically, the crime. But that, in its turn, is only comprehended because the crime itself does not lie in the material violence where it is manifested. It only exists in and through the law. We are animals dedicated to symbols and the crime adheres to our skin, like the law...

RB: A little while ago I evoked the relationship established between the one whose task is to judge and the deci-

## *The Anxiety of Judging 167*

sion. You say to me: the law survives. It's true. Only we must not forget the extenuating circumstances. For the same crime you can be condemned to death or to three years in prison with a suspended sentence. Of course the range of possible sentences is not infinite, but all the same it's very large. The diversity of possible decisions confers on judges a great power.

In fact, if one has thus been oriented toward an expansion of the possible, it's because the judicial institution has been demanding it. Recall the thesis of Montesquieu and the Constituent Assembly: the judge must be "the mouth of the law." It was infinitely easy for him. It sufficed that he ask himself the question: guilty or not guilty? If he were convinced that the accused was guilty, he pronounced the penalty provided by the texts. And he had the comforting feeling of having applied the general will. That must have been agreeable. But too easy. Today the judge, groping and uncertain, assumes responsibility for the decision. But it's infinitely preferable to this automatic cleaver of abstract retribution.

The drama is that we haven't gone to the end of personalization. Of course we talk about treatment, re-education, rehabilitation. But we are given a caricature of treatment. We talk of the social rehabilitation of the convicted. And, in fact, we witness a political exploitation of the fight against crime. No government has ever wanted to provide itself with the means to carry out these beautiful statements.

JL: We are marching in giant steps toward a total psychiatricization of justice.

RB: No, psychiatry is only one means among others that are available to judges.

JL: I would mention psychoanalysis, which seems to me just as serious. Psychoanalysis is not there to cure delinquency on command.

## *168 The Anxiety of Judging*

MF: I will go further: what is this strange postulate according to which, from the moment someone has committed a crime, it signifies that he is sick? This symptomatization of the crime is the problem ...

RB: Don't make me say what I didn't say: it would be a gross caricature of my thinking. Crime is a social sickness. But it's not by killing the ill or by confining them separately from the so-called healthy that one fights the sickness.

MF: Perhaps, but it's not a caricature of what all of criminology has been saying since 1880. We still have, in appearance, a legal system which punishes the criminal. In fact, we have a justice that proves itself innocent of punishing by pretending to treat the criminal.

It is around this substitution of criminal for the crime that things have pivoted and that we have begun to think: "if we are dealing with a criminal, to punish him doesn't make a lot of sense unless the punishment is inscribed in a technology of human behavior." And it is there that the criminologists of the 1880s and 90s began to advance strangely modern statements; "The crime cannot be, for the criminal, but an abnormal, disturbed behavior. If he upsets society, it's because he himself is upset." They have drawn two kinds of conclusions: in the first place, "the judicial apparatus is no longer useful." The judges, as men of law, are no longer competent to treat so difficult a matter, one so little juridical and so properly psychological as the criminal. Therefore, for the juridical apparatus we must substitute technical commissions of psychiatrists and doctors. Very specific projects were elaborated in this direction.

Second consequence: "We must certainly treat this individual who is dangerous only because he is sick. But, at the same time, we must protect society against him." Hence

## *The Anxiety of Judging 169*

the idea of an internment with a mixed function: therapeutic and social preservation.

These projects aroused very hvely reactions from judicial and political authorities in the 1900s. However, in our day they have found a very large field of application, and the USSR—once more “exemplary”—^is not the exception.

RB: But all the same, one cannot advocate a return to the abstract retribution of the penalty. You speak of crime, Michel Foucault, but it’s the criminal one judges. One can try to make reparations for a crime but it’s the criminal that one punishes. The judges couldn’t refuse to go in the direction of judicial treatment. How could they refuse the idea that one was going to change the criminal by bringing him back to the norm? What was there to do? Throw him into a hole for twenty years? It’s not possible any longer. Cut him in half? It’s not possible. What then? Re-integrate him by normalizing him. From the point of view of judicial technology—judge or lawyer—^there is no other possible approach. And it’s not necessarily practiced according to the Soviet system.

The other aspect of the thing that really upsets me is this rising clamor: “Death! Death! Let’s hang them, let’s torture them, let’s castrate them!” Why? If I was so disappointed by reading Laplanche’s article it was because he didn’t respond to the question. At bottom, the only interesting approach to the problem of the death penalty is not that of the technicians of justice, nor that of the moralists nor of the philosophers. It is another that I would like to see bom and that will respond to all those investigating the secret function of the death penalty.

The death penalty, in France, concerns only a very small number of criminals. In the last nine years there have been only five executions. Considering these figures, look at the enormity of the passions vented. Why does one receive, as

## 170 *The Anxiety of Judging*

soon as one publishes an article on the death penalty, two hundred letters of insult and delirium. For the Patrick Henry case I'm still receiving an unbelievable amount of mail: "You filth, if you think you're gonna save your own skin after letting him go—that monster!" Threats of torture against my wife and children then follow. Can you explain this anguish? Why do non-criminals have such a need for expiatory sacrifice?

MF: I think you are integrating two things into the same question. It's certain that spectacular crimes set off a general panic; it's the irruption of danger in daily life, a resurgence exploited shamelessly by the press.

On the other hand, you can't imagine the efforts needed to interest people even a little in what you will agree is the real problem of criminal punishment, that is, the flagrant offences, the diet in correctional institutions, the trial-a-minute (*procès-minute*) where some kid, because he has stolen a piece of scrap iron off some vaguely defined lot, finds himself spending eighteen months in prison, which means that he will have to start over again, etc. The intensity of feelings that surround the death penalty is intentionally maintained by the system, since it allows it to mask the real scandals.

We have then three superimposed phenomena out of keeping with one another: a penal discourse that claims to treat rather than punish, a penal apparatus that never ceases to punish, and a collective consciousness that demands several singular punishments and is ignorant of the daily punishment that is silently exercised in its name.

JL: It seems arbitrary to me to separate so distinctly the population of delinquents from that of the non-delinquents. There exists, on both sides, depths of common anguish and guilt. The great waves of anguish you were speaking of are not linked to fear but to something much deeper and harder to

## *The Anxiety of Judging 171*

pinpoint. If people investigate the death penalty so much, it's because they are fascinated by their own aggressivity. Because they know in a vague way that they bear the crimes in themselves and that they resemble the monster that confronts them.

As for the criminals—whom I don't know so well as Monsieur Badinter—they themselves remain faithful to the law. Don't you hear, from one cell to another: "It's not fair, he got too heavy a rap," or "He got what was coming to him!"

No, there isn't on one side a population white as snow who's afraid of lawbreakers and wants them punished, and on the other a group of criminals who live only in and through lawbreaking. Well, what's there to say, if not that there exists a gap between the unnameable anguish that comes from our own death drive and a system that introduces the law? And that it's just this gap that permits a certain psychic equilibrium. I don't think at all that the application of the law is an element that exists implicitly, even in the one who violates it. Inversely, the crime exists in each one of us, but what is psychically devastating is to treat someone as an "irresponsible child" when he manifests this implicit crime in his acts. One could refer here to psychoanalysis and to its evolution in relation to the problems of education: it has been observed that the absence of law—or at least its partial deficiency, or its ambiguity—is very anguishing, indeed "psychotizing" for the child brought up in a "permissive" environment.

RB: There's no question of suppressing the law. It has not only a technical and repressive function but also an expressive function, in the sense that it expresses what the collective conscience judges to be proper.

JL: I would say, in the strongest sense, that it has a subjective function that operates in each of us; that of prohibitions that we respect—in our unconscious—like parricide and incest.

## *172 The Anxiety of Judging*

MF: For Laplanche the subject is constituted because there is law. Suppress the law and there will be no subject.

RB: I'm very sorry that psychoanalysts haven't investigated any further the origin of the need for punishment that they seem to assume is a given. To say that at the same time there is identification with the criminal and anguish in this identification are words ...

MF: It appears to me to be dangerous to demand the reason and foundation of the social act of punishment from psychoanalysts.

RB: Not reason and foundation but explication and clarity.

JL: Psychoanalysts, and Freud first of all, have studied this question at length. If one had to try and summarize their point of view in two sentences, I would say that there exists two levels of guilt: the one where it is co-extensive with the anguish of our own self-aggression; and the other where it comes to be symbolized in the constitutive systems of our social being: linguistic, juridical, religious. The need for punishment is already a way of making a primordial anguish pass into something expressible, and, consequently, "negotiable." That which can be expiated can be aboUshed, compensated for symbolically...

RB: We are content then to accept the need for punishment as a given without looking for the causes. But, once the public has been informed about a punishment, the second aspect of things begins: the treatment, the personalized approach to the criminal. The judiciary must then satisfy the collective need for punishment, without forgetting about re-

## *The Anxiety of Judging 173*

habilitation. Obviously that sometimes grates on nerves, and the public becomes indignant: "He was condemned to twenty years and he's being let go after eight!" But why should he be kept longer if he's been reformed?

JL: One might even wonder if it's absolutely necessary to punish some criminals if we are sure they are reformed before being punished.

RB: We ought not. But the public demands punishment. And if the judicial institution did not satisfy the need for punishment, that would produce a formidable frustration, which would be taken out in other forms of violence. That said, once the judicial dramaturgy is performed, the substitution of treatment for punishment allows the accused to be reinserted without affecting the ritual. And so the game is played.

MF: Of course that grates, but see also how well oiled everything is! Of course there's someone there to punish the crime, but the president, with his ermine and his cap, what does he say? He leans over toward the deUnquint: "What was your childhood like? Your relationship with your mother? Your little sisters? Your first sexual experience?" What do these questions have to do with the crime he has committed? Naturally, that has to do with psychology. Psychiatrists are brought in to make everyone feel stupid, with discussions as much from the psychiatric point of view as from the judicial, and that everyone pretends to consider as highly competent exposes. At the end of this great juridico-psychological liturgy the jurors finally accept this enormous thing: to punish with the feeling that they have accomplished an act of social security and public health, that one deals with "evil" by sending a fellow to prison for five years. The incredible difficulty of

## *174 The Anxiety of Judging*

punishing someone is dissolved into theatricality. It doesn't function badly at all.

RB: I'm not as sure as you are that the juror allows himself to be seduced by this medical approach. He thinks more simply: "He was abandoned by his mother? Let's take two years off the sentence." Or again: "His father beat him? Then reduce the solitary confinement by four years. He had a praiseworthy childhood? Then take off three years. He deserted his wife and children? Then add on three years." And so it goes. I'm caricaturing the situation a little, but not so much.

JL: Psychiatric expertise, such as I've known it, has been preoccupied above all with the protection of society. What would be most effective from that point of view? Therapeutics didn't have much to do with it? I saw cases involving minor offenses: knowing that the prison term would be very short, the expert advises to intern the delinquent, even recommending that the authorities not follow the advice of the top doctor who may be too intelligent and let him go free.

MF: There is a circular on this subject that dates from after the war, according to which the psychiatrist must respond in court to three questions in addition to the traditional "Was he of sound mind?" These questions are extraordinary if one considers them: (1) Is the individual dangerous? (2) Can he be given criminal punishment? (3) Is he curable or can he be rehabilitated? Three questions which make no sense judicially. The law has never pretended to punish someone because he is "dangerous," but because he was a criminal. But in the realm of psychiatry the question isn't any more meaningful: as far as I know "danger" is not a psychiatric category, nor is the concept of "rehabilitation." Here we have before us a strange mixed discourse where the only thing that matters is

## *The Anxiety of Judging 175*

the danger to society. This is the game that psychiatrists have agreed to play. How is it possible?

JL: Indeed, when psychiatry submits to this game, it assumes a double role: of repression and adaptation. For what concerns psychoanalysis, things are a little different. It is dedicated neither to an expertise nor to rehabilitation. Criminality in itself is certainly not a motive for analytic cure; with all the more reason if the delinquent was sent to the analyst by the authorities. However, one could easily imagine a delinquent undertaking an analytic cure in prison. If he expresses such a wish, there is no reason not to try to accommodate him. But in no case could the treatment be an alternative to the punishment: "If you get better, you will be freed sooner..."

MF: Certain legislation has foreseen judicial decisions for obligatory treatment, as in the case of drug addicts and trials for minors.

JL: That's aberrant. One knows how very difficult it is to approach addicts, even when they agree to be treated ...

RB: It's not an aberration from the judge's point of view. Even so, it's more valuable than to keep the addict locked up for several months.

JL: But, precisely in this regard, to want to remove the addict from a possible confrontation with a prison term is to put oneself in the worst conditions, from the point of view of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy could not be an alternative to prison without undermining itself.

RB: That said, our justice has never really wanted to go all the way with treatment.

## *176 The Anxiety of Judging*

JL: It's not because the penitential framework is detestable that it must be replaced by a no less detestable psychiatric one.

RB: I'm not talking about a psychiatric framework. It's not a matter of giving psychiatry full power. What I'm saying is that one can't be ignorant of it. Up to the present it has been used as an alibi. Never for curative purposes.

MF: You seem to think of psychiatry as a system that might really exist, like a marvelous instrument prepared in advance. "Ah, if finally the psychiatrists would come to work with us, how good that would be!" Yet I believe that psychiatry is not capable of responding to such a demand, and that it never will be. It is incapable of knowing if a crime is a sickness or of transforming a delinquent into a non-delinquent.

It would be serious if justice washed its hands of its responsibilities by delegating them to psychiatrists. Or if the sentence became a kind of transactional decision between an archaic code and an unjustified knowledge.

RB: It's certainly not a question of delegating responsibilities. But psychiatry is one instrument among many, badly or hardly utilized up till now in judicial matters.

MF: But its value is exactly what has to be put into question.

RB: But then must all psychiatric research be excluded from judicial concerns? Do we return to the beginning of the 19th century? To prefer the penal colony, to get rid of them by sending them as far away as possible where they can starve in indifference would be a frightful regression.

## *The Anxiety of Judging 177*

JL: Psychiatry is more and more infiltrated with psychoanalytic concepts. Yet psychoanalysis can in no case make pronouncements about the irresponsibility of a delinquent. On the contrary: one of the postulates of psychoanalysis is that those analyzed must become responsible again, as subjects of their acts. To use psychoanalysis to make them “irresponsible” would be an absurd reversal.

MF: It suffices to listen to these “experts” who come to analyze a fellow. They say just what anyone in the street would say: “You know he had an unhappy childhood. He’s a difficult person...” Of course all that is dressed up in technical terms, which doesn’t fool anybody. Yet it works. Why? Because everyone—the prosecuting attorney, the lawyer, the presiding judge—needs a modulator for the punishment. It allows one to make the code function as one wants, and to retain a good conscience. In fact, the psychiatrist doesn’t discuss the delinquent’s psychology: it’s to the liberty of the judge that he addresses himself. It’s a question not of the criminal’s unconscious but of the judge’s consciousness. When we publish some of the psychiatric testimony we have gathered over the past few years, one will be able to determine to what extent psychiatric relationships constitute tautologies: “He killed a little old lady? Well then he’s an aggressive subject!” Do we need psychiatry to perceive that? No. But the judge needs psychiatry in order to reassure himself.

This “modulator” effect works moreover in both directions; it can also increase the sentence. I saw expert testimony on homosexual subjects formulated in such terms as: “These are abject individuals.” But “abject” is not an accepted technical term! It’s a way of reintroducing, under the honorable cloak of psychiatry, certain connotations of homosexual ity in a trial where they don’t belong. Take *Tartuffe* at Elmira’s knees proposing “a love without scandal and a pleasure with-

## 178 *The Anxiety of Judging*

out fear.” Substitute prison term and punishment for pleasure and love and you have psychiatric tartufferie at the feet of the court of justice. Nothing works better against the anxiety of judging.

RB: But it is anguishing to judge! The judicial institution can function only to the extent that the judge is liberated from his anxiety. To succeed in it he must know in the name of what values he condemns or absolves. Until a recent period everything was simple. Political regimes changed, but not the values of society. The judges were comfortable. But today in this uncertain society in the name of what does one judge, by means of what values?

MF: I fear that it is dangerous to allow judges to continue to judge alone, by liberating them from their anxiety and allowing them to avoid asking themselves in the name of what they judge, by what right, by what acts, and who are they, those who judge. Let them become anxious like we become anxious when we meet so few who are disturbed. The crisis of the function of justice has just been opened. Let's not close it too quickly. A

### Note

<sup>1</sup> On February 28, 1977, Laplanche published an article on the then-current trial of Patrick Henry, provoking numerous reactions. The renowned psychoanalyst in essence dismissed both adversaries and advocates of capital punishment. Robert Badinter, the lawyer who contributed to saving Patrick Henry from the guillotine (later Socialist Minister of Justice), here debates the issue of the death penalty and capital punishment with Laplanche and Michel Foucault.

<sup>^</sup> Robert Badinter, *L'Execution* (Paris: Grasset, 1973).

# 15

## Clarifications on the Question of Power

Q: Your research since, let us say, *Discipline and Punish*, has begun to extend into and bring to light the realm of power relationships and the technology of power; this fact has created problems and difficulties now that these analyses have started to have echoes in the political and intellectual fields. In the United States they are wondering into which university discipline your work ought to be placed; in Italy they want rather to know what is the political effect of your ideas.

1. How would you define the field of your work today, and what might its political implications be?

2. In your analyses there would be no difference between ideology and the process of power, between ideology and reality. This type of analysis, this *mise a plat*—for which you are criticized—would be nothing more than an echo of what already exists, a confirmation of the real.

3. The metaphor of Bentham's Panopticon—to which one attempts to reduce all your analyses—would take us back to an absolute transparency of power which is all-seeing.

## 180 *The Question of Power*

4. The concept of resistance can easily function as *repoussoir*, as the external limit of an analysis which would bring to light in the presence of this concept the notion of Power with a capital P. In reality, you are probably thinking the opposite, in particular in *The History of Sexuality*. But this is a problem to which we shall undoubtedly have to return.

MF: By way of introduction, it is perhaps worth it to say something on this problem of the “amalgam,” because I think it might be an important factor. I have the impression that the whole operation can be summarized in this way: there is no difference between what Deleuze says, what Foucault says and what the “new philosophers” say.<sup>1</sup> I suppose, though it would have to be verified, that yet a fourth adversary has been assimilated here, the theory of radical needs, which is, I believe, rather important in Italy today and of which the PCI would also like to rid itself. Here we find something worth emphasizing: these are the old tactics, both political and ideological, of Stalinism, which consist of having at all times only one adversary. Also, or rather above all, when you strike on several fronts, you must do it in such a way that the battle seems like a battle against one and the same adversary. There are a thousand devils, the Church used to say, but there is only one Prince of Darkness... And they do the same thing. This produced, for example, social-fascism, in the very moment when it was necessary to fight against fascism; but they wanted at the same time to attack social democracy. There has been the category of Hitlerian-Trotskyism; or Titoism as the unchanging element of all the adversaries. So they maintain absolutely the same procedure.

Secondly, it has to do with a judiciary procedure, and one which has acted out a very precise role in all the trials, those of Moscow, those of the post-war popular democracies; that is, the role of saying: since you are nothing more than one

## *The Question of Power 181*

and the same enemy, we shall ask you above all to account not only for what you have said, but also for everything you have not said, if it is one of your so-called allies or accomplices who has said it. Hence a totalization of sins on each of the accused heads. And then: as you can well see, you contradict yourselves, since, even though you are all one and the same adversary you say one thing but you also say the opposite. So you must account for what has been said and for the opposite of what has been said.

There is also a third element which seems important to me and which consists of the act of assimilating the enemy and the danger. Every time something appears which represents a danger (with respect to given situations, affirmed tactics and dominant ideological themes)—^that is, a given problem or the need for a change of analysis, you never have to take it as a danger or as an event; you need only denounce it immediately as an adversary. To give a precise example, I believe that these analyses of power held nothing more than a relatively restricted place in the institutionalized discourse of Marxism. It is a new event, the fact that the problem has been opened up, and not by me, but by many other events, other people and other trials. The various communist parties, the Italian party in particular, did not respond to this by saying; perhaps we ought to take it into consideration; rather, the response was: if it is something new, it is a danger and therefore an adversary.

In my opinion, these elements deserve to be stressed as supports of the current polemics.

In the same vein with what I have just said, the operation of “reduction to system” must be added. In the presence of analyses of this kind, in the presence of the problems, with respect to which, however, these analyses are nothing more than imperfect and awkward attempts to come up with an answer—and here I do not delude myself—one tries to ex-

## *182 The Question of Power*

tract immediately a certain number of theses, no matter how caricaturish they may be, no matter how arbitrary the link between the "extracted" theses and what has actually been said. The goal is to arrive at a formulation of theses which might permit something like a condemnation; a condemnation which is produced solely upon the basis of the comparison between these theses and those of Marxism, or, in any case, the "just" theses.

I believe that all of these procedures can be found in the enormous network of fiction which some communists have constructed around what I was doing. There is hardly any relationship between what I have actually said and the things they attribute to me. This, I believe, can be asserted with complete objectivity. For example, a naturalistic conception of desire was attributed to me: enough to make you split your sides with laughter. Perhaps one could accuse them of stupidity, and certainly this is being done; but I think that the problem, in spite of everything, should be examined instead at the very level of their cynicism. I mean that they are well-skilled in telling lies, and that this can easily be demonstrated. They know very well that every honest reader, reading what has been written about me and what I myself have written, will see that these theses are lies. But their problem, as well as their strength, lies in the fact that what interests them is not what they themselves say, but what they do when they say something. And what they do is precisely this: to constitute a singular enemy, to utilize a judiciary proceeding, to begin a procedure of condemnation, in the politico-judiciary sense; and this is the only thing that interests them. Just so the individual is condemnable and condemned. The nature of the evidence upon which he is condemned is of little importance, since, as we well know, the essential thing in a condemnation is not the quality of the evidence but the force of the one who presents the evidence.

## *The Question of Power 183*

In reference to the reduction of my analyses to that simplistic figure which is the metaphor of the Panopticon, I think that here too a response can be made on two levels. We can say: let us compare what they attribute to me with what I have said; and here it is easy to show that the analyses of power which I have made cannot at all be reduced to this figure, not even in the book where they went searching for it, that is, *Discipline and Punish*. In fact, if I show that the Panopticon was a utopia, a kind of pure form elaborated at the end of the 18th century, intended to supply the most convenient formula for the constant, immediate and total exercising of power; and if, then, I have revealed the genesis, the formulation of this utopia, its *raison d'être*; it is also true that I immediately showed that what we are talking about is precisely a utopia which had never functioned in the form in which it existed, and that the whole history of the prison—its reality—consists precisely of its having come near this model. Certainly there was a functionalism in Bentham's dream, but there has never been a real functionality of the prison. The reality of the prison has always been grasped in diverse strategic and tactical connections which took into account a dense, weighty, blind, obscure reality. It is thus necessary to be in absolute bad faith in order to say that I presented a functionalist conception of the transparency of power. As far as the other books are concerned, the same thing is true. In *The Will to Knowledge* I tried to indicate how analyses of power ought to be made, just how they can be oriented—and all of these indications revolved around the theme of power as a series of complex, difficult and never-functionalized relationships, a series of relationships which in a certain sense never functions at all. Power is not omnipotent or omniscient—quite the contrary! If power relationships have produced forms of investigation, of analysis, of models of knowledge, etc., it is precisely not because the power was omniscient, but because it was blind.

## *184 The Question of Power*

because it was in a state of impasse. If it is true that so many power relationships have been developed, so many systems of control, so many forms of surveillance, it is precisely because power was always impotent. On the level of the nature itself of my analyses, it is easy to show that what is being attributed to me is a pure and simple lie. What must be done, then, is precisely to take things at another level and to try to understand what they are doing when they tell a lie which can be so easily unmasked—and here I believe they are utilizing the technique of the inversion of reproach.

Ultimately, it is true that the question I posed was posed in reference to Marxism, as well as to other conceptions of history and politics; and the question was this; isn't it possible, with reference to production, for example, that power relationships do not represent a level of reality which is simultaneously complex and relatively, but only relatively, independent? In other words, I was putting forth the hypothesis that there was a specificity to power relationships, a density, an inertia, a viscosity, a course of development and an inventiveness which belonged to these relationships and which it was necessary to analyze.

I was simply saying this; maybe everything is not as easy as one believes; and in order to say this I was basing my message on analyses and experience at the same time. The experience is that of the Soviet Union, but also that of the Communist parties, because sixty to seventy years of contemporary experience have taught us that the idea of taking over the apparatus of the State, of the deterioration of the State, of democratic centralism, that all of this was nothing more than a marvelously simple set of formulas, but ones which absolutely did not take into account what was happening at the level of power. And this is true for the Soviet Union just as it is for any Communist party. Furthermore, this affirmation was not as simple as some people thought, because I was basing it upon

## *The Question of Power 185*

historical analyses. It is evident, for example, that since the 16th century the problem of the art of governing, of how to govern, with what techniques, with what instruments, has been a decisive problem for the entire West. How are we to govern, how are we to accept being governed, etc.

So then, my problem was one of saying: look, the problem of power is complicated; and it was the problem of showing in what sense this was true, with all the consequences resulting therefrom all the way up to current politics. This has been the answer of the Communists: you speak of simplicity and yet you hold that things are more complicated than one thinks? But it is you who hold the most simplistic conception. And they have reduced everything I said to the simple form of the Panopticon, which was only one element of my analysis. Inversion of reproach: the technique of lawyers.

Another point which could be talked about here is the reduction of the analyses of the technology of power to a kind of metaphysics of Power with a capital P, by which technology is led back to a dualism in which the things confronted are this Power and the silent, deaf resistance to it, of which no one would ever say anything. What would be reconstructed in this is a kind of dual clash.

First of all, I never use the word power with a capital P; they are the ones who do that. In the second place, some French "Marxists" maintain that power for me is "endogenous," and that I would like to construct a real and true ontological circle, deducing power from power. This is a stupid and ridiculous affirmation, since I have always tried to do just the opposite. Let's take, for example, *Madness and Civilization*, my very first book, in which I tried somewhat to deal with this problem. I was then involved with some psychiatric institutions, where the power of the administration, of the director, of the doctors, of the family, etc., functioned absolutely, with reference to the mentally ill. If I had wanted to

## 186 *The Question of Power*

make, as they say, an ontology of Power with a capital P, I would have tried to establish the origin of these great institutions of power; I would have placed my analysis exclusively on the level of the institution and of the law, and on the power relationship, more or less regulated, with which the violence against madness or madmen would have been exercised.

Instead, I tried to show how these *decoupages*, these relationships of force, these institutions and this entire network of power were able to establish themselves at a given moment. And beginning from what? Beginning from those economic and demographic processes which appear clearly at the end of the 16th century, when the problem of the poor, of the homeless, of fluctuating populations, is posed as an economic and political problem; and an attempt is made to resolve it with an entire arsenal of implements and arms (the laws concerning the poor, the more-or-less forced isolation and, finally, imprisonment of these people—in particular, what took place in France and in Paris in 1660-1661).

I tried to see, then, how this set of power relationships which encircled madness and defined it as a mental illness was something completely different from a pure and simple power relationship, from a pure and simple tautological affirmation of the following type: I, reason, exercise power over you, madness. Just as, in the opposite sense, a power relationship was born from within a very different transformation, which was at the same time the condition allowing for the regulation and control of these relationships and these economic processes, etc. It is precisely the heterogeneity of power which I wanted to demonstrate, how it is always born of something other than itself

The same can be said, for example, of the prison. To make an analysis of power in terms of an ontological affirmation would have meant to question oneself as to what penal law is and to deduce the prison from the essence itself of the

## *The Question of Power 187*

law which condemns the crime. Instead, I was attempting to reinsert the prison within a technology which is the technology of power, but which has its birth in the 17th and 18th centuries, that is, when an entire series of economic and demographic problems poses once again the problem of what I have called the economy of power relationships.

Could the feudal type systems or the systems of the great administrative monarchies still be considered valid when it is a question of irrigating the power relationships in a social body whose demographic dimensions, whose population shifts, whose economic processes are those which they have become? All of this is born from out of something else; and there is no Power, but power relationships which are being born incessantly, as both effect and condition of other processes.

But this is only one aspect of the problem which I wanted to confront; the other is the one of resistance. If mine were an ontological conception of power, there would be, on one side. Power with a capital P, a kind of lunar occurrence, extra-terrestrial; and on the other side, the resistance of the unhappy ones who are obligated to bow before power. I believe an analysis of this kind to be completely false, because power is born out of a plurality of relationships which are grafted onto something else, born from something else, and permit the development of something else.

Hence the fact that these power relationships, on one hand, enter into the heart of struggles which are, for example, economic or religious—and so it is not against power that struggles are fundamentally born.

On the other hand, power relationships open up a space in the middle of which the struggles develop. For example, in reference to criminality, to the penal system, and to the judicial bureaucracy, there was in the 18th century an entire series of interesting struggles: the struggles of the people

## 188 *The Question of Power*

against the upper echelons, struggles of the intellectuals against the old bureaucracies, struggles of the judiciary bureaucracy against the new political and technocratic classes which exerted power, at least in some states, and which sought to sweep away the old structures.

If there are class struggles, and certainly there have been, these struggles cover this field, they divide it, plough it, organize it. But we must reposition the power relationships within the struggles and not suppose that power might exist on one side, and that on the other side lies that upon which power would exert itself; nor can we suppose that the struggle develops between power and non-power.

Instead of this ontological opposition between power and resistance, I would say that power is nothing other than a certain modification, or the form, differing from time to time, of a series of clashes which constitute the social body, clashes of the political, economic type, etc. Power, then, is something like the stratification, the institutionalization, the definition of tactics, of implements and arms which are useful in all these clashes. It is this which can be considered in a given moment as a certain power relationship, a certain exercising of power. As long as it is clear that this exercising (to the degree to which it is, in the end, nothing other than the instant photograph of multiple struggles continuously in transformation)—this power, transforms itself without ceasing. We need not confuse a power situation, a certain distribution or economy of power in a given moment, with the simple power institutions, such as the army, the police, the government, etc.

Finally, there is another thing for which I am criticized. By freeing myself of the old concept of ideology, which permitted playing reality against false interpretations of reality, which permitted functioning on the basis of the device of demystification—things are not as they are presented, but exist in a different way they say I would perform a *mise a plat* of

## *The Question of Power 189*

the discussions concerning reality, reducing my analyses to a simple reproduction of reality, in such a way that my discussion would be nothing more than a kind of reactionary echo which would do nothing but confirm things as they are.

Here once again we must understand what they are doing when they say something like this. Because, we have to ask what it means when they say: you do nothing but repeat reality. Above all, it can mean; you do nothing but repeat what has been said. I would answer: show me that it has been said. Did you say it? If they say to me: you do nothing but repeat reality—^in the sense that what I say is true, then I agree with them and thank them for this recognition. It is true, I decided to say exactly what has happened. But I would only thank them half-way, because after all, that is not exactly what I decided to do.

This is what others would say of the analyses I perform and of that opinion which claims that these analyses simply reproduce reality: this is not at all true; it is all pure and simple imagination. The French psychiatrists, of more or less Marxist inspiration, tried to say this about *Madness and Civilization*, with dubious success, however. They tried to say that it was a fable.

In reality, what I want to do, and here is the difficulty of trying to do it, is to solve this problem: to work out an interpretation, a reading of a certain reality, which might be such that, on one hand, this interpretation could produce some of the effects of truth; and on the other hand, these effects of truth could become implements within possible struggles. Telling the truth so that it might be acceptable. Deciphering a layer of reality in such a way that the hnes of force and the hnes of fragility come forth; the points of resistance and the possible points of attack; the paths marked out and the short-cuts. It is the reality of possible struggles that I wish to bring to light.

## 190 *The Question of Power*

This is what I wanted to do in *Madness and Civilization*. It is, however, rather curious that all the psychiatrists have read this as a book of anti-psychiatry—a book which says explicitly: I shall speak of what has happened with regard to madness and mental illness between the middle of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th, roughly speaking—and I have not gone beyond Pinel. As if the book were speaking about the mental situation!

Those psychiatrists were right and wrong at the same time. Wrong because it simply was not true; I was not speaking about the mental situation. Nonetheless, there was something of the truth in this superficial and angry reaction of theirs since, in reality, reading history in that way meant, in essence, tracing within contemporary reality some possible paths which later became, with the indispensable transformations, paths actually followed.

This polemic of reality is the effect of truth which I want to produce. The same holds true for the prison, for the problem of criminality. This too is a book which deals with seventy years of the history of penal institutions: 1760-1830/40. In nearly all the reviews it was said that this book speaks about the current situation, but that it does not speak sufficiently about it because things have changed since then. But I am not speaking about the current situation. I am making an interpretation of history, and the problem is that of knowing—but I don't resolve the problem—^how these analyses can possibly be utilized in the current situation.

At this point I think we need to bring into the discussion the problem of the function of the intellectual. It is absolutely true that when I write a book I refuse to take a prophetic stance, that is, the one of saying to people: here is what you must do—and also: this is good and this is not. I say to them: roughly speaking, it seems to me that things have gone this way; but I describe those things in such a way that the possible

## *The Question of Power 191*

paths of attack are delineated. Yet even with this approach I do not force or compel anyone to attack. So then, it becomes a completely personal question when I choose, if I want, to take certain courses of action with reference to prisons, psychiatric asylums, this or that issue. But I say that political action belongs to a category of participation completely different from these written or bookish acts of participation. It is a problem of groups, of personal and physical commitment. One is not radical because one pronounces a few words; no, the essence of being radical is physical; the essence of being radical is the radicalness of existence itself.

Now then, returning to the Communists, I would say that this radicalness is what they don't have. They don't have it because for them the problem of the intellectual is not one of telling the truth, because the intellectuals of the PC were never asked to tell the truth. They were asked to take a prophetic stance, to say: this is what must be done—which implies simply that what must be done must adhere to the PC, must do as the PC does, must be with the PC or vote for the PC. In other words, what the PC demands is that the intellectual be the intermediary that transmits the intellectual, moral and political imperatives of which the party can make direct use.

But it is a different story for the intellectual who takes a completely opposite position, which consists of saying to the people: I would like to produce some effects of truth which might be used for a possible battle, to be waged by those who wish to wage it, in forms yet to be found and in organizations yet to be defined. The people of the PC clearly do not talk about this freedom which I leave here at the end of my discussion for anyone who wants or does not want to get something done.

This is exactly the opposite of what they would have me do; because for the PC the real intellectual is the one who calms down reality, explaining how it ought to be and saying

## 192 *The Question of Power*

immediately how it will have to be on that day when everyone will do as the Communist party does. A position exactly contrary to my own; and it is in this sense that they do not pardon me.

They really do understand what I am doing, but they don't understand what I am saying. Or, at least, they take the risk—and this, once again, is truly surprising—of letting everyone see that they don't understand what I am saying. But this does not worry them, because their problem is one of covering up what I do, of condemning it and thereby preventing the people from doing or accepting what I do; theirs is the task of making what I do unacceptable. And in the moment when they cannot say; what he is doing is unacceptable, they say: what he is saying is false. But in order to say this they are obligated to he and to make me say what I am not saying.

For this reason, I don't think there's much to discuss concerning these words poured on top of my own. Rather, what we need to do is to grasp clearly the reason for this attack of theirs. And if they do understand what I am doing, then I would like to make clear what they are doing when they tell these lies.A

Translated by James Cascaito

### Note

1 The “New Philosophers” were the first French intellectuals to openly link Marxism as a philosophy to totalitarian politics. Its main proponents were Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksman. Gilles Deleuze, a long-time friend and ally of Foucault, came out strongly against the simplifications of the “New Philosophers.”

# 16

## The Masked Philosopher

Q: Allow me first to ask why you have chosen to remain anonymous?

MF: You know the story of the psychologist who went to a little village in the depths of Africa to show a film to its inhabitants. He then asked them to recount the story exactly as they had understood it. Well, in this anecdote with three characters they had only been interested in one thing: the passage of light and shadows through the trees. For us, the characters establish the laws of perception. Our eyes naturally focus on the figures who come and go, arise and disappear.

Why have I suggested that I remain anonymous? Out of nostalgia for the time when, being completely unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard. The surface contact with some possible reader was without a wrinkle. The effects of the book rebounded in unforeseen places and outlined forms I hadn't thought about. The name is a facility.

I will propose a game: the year without names. For one year books will be published without the author's name. The critics will have to manage with an entirely anonymous production. But I suspect that perhaps they will have nothing

# 19

## **How Much Does It Cost For Reason To Tell The Truth**

Q; What is the origin of what we loosely call Post-Structuralism?

MF: Indeed, why not this term? In regard to Structuralism, neither the exponents of this movement nor those who were designated “Structuralists” knew what it was about. Those who used the structural method in very limited areas like Hnguistics or comparative mythology knew that it was structuralism. But as soon as one went beyond these very limited areas, nobody knew what that was. I am not certain it jKQuId-be very interesting to attempt to redefine what was called Structuralism then. Instead it seems interesting to me to study Formal Thinking, the different types of Formalism, which have traversed Western culture during all the 20th century.

## ***234 How Much Does It Cost..***

I'm thinking of the unusual skill of Formalism in painting, the formal research in music, the significance of Formalism in the analysis of folklore, the sagas, architecture, the application of some of its forms to theoretical thinking. Formalism was probably in general one of the most powerful and complex forces in 20th century Europe. Moreover, Formalism was associated very often with conditions and even political movements, which were certainly equally stimulating each time. The relationship between Russian Formalism and the Russian Revolution should definitely be investigated precisely anew. The role of formal thinking and formal art at the beginning of the 20th century, its ideological value, its ties to various political movements should be analyzed. What strikes me about the so-called structuralist movement in France and in Western Europe during the 1960s: it was really like an echo of the efforts of certain countries in the East and particularly Czechoslovakia to free themselves from dogmatic Marxism. While in a country like Czechoslovakia, the old tradition of pre-war European Formalism was revived—around 1955 or in the 1960s—so-called Structuralism arose at about the same time in Western Europe—that is, I believe, a new form, a new modality of this thinking, of this formalistic investigation. That's the way I would classify this structural phenomenon — through its revitalization in the great stream of formal thought.

Q: There is no longer a direct connection between Critical Theory and the student movement in the Federal Republic of Germany. Perhaps the student movement rather made instrumental use of Critical Theory. It sought refuge there. In the same way, perhaps there is no direct causality anymore between Structuralism and '68.

MF: That's right.

## *..For Reason to Tell the Truth? 235*

Q: But would you say that Structuralism was like a necessary forerunner?

MF: No, nothing is necessary in this order of ideas. But one could say very roughly that formalistic culture, thought, and art in the first third of the 20th century were generally associated with critical political movements of the Left—and even with revolutionary movements—and Marxism obscured all that. Marxism devoted itself to an angry criticism of Formalism in art and in theory which has become manifest since 1930. Thirty years later you can see in a few Eastern countries and in France, how people have attacked dogmatic Marxism, in that they use forms and types of analysis which are obviously inspired by Formalism. The events in France and other countries in 1968 are to the same degree as highly exciting as they are ambiguous; and ambiguous because they are exciting. It's a matter of movements, which often clearly showed a definite respect toward Marxism while at the same time strongly criticizing the dogmatic Marxism of parties and institutions. And the play between a certain pro-Marxist form of thought and Marxist references created room in which the student movements developed. Eventually they brought the revolutionary Marxist discourse to the height of exaggeration. At the same time they were possessed by an antidogmatic impetuosity which prohibits any type of discourse.

Q: In Freud's camp or in Structuralism's camp.

MF: That's right. I would like to return to the history of Formalism and the small Structuralist episode in France, which was relatively, with widely dispersed forms, embedded in the heart of Formalism in the 20th century which is in my opinion as significant as Romanticism or Positivism in the 19th century. Marxism constituted in France a kind of horizon.

## 236 *How Much Does It Cost.*

which Jean-Paul Sartre once considered impassable. At that time Marxism was in fact a rather closed and in any case a controlling mental horizon. From 1945 to 1955 the entire French university life—the group university life in order to differentiate it from the university tradition—was busy with or even fully engrossed in achieving something; not Freud/Marx, rather Husserl/Marx, the relationship to Phenomenological Marxism. That was the beginning of the discussion and the efforts of a whole group of people: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, who came to Marxism by way of Phenomenology, and also Dominique Desanti.'

Q: Mikel Dufresne, even Jean-François Lyotard.^^

MF: Paul Ricoeur, who is certainly no Marxist, but who was a phenomenologist and not inclined to ignore Marxism.<sup>3</sup> Then one attempted to combine Marxism with Phenomenology and, as a certain form of structural thought and structural method began to develop. Structuralism took the place of Phenomenology, in order to couple itself with Marxism. The transition from Phenomenology to Structuralism occurred and focused basically on the problem of language. It was a significant moment, as Merleau-Ponty discovered the problem of language. You know that Merleau-Ponty's last efforts were directed to this end: I remember exactly a lecture in which he began to speak about Saussure, who even though he had been dead for only about 50 years, had been completely ignored by the cultivated public—not to mention the French philologists and linguists. The problem of language arose and it became obvious that phenomenology could not do it as much justice as the structural analysis of signification which could be produced by a structure of a linguistic nature, a structure in which the subject in the phenomenological sense could not be engaged as a creator of meaning and naturally, since the phe-

## *.For Reason to Tell the Truth? 237*

nomenological bride did not understand how to speak about language, she was let go. Structuralism became the new bride. That's the way it happened. Psychoanalysis also brought—mostly due to the influence of Jacques Lacan—a problem to the fore, which was indeed very different, but not without analogy to the above. The problem was the unconscious, which cannot fit into an analysis of a phenomenological nature. The best proof, that it could not be included in phenomenology, not at least into the one constructed by the French, is the following. Sartre or Merleau-Ponty—I don't want to speak about others—have so^jgHfindefatigably to dethrone what they called "Positivism." And when the question of language arose, Lacan said: Your efforts are in vain, the activity of the unconscious cannot be reduced to the effects of giving meaning, for which phenomenology is suited. Then Lacan formulated an absolutely symmetrical problem for the hnguists. The phenomenological subject was disqualified a second time by psychoanalysis, as it had already been disqualified by linguistic theory. One understands why Lacan could say at this moment that the unconscious was structural like a language. It's the same type of problem. So one had a structural Freudo-Marxism. While phenomenology is excluded on the basis of the above reasons, there are now many more suitors who give Marx their hands and that's a merry group. What I described here was done and embraced by a certain number of people, but there was a whole group of individuals who did not follow this movement. I'm thinking of those who participated in the history of science, those who showed by aligning themselves with Comte a noteworthy tradition, particularly those around Canguilhem, who had a decidedly influential effect on the young French university life. Many of his students were neither Marxist nor Freudians or Structuralists. If you wish. I'm speaking about myself here. At that time I was a Freudian. I was never a Marxist and never a Structuralist.

Q: How about giving us some dates.

MF: I wrote my first book at the end of my student days, around 1956–1957. That was *Madness and Civilization*, which I wrote between 1955 and 1960. This book is neither Freudian nor Structuralist or Marxist. In 1953, I read Nietzsche and indeed—equally unusual as Nietzsche himself—in his perspective of an examination of the history of knowledge, the history of reason: How can one write the history of rationality, that as the problem of the 19th century.

Q: Knowledge, reason, rationality.

MF: Knowledge, reason, rationality: the possibility of writing a history of rationality. With a man like Alexander Koyré one still encounters phenomenology: a historian of science with a German education, who settled in France around 1930–1935 and developed a historical analysis of the forms of rationality and knowledge in a phenomenological perspective. For me the problem presents itself in analogous terms as those I've just recalled: can a transhistorical subject of a phenomenological kind be accounted for by the history of reason? Here the writings of Nietzsche cause a break, a rupture (*coupure*) for me. There is a history of the subject as there is a history of reason. One cannot expect this history of reason to evolve from the initial founding act of a rationalistic subject. I read Nietzsche a bit by chance. Remarkably it was through Canguilhem—at that time the most influential French historian of science.

Q: But he shows no detectable traces of Nietzsche.

MF: On the contrary. Without a doubt, there are even expressed references, clearer in his later texts than his

## *.ForReason to Tell the Truth? 239*

earlier ones. In France the relationship to Nietzsche—even the relationship of all 20th century thought—was difficult, for understandable reasons. But I keep talking about myself. One must also speak about Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze wrote his book on Nietzsche around 1960. It was published in 1965." I am quite certain that he is in debt to Hume since he is interested in empiricism and also in the same question: is the theory of the subject presented by phenomenology satisfying? He escapes this question through Hume's subterfuge of empiricism. I am convinced that he met Nietzsche under the same conditions. Everything which happened in the 1960s came from this dissatisfaction with phenomenology's theory of the subject with various digressions, escapes and breakthroughs, according to whether one understood an expression to be positive or negative—to linguistics, to psychology, to Nietzsche.

Q: In any case, Nietzsche represented a certain experience in order to offer the founding act of a subject a check.

MF: Exactly. And here French authors like Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille are very important for us. As I just said, I asked myself why I read Nietzsche. I do know why I read Nietzsche. I read Nietzsche because of Bataille and I read Bataille because of Blanchot. It's not true at all that Nietzsche first appeared in French philosophy in the 1970s. At first his influence appeared in the discourse of people who were Marxists in the 1960s and left Marxism as a result of Nietzsche. But those who first reached back to Nietzsche didn't want to leave Marxism. They were not Marxists. They wanted to leave phenomenology.

Q: They spoke one after the other of historians of science and then about writing a history of knowledge, a history of rationality, a history of reason. Before we return to

## ***240 How Much Does It Cost.***

Nietzsche one can certainly summarize these four terms: one can assume that is a matter of quasi-synonyms.

MF: No, not at all. I have described a movement which encompassed many parts and many different problems. I didn't identify the problems. I'm speaking about relationships of research and the proximity of the people who practice them.

Q: Can one attempt to ascertain their relationships?

MF: That's not easy to do in an interview. The history of science played a significant role in the philosophy of France. If modern philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries derives primarily from the Kantian question, namely "What is Enlightenment?" and if one admits that modern philosophy took up the test of every historical moment, since reason in the form of "maturity" and "without guardian" could appear, under its principle functions, so the function of philosophy of the 19th century consists of the question after the moment in which reason finds access to autonomy, what history means to reason and which value the sway of reason in the modern world straight through the three great forms of objective thought, of technical apparatus and political organization, must be accorded. That was a great task for philosophy since the test of these three domains signifies a reckoning or introducing an unsettling question into the realm of reason. It meant, continuing the Kantian question of "What is Enlightenment?" This taking up against this reiteration of Kant's question in France has found a certain and by the way inadequate form: "What is the history of science? What has happened since Greek mathematics to modern physics, since this universe of science has been erected?" From Auguste Comte until the 1960s it was the philosophical task of history of science to

.. *For Reason to Tell the Truth? 241*

take up this question again. In Germany the question of the history of reason or the history of forms of rationality in Europe manifested itself not so much in the history of science as much more in that stream of thought, which, talking in generalities, stretches from Max Weber to Critical Theory.

Q: Yes, reflection on norms and values.

MF: From Max Weber to Habermas. It seems to me that there the same questions arise about the history of reason, about the various forms of exercising this sway of reason. Surprisingly, France knew little, indirectly or not at all the stream of Weber's thought. Critical Theory or the Frankfurt School. By the way, that presents a small historical problem, which vexes me and I cannot escape from it. It's known that many representatives of the Frankfurt School came to Paris in 1935 to find refuge. But they left again fairly rapidly, most likely repelled—some have said this—^in any case sad and disheartened that they had not found acclaim again. The 1940s came, but they had already left for England or North America, where they were really received much better. A small agreement was struck between the Frankfurt School and a French philosophical thought, which would have been able to come to an understanding over the history of science, as well as the question of the history of rationality. I can assure you, that during my student days none of my professors mentioned the Frankfurt School.

Q: That's amazing.

MF: If I had known the Frankfurt School at the right time, I would have been spared a lot of work. Some nonsense, I wouldn't have expressed and taken many detours as I sought

## 242 *How Much Does It Cost.*

not to let myself be led astray when the Frankfurt School had already opened the ways. There is a remarkable problem of non-penetration of two forms of thought, which are akin to each other. Perhaps it is this proximity which explains the non-penetration. Nothing obscures a common problem more than two related ways of approaching it.

Q: It is interesting that you say you would have avoided certain things if you had been familiar with the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, especially since Habermas and Negt have applauded your efforts. In a conversation with Habermas, he praised to me your idea of *la bifurcation de la raison*—that in every moment reason is supposed to be divided in two. Despite that I asked myself if you would agree with the bifurcation of reason as Critical Theory conceives of it. That is, with the dialectic of reason according to which reason is perverted by the effect of its own power, is transformed and reduced to a type of thought which is technical thought. The thought in Critical Theory is that of a dialectical continuity of reason, with a perversion, which changes it completely suddenly and which serves to correct it, which should be the beginning of the battle for emancipation. The will to knowledge has made in its own way a lot of trust in history ambiguous (*bifurquer*). The word *bifurquer* is perhaps not the right word. Reason has divided knowledge many times.

MF: Yes, one has often tried to blackmail all criticism of reason and every critical test of the history of rationality so that one either recognizes reason or casts it into irrationalism—as if it were not possible to write a rational criticism of rationality, a rational history of all ambiguity and bifurcations, a contingent history of rationality. Since Max Weber in the Frankfurt School and in every case with many historians of

science like Canguilhem it was a matter of determining the form of rationalism, which is presented as the ruling one and to which one gives the status of reason, in order to let it appear as one of the possible forms of rational work. In this history of French science, which is considerably significant, Gaston Bachelard also plays a central role.

Q: Despite that the hymns of praise are a bit poisoned. According to Habermas you described the moment of the bifurcation of reason splendidly. This bifurcation is supposed to be a one-time occurrence, you had determined, as reason took a turn, which led to technical rationalism, to a self-diminution, to a self-limiting. If this bifurcation is also a split, then it could only have happened a single time in history, in order to divide two realms as one has called them since Kant. This analysis of bifurcation is Kantian. There is knowledge of understanding, the knowledge of reason, technical reason and moral reason. In order to judge this bifurcation one accepts the position of moral-practical reason. Therefore, a one-time bifurcation, a division between technical and practical which governs all of the history of thought in Germany. You just said that this tradition stems from the question "What is Enlightenment?" This praise seems to diminish your assessment of the history of ideas.

MF: In fact, I do not speak of a bifurcation of reason. Rather I speak of multiple bifurcations. I speak of an endless prolific division. I am not speaking of the moment when reason became technical. At the present, in order to give an example I am researching the problem of technology of self in Greco-Roman antiquity. How men, life, self were objects of a certain number of *technai*, which can be compared completely in their compelling rationality of a production technology.

## 244 *How Much Does It Cost.*

Q: But without including the entire society.

MF: Without including the entire society. What a *technai* or technology of self brings to development is a historical phenomenon, which is completely analyzable and determinable and is not the bifurcation of reason. In the prolific division, breaks, caesuras, this was an occurrence, a significant epoch, which had noteworthy consequences, but is not a one-time phenomenon.

Q: If one then assumes that the phenomenon of the self-perversion of reason is not a one-time occurrence, didn't occur just once in history where reason lost something essential, something substantial—as Weber would say—does your work aim to rehabilitate fruitful reason? Is there another kind of conception of reason in your work, another concept of rationality as that which is accepted by us today.

MF: Yes. But here I would like to free myself from phenomenology which was my starting point. I don't believe that there is here a kind of founding act through which reason in its essence discovers or would be engaged and afterwards could be broken off from any occurrence. I believe that there is a self-creation of reason and therefore I am trying to analyze the forms of rationality: various proofs, various formulations, various modifications by which rationalities educe each other, contradict one another, chase each other away, without one therefore being able to designate a moment in which reason would have lost its basic design or changed from rationalism to irrationalism. Very schematically, I wanted in the 1960s to give up the phenomenological thesis as well as the Marxist thesis (Lukács). There was a rationality which was the exemplary form of reason itself which had been led into a crisis by a number of social necessities (capitalism or even more the

## *.For Reason to Tell the Truth? 245*

transition of one form of capitalism to another). That is, into a forgetting of reason and a descent into irrationalism. That is the second great model, schematically correct and unjust, from which I tried to free myself.

Q: According to this model there was a one-time bifurcation, be it after a forgetting, be it after an expropriation by a class. Therefore the emancipation movement in history did not just consist of a retaking of what had been expropriated in order to re-expropriate it, but rather on the contrary in that reason was given back its entire truth, given back its status of absolute universal science. It is clear that you have no proposal of a new science or an expanded science.

MF; Absolutely not.

Q; But you show that every time a form of rationality asserts itself, it occurs through division, that is, through closure or alienation, through the demarcation of a boundary between itself and another. Does your proposal include a wish to rehabilitate this other one? For example, when you embrace the silence of a madman, do you consider it a language which expresses itself comprehensively on the necessities of the creation of works?

MF; Yes. What interested me in this general framework were the forms of rationality, which the human subject applied to himself. While the historian of science in France busied himself primarily with the problem of the constitution of scientific objects, I asked myself another question. How does it happen that the human subject makes himself into an object of possible knowledge, through which forms of rationality, through which historical necessities, and at what price? My question is this; How much does it cost the subject to be

## 246 *How Much Does It Cost.*

able to tell the truth about itself? How much does it cost the subject as madman to be able to tell the truth about itself? About the cost of constituting the madman as the absolute other and in that it not only pays this theoretical price, but also an institutional and even economic price as the organization of psychiatry allows it to be determined. A complex and multi-layered totality with an institutionalized game, class relationships, class conflicts, modalities of knowledge and finally a whole history, subjects and reason are involved in it. That is what I tried to reconstitute. That is perhaps a completely crazy, very complex project, of which I could only observe a few moments, a few special points, like the problem of the insane subject. How can one tell the truth about an insane subject? Those were my first two books. *The Order of Things* asked, what is the cost of problematizing and analyzing the speaking, working, living subject. That's why I transferred the same kinds of questions to criminals and penal institutions. How can one tell the truth about oneself as a criminal. And I want to continue that in respect to sexuality. How can the subject tell the truth about itself as a subject of sexual gratification, and at what cost?

Q: It is in no way a matter of exhuming using archaeology something archaic which existed before history.

MF: No. Absolutely not. When I use the word archaeology, which I don't do anymore, then I use it to say that the type of analysis which I conduct was displaced, not in time but by the level at which it is determined. My problem is not to study the evolution of the history of ideas, but rather much more to observe the ideas, how this or that object could appear as a possible object of perception. Why for example insanity became at one time an object of perception, which corresponded to a type of recognition. This displacement between

## ..For Reason to Tell the Truth? 247

the ideas about insanity and the constitution of insanity as object I wanted to delineate through the use of the word archaology as opposed to history.

Q: I asked this question because there are now tendencies, under the guise that the New German Right is influenced by Nietzsche, to assume that French Nietzscheanism comes from the same vein. One mixes everything together in order to renew basically the fronts of a new theoretical class war, which is very difficult to find these days.

MF: There is not just *one* Nietzscheanism. One cannot say there is a true Nietzscheanism and that this one is truer than the other. But those who found Nietzsche a tool more than 25 years ago, to change their position in regard to the body of philosophical thought ruled by one of phenomenology or Marxism, have nothing to do with those who use Nietzsche today. Gilles Deleuze wrote a powerful book about Nietzsche and Nietzsche is present in his work in general, but without noisy reference and without the desire to flaunt Nietzsche's banner for a rhetorical or political effect. It is impressive that someone like Deleuze simply turned to Nietzsche and took him seriously. I also wanted to do that: what serious use can one make of Nietzsche? I gave a lecture about Nietzsche and have written a little about him.' The only honor I accorded him, weakly, was naming the first part of *The History of Sexuality* "The Will to Knowledge."

Q: Motivated by this will to knowledge there was always a rapport or relationship. I suspect you avoid both these words because they are colored by Hegelianism. Perhaps we should speak about evaluation, as Nietzsche did; a way to evaluate truth and the power to give it structure to create it; a power which does not exist as archaically as reason or source.

## 248 *How Much Does It Cost.*

but rather a relationship of powers—perhaps already a relationship of power in the act of constituting all knowledge.

MF: No, I wouldn't say that. That is too complicated. My problem is the relationship of self to self and that of saying the truth. What I thank Nietzsche for, I owe more to his texts of around 1880 in which the question of truth, of the truth of history and the will to truth were central for him. The first text which Sartre wrote as a young student was a Nietzschean text. "The History of Truth," a tiny text which appeared for the first time around 1925 in a *gymnasium* journal. His departure point was from the same problem. And it is very noteworthy that his way led from the history of truth to phenomenology while the way of the subsequent generation to which we belong, arose particularly to sever itself from phenomenology in order to return to the question of the history of truth.

Q: You admit to an affinity to Deleuze, to a certain extent. Does this include Deleuze's concept of desire?

MF: No.

Q: It seems to me that desire by Deleuze is a productive desire and gives the species its form-giving reason for genesis.

MF: I don't want to take a position or say what Deleuze meant. People say what they want to or what they can. When a system of thought is created it always becomes fixed and identified in the heart of a cultural tradition. It is perfectly normal that this cultural tradition takes it up and restricts it, does what it wants with it, has it express what it didn't say, but with the illusion that it is only another form of

what one intended to say. That belongs to the play of culture. But that cannot be my relationship to Deleuze. I will not say what he wanted to say. His problem was the problem of desire. Probably we will find in the theory of desire the effect of a relationship to Nietzsche. While my problem always was truth. *Wahr-Sagen* and the relationship between it and the forms of reflexivity, the reflexivity of self above self.

Q: Yes, I think Nietzsche did not differentiate thoroughly enough the will to knowledge from the will to power.

MF: There's a noticeable shifting in Nietzsche's text between those who are governed by the question about the will to knowledge and the will to power. But I didn't want to debate this for a simple reason. I haven't read Nietzsche for a good many years.

Q: The elaboration seemed to be important for me because of the truly confused reception of Nietzsche abroad, as characterized by the way also in France.

MF: My relationship to Nietzsche is not a historical relationship. I am not so interested in Nietzsche's history of thought as in this quality of the challenge, which I felt—rather long ago—as I read Nietzsche for the first time. If one reads "*Fröhliche Wissenschaft*" or "*Morgenröte*" while one is being formed by the great and old university tradition of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, then one stumbles on these witty, strange, and impudent texts and says to oneself, good, I won't do it the way my friends, colleagues, and professors do it, peering in arrogance from on high. What is the epitome of philosophical intensity and what are the actual philosophical effects, which we can find in these texts. That for me is the challenge of Nietzsche.

## 250 *How Much Does It Cost..*

Q: In the actual reception there is a second confusion, that is post-modernism, to which not insignificant people refer and which played a certain role in Germany, since Habermas took up this expression and criticized it. Do you see a tendency in it? Can you ascertain a place for yourself in it?

MF: I must say, I find that difficult to answer. First, because I never really understood how modernism is defined in France. It's clear by Baudelaire, but after that it seems to lose meaning for me. I don't know in what sense Germans speak of modernism. I know that Americans are planning a kind of seminar with Habermas and me and Habermas proposed modernism as the topic. I'm at a loss; I don't know what that means nor what the problematic is. As much as I recognize behind the expression Structuralism, the problem of the subject and its transformation, as little do I see the common problematic between post-modernism or post-structuralism,

Q: Accepting modernism or rejecting it is not only ambiguous, it truncates modernism. Also it has at least three definitions: the definition of the historian, Weber's definition, and Adorno's which alludes to Benjamin's *Baudelaire*. Habermas seems to prefer here against Adorno the tradition of reason, that is, Weber's definition of modernism. Therefore he perceives in post-modernism the decline of reason, so that reason basically becomes a form of the will to knowledge, among other things.

MF: That isn't my problem. I don't at all identify reason with the totality of the forms of rationality. The latter could until recently dominate in the types of knowledge, the forms of technology and the modalities of governance. The application of rationality occurs primarily in these areas. I don't deal with the problem of art, it is too complicated. For

## *..For Reason to Tell the Truth? 251*

me no given form of rationality is reason. Therefore I don't see how one can say that the forms of rationality, which have governed these three realms, break apart and disperse. I simply see multiple transformations—^but why should one call that the demise of reason? Endlessly other forms of rationality are born. Therefore I claim that reason is a long narrative, which ends today and makes room for another, and makes no sense.

Q: The field is open for many forms of narratives.

MF: We hit upon here one of the most destructive habits of contemporary thought. Perhaps even one of the most destructive of modern thought—in any case, of post-Hegelian thought. That is that the moment of the present is considered in history as the break, the climax, the fulfillment, the return of youth, etc. The solemnity with which everyone who has a philosophical discourse reflects his own time seems a stigma to me. I say this particularly because it happens to me and one finds it constantly in Nietzsche. One must probably find the humility to admit that the time of one's own life is not the one-time, basic, revolutionary moment of history, from which everything begins and is completed. At the same time humility is needed to say without solemnity that the present time is rather exciting and demands an analysis. We must ask ourselves the question, what is today? In relation to the Kantian question, What is Enlightenment? One can say that it is the task of philosophy to explain what today is and what we are today, but without breast-beating drama and theatricality and maintaining that this moment is the greatest damnation or daybreak of the rising sun. No, it is a day like every other, or much more, a day which is never like another.

Q: That brings up a lot of questions which you have posed yourself. What is today? Can one characterize this ep-

## **252 *How Much Does It Cost.***

och despite everything as a great fragmentation in regard to others, through deterritorialization and schizophrenia?

MF: I want to say about the task of a diagnosis of today that it does not consist only of a description of who we are, rather a hne of fragility of today to follow and understand, if and how what is, can no longer be what it is. In this sense, the description must be formulated in a kind of virtual break, which opens room, understood as a room of concrete freedom, that is possible transformation.

Q: Does the practical work of the intellectual focus on this place of the crack?

MF: I believe so. The work of the intellect is to show that what is, does not have to be, what it is. Therefore this designation and description of reality never has the value of a prescription according to the form “because this is, that is.” Therefore the return to history makes sense in the respect that history shows that that which is was not always so. It unites casual movements into threads of a fragile and uncertain history. Thus things were formed which give the impression of the greatest self-evidence. What reason considers its necessity or much more what various forms of rationality claim to be their necessity existence, has a history which we can determine completely and recover from the tapestry of contingency. But this doesn’t mean that these forms of rationality are irrational. They rest upon a foundation of human practices and human faces, because they are made they can be unmade—of course, assuming we know how they were made.

Q: This work on the breaks is both descriptive and practical, is work on a particular place.

## *..For Reason to Tell the Truth? 253*

MF: Perhaps a place and perhaps work which must return as a result of the questions asked there so far back into historical analysis.

Q: Is the work on the place of the break that which you call microphysics of power or analysis of power?

MF: A little. These forms of rationality in the process of dominance must be analyzed for themselves. These forms of rationality are alien to other forms of power like recognition or technology. On the contrary, there is an exchange, transfer, interference. But it is impossible however to designate these three realms as the only and constant form of rationality. We find the same types again displaced, dense manifold circuits, but still no isomorphism.

Q: Sometimes or always?

MF: There are no universal rules which establish the types of relationship between rationality and the processes of governance.

Q: I asked this question because a number of critics express the same criticism—like Jean Baudrillard\*—which claims the beginning of microphysics reflects a situation in which power has been rendered irreparable through dissemination. That you speak up at a point in time when capitalism has decomposed the subject so much that it is possible to realize that the subject was never anything but a multiplicity of positions.

MF: I'll talk about that soon but I started with something else. First, when I examine the rationality of governance, I seek to establish circuits which are not isomorphisms. Sec-

## 254 *How Much Does It Cost..*

ond, when I speak about the relationships of power and the forms of rationality, which regulate and govern these, then I'm not speaking about the power, which governs all of society and superimposes its rationality on it. Relationships of power are manifold. They have various forms which can be executed within the family, inside an institution, an administration, between a ruling and subservient class in specific and common forms of rationality. It is a matter of a field of analysis and not a reference to a unique instance. Third, when I examine relationships of power, I create no theory of power. It is how relationships of power interact, are determining elements in every relationship which I want to examine; between the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth when my question is: How can the subject tell the truth about itself? That is obvious for my examination of insanity. The subject was able to tell the truth about his insanity, because the structures of the Other allowed him to. That was possible as a result of a specific kind of dominance, which some persons exerted over others.

I am no theoretician of power. The question of power in itself doesn't interest me. When I did speak often about this question of power, I did so because the given political analysis of the phenomenon of power could not be properly given justice from the fine and small appearances which I wanted to recall, when I asked the question of the "*dire-vrai*" about oneself. If I "tell the truth" about myself, I constitute myself as subject by a certain number of relationships of power, which weigh upon me and which I lay upon others. I am not creating a theory of power or an analysis of contemporary power. I am working on the way the reflexivity of self to self has been established and which discourse of truth is tied to it. When I speak about the institutions of confinement in the 18th century, then I am speaking about the point in time of existing relationships of power. I take contemporary psychiatry for ex-

amination. A number of problems arise in the interdependencies of function of the institution. They point to a relatively ancient history, which encompasses several centuries. I write the history or archaeology of the kind and way one tried in the 17th or 18th century to tell the truth about insanity. I want to show it as it existed at that time. If for example I described the criminal and system of punishment in the 18th century I have researched how the forms and practices of power in a small number of 18th century institutions, which can serve as a model, existed. Therefore, I do not find it correct at all to say power is no longer the same. **A**

Translated by Mia Foret and Marion Martius.

Notes

- 1 Dominique Desanti, *A Woman in Revolt: A Biography of Flora Tristan*, trans. Elizabeth Zewin (New York: Crown, 1976); *Les Staliniens, 1944-1956: une expérience politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1975).
- 2 Mikel Dufresne, *The Sciences of Art* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1963); Jean-François Lyotard, *Driftworks* (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1984).
- 3 Paul Ricoeur wrote extensively on hermeneutics. See, for example. *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1974), and *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976).
- 4 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). See also *On the Line*, trans. John Johnston (New York:

Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1983), and *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1987).

5 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Semiotext(e)* (Vol III, No. 1, 1978).

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1987). See also Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, trans. Paul Foss, John Johnston, and Paul Patton (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1983); *Simulations*, trans. Philip Beitchman, Paul Foss, Paul Patton (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1985); and *The Ecstasy of Communications*, trans. Bernard Schutze and Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1988).

# 20

## An Ethics of Pleasure

Q: In your interview with geographers at *Herodote*, you said that architecture becomes political at the end of the eighteenth century. Obviously, it was political in earlier periods, too, such as during the Roman Empire. What is particular about the eighteenth century?

MF: My statement was awkward in that form. Of course I did not mean to say that architecture was not political before, becoming so only at that time. I only meant to say that in the eighteenth century one sees the development of reflection upon architecture as a function of the aims and techniques of the government of societies. One begins to see a form of political literature that addresses what the order of a society should be, what a city should be, given the requirements of the maintenance of order; given that one should avoid epidemics, avoid revolts, permit a decent and moral family life, and so on. In terms of these objectives, how is one to conceive of both

# 21

## What Calls For Punishment?

Q: Your book *Discipline and Punish*, published in 1974, fell like a meteor onto the domain of criminology and penal studies. Proposing an analysis of the penal system in the perspective of political tactics and the technology of power, this work collided with traditional conceptions of delinquency and the social function of punishment. It has troubled repressive judges, at least those who examine the meaning of their work; it has shaken up a number of criminologists who hardly enjoyed having their discourse described as idle chatter. Increasingly rare today are books on criminology that don't refer to *Discipline and Punish* as an incontrovertible work. However, the penal system doesn't change and the "idle chatter" of criminologists continues invariably, as if one rendered homage to the theoretician of juridico-penal epistemology without being able to learn from his teachings, as if a totally airtight barrier existed between theory and practice. No doubt your intention was not to be a reformer, but can one imagine a politics of criminology that would take support from your analysis and try to draw from it certain lessons?

## ***280 What Calls for Punishment?***

MF: Perhaps I first ought to explain precisely what I intended to do in this book. I didn't want to write a directly critical work, if one means by "critical" the denunciation of the drawbacks of today's penal system. Nor did I want to write an historical work about the institution, in the sense that I did not want to recount how the penal and carceral institution functioned in the course of the 19th century. I tried to pose another problem: to discover the system of thought, the form of rationality, which since the end of the 18th century has underlain the idea that the prison is in sum the best means, one of the most efficient and most rational, to punish in fi'actions in a society. It is clear that in doing this I had certain preoccupations concerning what one could do now. Indeed, it often appeared to me that in opposing as one did in the traditional way through reformism and revolution, one did not give oneself the means to think what could yield to a real, profound and radical transformation. It seems to me that very often in the reforms of the penal system one accepted implicitly and sometimes even explicitly the system of rationality that had been defined and put into place a long time ago, and that one tried simply to know what the institutions and the practices would be that would permit realization of the project and attainment of its ends. By isolating the system of rationality underlying punitive practices, I wanted to indicate what postulates of thought it was necessary to reexamine if one wanted to transform the penal system.

I do not say that one had necessarily to free oneself from them; but I believe that it is very important when one wants to do a work of transformation to know not only what are the institutions and their real effects, but equally what is the type of thought that sustains them: what can one still accept of this system of rationality? What part, on the contrary, deserves to be set aside, transformed, or abandoned? I had tried to do the same thing in regard to the history of psychiat-

## *What Calls for Punishment? 281*

lie institutions. And it's true that I have been somewhat surprised and fairly disappointed to see that all that did not derive from any enterprise of reflection and thought that might have been able to re-unite, around the same problem, very different people: judges, theoreticians of penal law, employees of penitentiary institutions, lawyers, social workers, and people with prison experience. It's true, on that side, no doubt for social and cultural reasons, that the 1970s have been extremely disappointing. Many criticisms have been launched in every direction; often these ideas have had certain influence, but there rarely has been a crystallization of questions posed as a collective enterprise, to determine in any case what are the transformations to be made. In any case, for my part and despite my desire, I have never had the possibility of a working contact with any professor of penal law, any judge, or any political party—that's obvious. Thus the Socialist Party, founded in 1972, which for nine years was able to prepare its assumption to power and which to a certain point echoed in its discourse several themes developed in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, never made a serious attempt to define in advance what its real practice would be when it came to power. It seems institutions, groups and political parties that might have been able to promote this work of reflection did nothing...

Q: One has the impression that the conceptual system hasn't evolved at all. Although jurists and psychiatrists recognize the pertinence and the novelty of your analyses, they collide, it would seem, with the impossibility of translating them into practice and into research on what is ambiguously called "a politics of criminality."

MF: You are posing a problem that is indeed very important and difficult. You know that I belong to a generation of people that has seen most of the utopias framed in the

## ***252 What Calls for Punishment?***

19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century collapse one after another, and that has also seen the perverse and sometimes disastrous effects that could follow from projects which were the most generous in their intentions. I have always insisted on not playing the role of the prophet intellectual who tells people in advance what they must do and prescribes to them the frameworks of thought, the objectives and the means—all drawn from his own brain while working in an office among his books. It has seemed to me that the work of an intellectual, what I call a “specific intellectual,” is to try to isolate, in their power of constraint but also in the contingency of their historical formation, the systems of thought that have now become familiar to us, that appear evident to us, and that have become part of our perceptions, attitudes and behavior. Next, it is necessary to work in common with practitioners, not only to modify institutions and practices but to elaborate forms of thought.

Q: What you have called the “idle chatter of criminologists” and which no doubt has been poorly understood, is it precisely the fact that this system of thought in which all these analyses have been carried out for a century and a half has not been put into question?

MF: Yes, that’s it. Perhaps that phrase was a little too off-hand. Let’s take it back then. But I have the impression that the difficulties and contradictions that penal practice has encountered over the last two centuries have never been deeply re-examined. And now, one hundred and fifty years later, the same notions, the same themes, the same reproaches, the same criticisms, the same demands are being repeated, as if nothing had changed, and in a sense, indeed nothing has. From the moment when an institution presents so many drawbacks, arouses so much criticism, and can only give rise to the

## *What Calls for Punishment? 283*

indefinite repetition of the same discourse, “idle chatter” is a serious symptom.

Q: In *Discipline and Punish*, you analyze this “strategy” which consists in transforming certain illegalisms into delinquency, making a success out of this apparent failure of the prison. Everything happens as if a certain “group” more or less consciously used this means to arrive at certain effects which would not be announced. One has the impression, perhaps false, that that’s a ruse of power that subverts the projects and undermines the discourse of humanist reformers. From this point of view, there would be some similarity between your analysis and the model of Marxist interpretation of history (I am thinking of the paper in which you show that a certain type of illegalism is singled out for repression whereas others are tolerated). But one does not see clearly, in contrast with Marxism, what “group” or what “class” or what interests are at work in this strategy.

MF: In the analysis of an institution different things must be distinguished. First, what one could call its *rationality or its end*, that is to say the objectives that it proposes and the means it has of attaining these objectives; in short, the program of the institution such as it has been defined; for example, Bentham’s conception concerning the prison. Secondly, there is the question of *effects*. Obviously the effects only rarely coincide with the ends; thus the objective of the corrective prison, of the means of rehabilitating the individual, has not been attained; the effect has been rather the inverse, and the prison has been led rather to the behavior of delinquency. But when the effect does not coincide with the end there are several possibilities: either one reforms or one utilizes these effects for something that wasn’t foreseen at the beginning but which can well have a meaning and a use. This

## ***284 What Calls for Punishment?***

is what one could call the usage: thus the prison, which did not have the effect of rehabilitation, has served rather as a mechanism of elimination. The fourth level of the analysis is what one could call the “strategic configurations”—^in other words, beginning from these usages in some new and unforeseen way, but in spite of everything intentional to a certain point, one can construct new rational behaviors, different from the initial program but which thus respond to their objective, and in which play between different social groups can take place.

Q: Effects that are themselves transformed into ends.

MF: That’s right. They are effects that are taken up in different usages and these usages are rationalized, organized in any case by means of new ends.

Q: But that’s obviously not premeditated. There’s no occult Machiavellian project at the base.

MF: Not at all. There’s no person or group, no titular head of this strategy: but beginning from effects different from their initial ends and from the capacity to utilize these effects, a certain number of strategies are formed.

Q: Strategies of which the finality in its turn partly escapes those who conceive them.

MF: Yes. Sometimes these strategies are completely conscious: one can say that the manner in which the police use the prison is almost conscious. These strategies are simply not formulated, in contrast to the program. The institutions’s first program, its initial finality is on the contrary displayed and used as justification, while the strategic configurations are not often clear in the very eyes of those who occupy a place and

## *What Calls for Punishment? 285*

play a role there. But this play can perfectly solidify an institution, and the prison has been solidified, despite all the criticisms that have been made, because several strategies of different groups have come to intersect at this particular place.

Q: You explain very clearly how the penalty of imprisonment was from the beginning of the 20th century denounced as the great failure of penal justice, and in the same terms as is done today. There is no penal expert who is not convinced that the prison does not attain the ends it was given: the rate of criminality doesn't diminish; far from "socializing," the prison produces delinquents. It increases the recidivism; it doesn't guarantee security. Yet the penitentiary establishments are always full, and one sees no initiation of a change, in this regard, under the socialist government in France.

But at the same time you have turned around the question. Rather than search for the reasons for a perennial failure, you are asking what this problematic failure serves, and who profits from it. You discover that the prison is an instrument of differential management and the control of illegalisms. In this sense, far from constituting a failure the prison on the contrary has succeeded perfectly in specifying a certain delinquency, that of the popular classes, in producing a determined category of delinquents, and in circumscribing them better to disassociate them from other categories of lawbreakers coming notably from the bourgeoisie.

Finally, you observe that the carceral system succeeds in rendering legitimate the legal power to punish, which it "naturalizes." This idea is linked to the old question of the legitimacy and the foundation of punishment, for the exercise of disciplinary power does not exhaust the power of punishment, even if that's its major function, as you have shown.

MF: Let's set aside, if you like, several misunderstandings. First, in this book on the prison it is clear that I did

## ***286 What Calls for Punishment?***

not want to pose the question of the basis of the right to punish. What I wanted to show is the fact that, starting from a certain conception of the basis of the right to punish, one can find in the work of penal experts and philosophers of the 18th century that different means of punishment were perfectly conceivable. Indeed, in the reform movement of the second half of the 18th century, one finds a whole spectrum of means to punish that are suggested, and finally it happens that the prison was in some way the privileged one. It has not been the only means, but it became nonetheless one of the principle ones. My problem was to know why this means was chosen. And how this means of punishing reoriented not only judicial practice but even a certain number of rather fundamental problems in penal law. Thus the importance given to the psychological aspects or the psychopathology of the criminal personality, which is affirmed all along in the 19th century, and which was to a certain degree extrapolated from a punitive practice that took rehabilitation as its end and encountered only the impossibility of rehabilitating. I therefore left the problem of the basis of the right to punish to the side, in order to make another problem appear, which was I believe more often neglected by historians: the means of punishment and their rationality. But that does not mean that the question of the basis of punishment is not important. On this point I believe that one must be radical and moderate at the same time, and recall what Nietzsche said over a century ago, to wit, that in our contemporary societies we no longer know what we are doing when we punish and what at bottom, in principle, can justify punishment. Everything happens as if we carry out a punishment by allowing a certain number of heterogeneous ideas, at different layers of sedimentation and stemming from different histories, distinct movements and divergent rationalities, to prevail.

Thus, if I have not spoken about the basis for the right to punish it's not because I consider it to be unimportant:

## *What Calls for Punishment? 287*

I think that one of the most fundamental tasks would be to rethink the meaning that one can give to legal punishment today, in its articulation with law, morality and the institution.

Q: The problem of the definition of punishment is all the more complex because not only do we not know exactly what it is to punish but it seems that we are loathe to do it. Indeed, judges more and more refrain from punishing; they intend to care for, treat, re-educate, and cure, a little as if they were trying to exculpate themselves from exercising repression. In *Discipline and Punish* moreover you write that “penal and psychiatric discourse blur their boundaries.” And, “Thus is established, with the multiplicity of scientific discourses, a difficult and infinite relationship, which penal justice today is not ready to control. The maker of justice is no longer the master of truth.” Today the recourse to psychiatry, to psychology and to social welfare is routine judiciary fact, as much penal as civil. You analyze phenomena that no doubt indicate an epistemological change in the juridico-penal sphere. Penal justice seems to have changed meaning. The judge less and less applies the penal code to a lawbreaker; more and more he treats pathologies and disturbances of the personality.

MF: I think you’re completely right. Why has penal justice established these relationships with psychiatry, which ought to greatly hinder it. For obviously, between the problematic of psychiatry and what is demanded by the very practice of penal law concerning responsibility I would not say there is contradiction but heterogeneity. They are two forms of thought that are not on the same plane, and consequently one doesn’t see by what rule the one could utilize the other, yet it is certain, and it’s a striking thing since the 19th century, that penal justice, which one would have supposed would have enormously distrusted this psychiatric, psychological and medical thought, instead seems to have been fascinated by it.

## 288 *What Calls for Punishment?*

Of course there were resistances and conflicts; it's not a matter of underestimating them. But finally, if one takes a longer period of time, a century and a half, it seems that penal justice has been very accomodating, and more and more accomodating to these forms of thought. It is reasonable that the psychiatric problematic has sometimes hampered penal justice. It seems that today it facilitates it by allowing it to leave in a state of equivocation the question of knowing what we do when we punish.

Q: You observe in the last pages of *Discipline and Punish* that the disciplinary technique has become one of the major functions of our society, that power attains its highest degree of intensity in the penitential institution. You say on the other hand that the prison does not remain necessarily indispensable to a society like ours, for it can lose much of its reason for being, in a setting where mechanisms of normalization are more and more numerous. Could one therefore conceive of a society without prisons? This utopia begins to be taken rather seriously by certain criminologists. For example, Louk Hulsman, a professor of penal law at the University of Rotterdam and an expert on the United Nations, defends a theory of the abolition of the penal system. The reasoning that founds this theory brings together some of your analyses: the penal system creates the delinquent; it ends up being fundamentally incapable of realizing the social finalities that it reputedly pursues; every reform is illusory; the only coherent solution is its abolition. Louk Hulsman notes that a majority of offenses escape the penal system without putting society into peril. That being the case, he proposes to de-criminalize systematically the major part of the acts and behaviors that the law establishes as a crime offense, and to substitute for the concept of crime that of the "problem-situation." Instead of punishing and stigmatizing, try to regulate conflicts through

procedures of arbitration and non-judicial conciliation. Look at infractions as social risks, the essential being the indemnification of the victims. The intervention of the judicial apparatus would be reserved for serious matters, or as the last recourse in the case of failure in attempts of reconciliation or solutions by civil law. Louk Hulsman's theory is one of those that assumes a cultural revolution.

What do you think of this idea of abolition, thus schematically summarized? Can possible extensions of *Discipline and Punish* be seen there?

MF; I think there are an enormous number of interesting things in Hulsman's thesis, even if it is only the challenge that it poses to the question of the basis of the right to punish by asserting that there is no longer any reason to punish. I also find very interesting the fact that he poses the question of the basis of punishment by taking account at the same time of the means by which one responds to something considered an infraction. In other words, the question of means is not simply a consequence of what might be posed concerning the basis of the right to punish, but for him the reflection on the basis of the right to punish and the manner of reacting to an infraction must be part of the same thing. All that appears to me to be very stimulating and important. Perhaps I am not sufficiently familiar with his work, but I would ask about the following points. Is the notion of problem-situations not going to lead to a psychologizing of both the question and the reaction? Doesn't a practice like this one risk—even if it's not what he wants—leading to a kind of dissociation between on the one side the social, collective and institutional reactions to the crime which will be considered an accident and which will have to be regulated in the same way, and then on the other side a hyper-psychologizing around the criminal himself that will constitute him as the object of psychiatric or medical interventions with therapeutic ends?

## ***290 What Calls for Punishment?***

Q: But does this conception of the crime not lead to the abolition of notions of responsibility and guilt? To the extent to which evil exists in our society, does not the consciousness of guilt, which according to Ricoeur was born with the Greeks, fill a necessary social function? Can one conceive of a society exonerated from every feeling of guilt?

MF: I don't think that the question is to know if a society can function without guilt but if a society can make guilt function as an organizing principle and foundation of a law. And that's where the question becomes difficult.

Paul Ricoeur is perfectly right to pose the problem of the moral conscience, and he poses it as a philosopher or historian of philosophy. It is completely legitimate to say that guilt exists, and that it has existed since a certain time. One can discuss whether the feeling of guilt comes from the Greeks or has another origin. In any case, guilt exists and one doesn't see how a society like ours, still so strongly rooted in a tradition which is also that of the Greeks, could dispense with it. It has been possible for a very long time to consider whether or not one could directly articulate a system of law and a judicial institution onto a notion like that of guilt. For us, on the contrary, the question is open.

Q: Today, when an individual appears before one or another instance of penal justice, he must account not only for the interdicted act he has committed but also for his very life.

MF: It's true. In the United States, for example, indeterminate penalties have been much discussed. Almost everywhere, I believe, one has abandoned the practice, but it implied a certain tendency, a certain endeavor that appears to me not to have disappeared; the tendency to make the penal judgement bear much more on a somehow quantitative set

## *What Calls for Punishment? 291*

characterizing an existence and a manner of being taken on a specific act. There is also the measure passed recently in France concerning the carrying out of punishments. One has wanted to reinforce—and the intention is a good one—the power and control of the judiciary apparatus on the unfolding of the punishment. Which is good, because it diminishes the independence of the penitentiary institution. Only here is what we have: there will now be a tribunal, three judges I think, who will decide whether or not conditional liberty can be accorded to a prisoner; and this decision will be made by taking into account elements in which there will be first the initial infraction, which will be re-actualized in some way, since the civil party and the representatives of the victim will be present and will be able to intervene. And then one will integrate with that the elements of the individual's conduct in prison, such as have been observed, appreciated, interpreted, and judged by the guards, administrators, psychologists and doctors. It's this jumble of heterogeneous elements that will contribute to a judicial decision. Even if it is juridically acceptable, it is necessary to know what factual consequences all that will entail. And at the same time, what dangerous model that might present for penal justice in its current usage, if, in effect, a penal decision is habitually made a function of good or bad conduct.

Q: The medicalization of justice leads little by little to a removal of the penal right of judiciary practices. The subject of law cedes place to the neurotic or psychopath, more or less irresponsible, whose behavior would be determined by psycho-biological factors. In reaction against this conception, certain penal experts envisage a return to the concept of punishment more susceptible to reconciliation with the respect of liberty and the dignity of the individual. It's not a question of returning to a system of brutal and mechanical punishment that would make an abstraction of the socio-economic regime

## 292 *What Calls for Punishment?*

in which it functions, which would be ignorant of the social and political dimension of justice, but of recovering a conceptual coherence and of distinguishing between what stems from law and what from medicine. One thinks of the word of Hegel: "By considering in this sense that the penalty contains its law, one honors the criminal as a rational being."

MF: I believe that indeed the penal law is part of the social fabric in a society like ours, and that there's no reason to mask it. That means that individuals who are part of this society have to recognize each other as subjects of the law who as such are susceptible of being punished and chastised if they infringe upon some rule. There is nothing scandalous about that, I don't think. But it's the duty of society to act in such a way that concrete individuals can actually recognize each other as subjects of law. Which is difficult when the penal system used is archaic, arbitrary, and inadequate to the real problems that are posed to a society. Take for example the single domain of economic delinquency. The true *a priori* work is not to inject more and more medicine and psychiatry in order to modulate the system and make it more acceptable; it is necessary to rethink the penal system itself. I don't mean: let's return to the severity of the 1810 penal code; I mean let's return to the serious idea of a penal law that would clearly define what in a society like ours can be considered as necessary to punish, and what not; let's return to the very thought of a system defining the rules of social activity. I am suspicious of those who want to return to the system of 1810 under the pretext that medicine and psychiatry destroy the meaning of penal justice; but I am equally suspicious of those people who basically accept the system of 1810, simply by adjusting it, ameliorating it, and attenuating it through psychiatric and psychological modifications.▲

Translated by John Johnston

# 22

## The Concern for Truth

Q: *The Archeology to Knowledge* announced a forthcoming *History of Sexuality*. The next volume appeared eight years later and according to a plan completely different.

MF: I changed my mind. A work, when it's not at the same time an attempt to modify what one thinks and even what one is, is not much fun. I had begun to write two books in accordance with my original plan; but very quickly I got bored. It was unwise on my part and contrary to my habits.

Q: Why then did you do it?

MF: Out of laziness. I dreamed that a day would come when I would know in advance what I meant and would only have to say it. That was a reflection of old age. I imagined I had finally reached the age when one only has to reel out what's in one's head. It was both a form of presumption and an abandonment of restraint. Yet to work is to undertake to think something other than what one has thought before.

Q: The reader thought so too.

### ***308 The Concern for Truth***

ment and of the alliance on which it is based? These questions certainly don't define a politics; but they are questions to which those who do define a politics ought to respond.

Q: Would the role that you assume in politics correspond to this principle of "fi-ee speech" that has been the theme of your courses in recent years?

MF: Nothing is more inconsistent than a political regime that is indifferent to the truth; but nothing is more dangerous than a political system that claims to prescribe the truth. The function of "free speech" doesn't have to take legal form, just as it would be vain to believe that it resides by right in spontaneous exchanges of communication. The task of speaking the truth is an infinite labor; to respect it in its complexity is an obligation that no power can afford to short-change, unless it would impose the silence of slavery. A

Translated by John Johnston

# 23

## An Aesthetics of Existence

Q: Seven years have passed since *A History of Sexuality* appeared. I know that your last books posed problems for you and that you have encountered difficulties. Would you talk a little about these difficulties and this excursion to the Greco-Roman world, a world that was if not unknown at least foreign to you.

MF: The difficulties arose from the project itself, which was intended to avoid them. I planned my work in several volumes according to a program established in advance, telling myself that now the time had come when I could write them without difficulty simply by spinning out what was in my head, confirming what was there with the work of empirical research. But I almost died of boredom writing these books; they were too much like their precedents. For some authors, to write a book is always to risk something; for example, to fail to finish it. When one knows in advance where one wants to go, a dimension of the experience is lacking, which consists precisely in running the risk of not going to the end. Therefore I changed the general project: instead of studying sexuality at the confines of knowledge (savoir) and power.

### 310 *An Aesthetics of Existence*

I tried to investigate at a deeper level how the experience of sexuality as desire had been constituted for the subject himself. In order to disengage this problematic, I was led to look very closely at very old Latin and Greek texts, which required much preparation and effort and which left me, until the end, with a good number of uncertainties and hesitations.

Q: There is always a certain “intentionality” in your works, which has often escaped your readers. *Madness and Civilization* was at bottom the history of the constitution of this knowledge that we call psychology; *The Order of Things* was the archeology of the human sciences; *Discipline and Punish*, the setting in place of the disciplines of the body and the soul. It seems that what is at the center of your last books is what you call the “play of truth.”

MF: I don't think there is a great difference between these books and their precedents. When one writes books like these recent ones one wants very much to modify completely what one thinks and to find oneself at the end completely other than what one was at the start. Then one perceives that really one has changed very little. One has perhaps changed perspectives, one has turned the problem around, but it's always the same problem: that is, the relations between the subject, the truth and the constitution of experience. I have sought to analyze how fields like madness, sexuality and delinquency could enter into a certain play of the truth, and how on the other hand, through this insertion of human practice and behavior into the play of truth, the subject himself is effected. That was the problem of the history of madness, and of sexuality.

Q: Isn't it basically a question of a new genealogy of morals?

## *An Aesthetics of Existence 311*

MF: If not for the solemnity of the title and the imposing mark that Nietzsche left on it, I would say yes.

Q: In a piece that appeared in *Debat* (November, 1983), you speak in regard to Antiquity of a morality turned towards ethics and a morality turned towards a code. Is that the division between Greco-Roman morality and the one born of Christianity?

MF: With Christianity we see a slow progressive change brought about in relation to ancient morality, which was essentially a practice, a style of liberty. Naturally there were also certain norms of behavior that regulated the conduct of each person. But in Antiquity the will to be a moral subject, the search for an ethics of existence, was principally an effort to affirm one's liberty and to give to one's own life a certain form in which one could recognize oneself, be recognized by others, and in which even posterity could find an example.

This elaboration of one's own life as a personal work of art, even if it obeyed collective canons, was at the center, it seems to me, of moral experience, of the moral will, in Antiquity; whereas in Christianity, with the religion of the text, the idea of God's will and the principle of obedience, morality took much more the form of a code of rules. Only certain ascetic practices were more closely linked to the exercise of a personal liberty.

From Antiquity to Christianity one passes from a morality that was essentially a search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules. And if I have taken an interest in Antiquity, it is because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. To this absence of a morality, one responds, or must respond, with a research which is that of an aesthetics of existence.

### *312 An Aesthetics of Existence*

Q: Has all the knowledge of the body, sexuality and training that has accumulated in the last years ameliorated our relationship with others and our being in the world?

MF; I can't help from thinking that the whole series of things put into discussion around certain forms of existence, rules of behavior, etc., even independently of political choices, have been profoundly beneficial in relations with the body, between men and women, and with sexuality.

Q; So this knowledge has helped us to live better.

MF; There was not simply a change in our preoccupations, but in philosophical, critical, and theoretical discourse; in most of the analyses carried out one did not suggest what people ought to be, what they ought to do, what they ought to think and believe. It was a matter rather of showing how social mechanisms up to the present have been able to work, how forms of repression and constraint have acted, and then, starting from there, it seems to me, one left to the people themselves, knowing all the above, the possibility of self-determination and the choice of their own existence.

Q; Five years ago one began to read, in your seminar at the Collège de France, Hayek and Von Mises.' It was then said that, through a reflection on liberalism, Foucault is going to give us a book on politics. Liberalism thus seemed to be a detour taken to discover the individual beyond the mechanisms of power. One knows your dispute with the phenomenological subject, and the psychological subject. At that period, one began to speak of a subject of practices, and the re-reading of liberalism took place somewhat in that context. It's no secret to anyone that it was often said that there is no subject in Foucault's work. Subjects are always subjugated;

## *An Aesthetics of Existence 313*

they are the point of application of techniques, normative disciplines, but they are never sovereign subjects.

MF: We have to make distinctions. In the first place, I don't think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very sceptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more anonymous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, starting of course from a certain number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture.

Q: That leads us to the present political scene. These are difficult times: on the international level there's the blackmail of Yalta and the confrontation of blocks; on the national level there's the spectre of crisis. In relation to all this it seems that between the Left and the Right there is no longer anything but a difference of style. How can one achieve a self-determination then, face to face with this reality and its dictates, which appears to offer no possible alternative?

MF: Your question seems to me both just and a little too compressed. One would have to break it into two kinds of questions: in the first place, is it necessary to accept or refute the present situation? Secondly, if one doesn't accept it, what can one do? To the first question one must respond without any ambiguity: it is not necessary to accept either the residues of the war and the prolongation of a certain strategic situation in Europe, or the fact that half of Europe is enslaved.

Next, the other question is posed: What can one do against a power like the Soviet Union, in relation to our own government and with the people on both sides of the iron curtain who intend to put into question the division such as it

### 314 *An Aesthetics of Existence*

has been established? In relation to the Soviet Union there is not much to do, except to help as effectively as possible those who are fighting it on their own ground. As for the two other targets, there is a great deal to do; the bread is on the shelf. ^

Q: One doesn't therefore have to assume an Hegelian attitude, so to speak, by accepting reality such as it is and as it is presented to us. There remains a last question: Does "a truth in politics" exist?

MF: I believe too much in the truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of saying it. To be sure, one cannot demand a government to speak the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. On the other hand, it is possible to demand from governments a certain truth as to final aims, the general choice of its tactics, and on a certain number of particular points of its program: that is the *parrhesia* (free speech) of the governed, who can and must summon in the name of knowledge and their experience and because they are citizens the government to answer for what it does, for the meaning of its actions, and the decisions that it has taken.

Nevertheless, we must avoid a trap into which governments want intellectuals to fall (and often they do): "Put yourself in our place and tell us what you would do." This is not a question to which one has to respond. To make a decision on any matter implies a knowledge of the facts refused us, an analysis of the situation we aren't allowed to make. There's the trap. Yet as governed we still have the perfect right to pose questions about the truth: "What are you doing, for example, when you are hostile to Euromissiles, or when, on the contrary, you re-structure the steel industry, or when you open the debates on fi«e teaching?"

## *An Aesthetics of Existence 315*

*Q:* In this descent into hell that involves a long meditation and research—a descent in which one goes somehow in search of the truth—^what type of reader would you like to encounter and to whom you could recount this truth? While there still may be good authors, it's a fact that there are fewer and fewer good readers.

*MF:* I would say *some* readers. It's true that one is no longer read. The first book that one writes is read, because one is not known, because people don't know who we are, and it is read in disorder and confusion, which for me is fine. There is no reason for the writing of a book, nor is there a law of the book. The only law is that there are all manner of possible readings. I don't see any major inconvenience if a book, being read, is read in different ways. What is serious is that, as one continues to write one is no longer read at all; some readers, reading the new books on the backs of the earlier ones, and from one distortion to another, arrive at an absolutely grotesque image of the book.

Here we have a real problem: must one enter the fray and respond to each of these distortions, and, consequently, give the law to readers, which I am loath to do, or allow the book to be distorted into a caricature of itself, which I am equally loath to do?

There would be one solution: the only law for book publication, the only law concerning the book that I would like to see passed, would be to prohibit the use of the author's name more than once, with the additional right to anonymity and the use of pseudonyms, in order that each book might be read for itself. There are books for which recognition of the author provides the key to their intelligibility. But outside of a few great authors, this knowledge of the author's name has no real use. It serves only as a screen. For someone like me, who is not a great author but only someone who writes books.

### ***316 An Aesthetics of Existence***

books ought to be read for themselves, with their imperfections and their possible good qualities. **A**

Translated by John Johnston

#### Notes

' Friedrich A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948); Ludwig Von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (Libertarian Press, 1981).

^ "The bread is on the shelf" is a colloquial expression meaning "Much remains to be done."

# 24

## The Return of Morality

Q: What strikes the reader of your last books is the writing—clear, pure, smooth, and very different from your habitual style. Why this change?

MF; I am currently rereading the manuscripts that I wrote for this history of morality and that concern the beginning of Christianity (these books—this is one reason for their tardiness—are presented in the inverse order of their composition). In rereading these manuscripts abandoned some time ago I find again the same refusal of style evident in *The Order of Things*, *Madness and Civilization* or *Raymond Roussel*. I should say that it's a problem for me because this break did not occur progressively. Very abruptly, in 1975-76, I completely gave up this style, for I had it in mind to do a history of the subject, which is not that of an event that would be produced one day and of which it would be necessary to recount the genesis and the outcome.

Q: In ridding yourself of a certain style, didn't you become more philosophical than you were before?