

Michel de Certeau

Heterologies

Discourse on the Other

Translated by Brian Massumi

Foreword by Wlad Godzich

Theory and History of Literature, Volume 17

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Foreword

The Further Possibility of Knowledge

Wlad Godzich

Michel de Certeau is the author of nearly a score of books that range in subject matter from theology and history of religions to anthropology and that include theoretical reflections on the writing of history as well as contributions to contemporary cultural criticism, literary theory, and the analysis of everyday life. In his case, this is not merely an indication of a profusion of intellectual interests but rather the proper and legitimate exercise of certifiably acquired knowledge: he has received advanced training in theology, history, the study of comparative religions, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. He has taught in all these fields at major universities in France and in the Americas, and is currently dividing his time between the University of California at Los Angeles, where he teaches literature, and Paris, where, in addition to his teaching and research duties, he is active in a number of collective endeavors, not the least of which is the journal *Traverses*, a very stimulating pluridisciplinary publication of the design center at Beaubourg.

The present volume provides ample evidence of this wide range of activity, and its title, though perhaps not altogether euphonious in English, is further indication that the author not only is aware of this but intends it. *Heterology* is a term that has come to designate a philosophical countertradition that, in shorthand, could be described as being deeply suspicious of the Parmenidean principle of the identity of thought and being. Although de Certeau does not make overt reference to the themes and motifs of this tradition, his choice of title, significantly pluralized, places him among those who have reacted against the modern forms of this prejudice, that is, against the mainstream of speculative

Chapter 12

The Black Sun of Language: Foucault

Michel Foucault's book, *The Order of Things*,¹ sold out within a month after it first appeared—or so goes the advertising legend. The work, though long and difficult, numbers among those outward signs of culture the trained eye should find on prominent display in every private library, alongside the art books. Have *you* read it? One's social and intellectual standing depends on the response. But there are those who say that success, let alone faddishness, is a sure sign of a superficial or outmoded work.

First of all, Foucault is far from "boring." In fact, he is brilliant (a little too brilliant). His writing sparkles with incisive formulations. He is amusing. Stimulating. Dazzling. His erudition confounds us; his skill compels assent; his art seduces. Yet something in us resists. Or rather, the initial charm gives way to a kind of second-degree assent, a complicity that remains after we have taken a step back from the first flush of bewitchment, but whose basis we would be hard-pressed to explain.

However, a different kind of conviction takes shape in the historian's mind once he has recognized the sleight-of-hand element of the work—after he has had a chance to discuss both the information Foucault presents (which, after all, owes so much to Jacques Roger's book, *Les sciences de la vie dans la pensée*

Copyright © Michel de Certeau. This chapter first appeared as "Les sciences humaines et la mort de l'homme," in *Études*, 326 (March 1969), pp. 344–360, and was later published as "Le noir soleil du langage: Michel Foucault" (Chapter 5), in *L'absent de l'histoire* (Paris: Mame, 1973), pp. 115–132.

française du XVIII^e siècle²) and the virtuosity of a dialectic which seemingly stops at nothing. A question arises which leads to an inquiry essential to all contemporary thought. It is less a formulated question than the premonition of one. The dazzle and, at times, preciosity of the style combine with the minute dexterity of the analysis to produce an obscurity in which both author and reader fade from view: the work itself seems to illustrate the opposition it so often underlines between "surface effects" and the hidden "ground" they ceaselessly signify and conceal. This relation between the content and the form of the book is what arouses in the reader a sympathy without certitude which leads him, paradoxically, to wonder: what is it saying that is essential?

The Black Sun of Language

So what is it about? It is not Foucault's first book. In *The Order of Things* he elaborates upon a method already set forth and illustrated in two works, to my mind far superior: *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*³ and *Naissance de la clinique*.⁴ He also returns to themes present in numerous other studies—in his book, *Raymond Roussel*, in his articles on Maurice Blanchot, Jules Verne, etc. His breadth of learning as a historian, philosopher, and literary critic caters to a curiosity at once imperious, scrutinizing, and insatiable. With a hurried step, sometimes too quickly, this voyager tours the various zones of culture and periods of thought in search of a Reason that would account for the inorganic multiplicity of the ascertainable. With an ironic wave of the hand, he dismisses the naive certitudes of evolutionism, which believes it can finally grasp a reality that had always lain within reach beneath the illusions of yesteryear. He has nothing but contempt for the postulate of continuous progress, that touching self-justification of a present-day lucidity which all of history ought to prophesy. And not without reason.

Beneath thoughts, he discerns an "epistemological foundation" which makes them possible. Between the many institutions, experiences, and doctrines of an age, he detects a coherence which, though not explicit, is nonetheless the condition and organizing principle of a culture. There is, therefore, order. But this "Reason" is a ground that escapes the notice of the very people whose ideas and exchanges it provides the foundation for. No one can express in words that which gives everyone the power to speak. There is order, but only in the form of what one does not know, in the mode of what is "different" in relation to consciousness. The Same (the homogeneity of order) appears as otherness (the heterogeneity of the unconscious, or rather of the implicit).

To this first rift, we must add a second: analysis can uncover a beginning and an end to this language that speaks unbeknown to the voices that pronounce it. After having ensured the "positivity" of a historical period, the "foundation" suddenly crumbles to make way for another ground, a new "system of possibil-

ity" which reorganizes the floating world of words and concepts and implies, with its mix of vestiges and invention, an entirely different "epistemological field" (*episteme*). Over time, and in the density of its own time, each *episteme* is made up of the heterogeneous: what it does not know about itself (its own grounding); what it can no longer know about other *epistemei* (after the disappearance of the "foundations" they imply); what will be lost forever of its own objects of knowledge (which are constituted by a "structure of perception"). Things are defined by a network of words, and they give way when it does. Order emerges from disorder only in the form of the equivocal. Reason, *rediscovered* in its underlying coherence, is always being *lost* because it is forever inseparable from an illusion. In Foucault's books, reason dies and is simultaneously reborn.

Thus, what is presented here is a philosophy as well as a method. Although it is useful to distinguish them for purposes of exposition, the two are inseparable. Doubtless, when he undertakes "a structural study which attempts to decipher the conditions of history itself in the density of the historic" (*NC*, p. XV), Foucault is inaugurating a new criticism ("a strange discourse, I admit" [*NC*, p. XI; Eng., p. XV]). It is a criticism which aims to detect and define the successive alliances formed between words and things, the "structures" which delineate one by one, over time, the spaces of perception, and thus the tacit (though determining) combinations of saying and seeing, of language and the real, which are implied in the processes of thought and practice.

A criticism of this nature unfolds within the very field of the human sciences it relativizes, and makes use of their technical tools. So however new and cardinally important (and arguable) it may be, it does not carry within itself the means for its own justification, at least not now. The method remains the signifier of a signified that is impossible to put into words. The moment it demystifies the "positivism" of science or the "objectivity" of things by defining the cultural shifts which "created" them, it opens onto the nocturnal underside of reality, as if the fabric of words and things held within its net the secret of its own ungraspable negation. The combinatory system of saying and seeing has as its underside, or as what fundamentally determines it, "an essential void" (*OT*, p. 16), the unassimilable truth of the modes of structural coherence. Since it shifts and slips away, the ground beneath scientific or philosophical certitudes bears witness to an internal rift—never locatable, the rift is perceptible only in that illusion forever hidden and avowed by the temporary organization of languages prior to all conscious thought.

Histoire de la folie recalls that dreams and madness had become, for the German romantics, the horizon of something "essential." In their time, unreason foreshadowed this "essential" something through lyric pathos or the literature of the absurd. For Foucault, unreason is no longer the outer limit of reason: it is its truth. It is the black sun imprisoned in language, burning unbe-

known to it—it is what revealed to him, as it did to Roussel, “the untiring journey through the domain common to both language and being, the observation of the play in which things and words mark their presence yet are absent from themselves, expose and mask themselves.”⁵ But to speak of unreason is still to give negativity the title of stranger; it is to locate it “elsewhere.” That takes us off the track again. In fact (at the stage represented by *Naissance de la clinique* and *The Order of Things*), this *other* is an *internal* truth: death. Thus all of Foucault’s works revolve around the sentence which, like a motto, opens *Naissance de la clinique*: “This book is about space, about language, and about death” (NC, p. V; Eng., p. IV). Language and the epistemological spaces of perception constantly refer to the inscription above the door: “Here, it is a question of death.” An absence, which is perhaps meaning, has been trailed and is overtaken where we would least expect to find it—in rationality itself.

What is serious about this way of thinking is the impossibility of separating its spectral analysis of cultural history from its awakening to that obscure ray of light diffracted in it. Its philosophical discourse announces an “anxiety of language,” taken in the most physical and fundamental sense—an uncertainty which rises up from the subterranean shifting to infiltrate the coherency of our certitudes. The affirmations proper to a culture are delivered over to this uncertainty and opened to questioning. All discourse finds its law in death, “the innocent, good earth beneath the lawn of words” (NC, p. 199).

In order to place Foucault’s thought in context, we must first take note of the general subject matter of his work, which presents itself as the history of ideas in Western Europe over the last four hundred years—and as its renewal. His thought is new, and still in search of itself: it is imperialist, but does not really succeed in defining its ambitions or conquests; it is often imprecise exactly where it is most incisive.⁶ It must also be said that critics proceed with care over this still unsteady ground, even if they cover it with praise as they go. This is doubtless due both to the importance of the questions raised and the way in which they are presented. Rather than discussing Foucault’s historical analysis, I shall focus on several of these questions of method and foundation.

From Commentary to “Structural Analysis”

Foucault’s work seems to be the result of an irritation or a weariness with the monotony of commentary. The historian of ideas seems capable of nothing else. Commentary “questions discourse as to what it says and intended to do” (NC, p. XII). It always supposes that there is “a necessary, unformulated remainder of thought that language has left in the shade” (NC, p. XII; Eng., p. XVI) and, inversely, that what has been formulated carries within it a content that has not yet been thought (ibid.). In a constant play between the excess of thought over language and the excess of language over thought, commentary “translates”

into new formulations the “remainder” of the signified or the “residue” latent in the signifier. It is an infinite task, since what one claims to find is always pre-given in that unlimited reserve of “intentions” buried beneath words, in that inexhaustible capital of words richer than the thoughts that assembled them. Is that not the principle behind any history of science, philosophy of history, or theological exegesis? They know in advance the reality they “discover” hidden in a mythological or naive language from the past. They endow the expressions or the ideas of the past with a richness that shatters their shared articulation, untying the knot of the signifier and signified. What is essential in this is the relation to the commentator: the hidden treasure of the past is measured against the thoughts of the interpreter; what is implicit in one is defined by what is explicit in the other.

Foucault proposes substituting for commentary a different kind of activity: “a structural analysis of the signified that would evade the fate of commentary by leaving the signified and signifier in their original adequation” (NC, p. XIII). Understanding a proposition will no longer be equated with an exegesis that reduces the relation between text and commentator to a tautology. On the basis of a historical “adequation” between language and thought (an adequation which defines the text), the explanation will bring to light the relations which articulate the proposition “upon the other real or possible statements which are contemporary to it” and which place it in opposition to other propositions “in the linear series of time” (NC, p. XII; Eng., p. XVI).

Instead of identifying a thought with other thoughts—whether earlier (“influences”) or later (our own)—instead of supposing a mental continuum over which a range of *resemblances* is spread and which authorizes our making explicit the unformulated or unthought, interpretation will take *difference* as the element of its theoretical rigor and the principle of the distinctions it makes. In keeping with this theoretical rigor, meanings must be grasped in terms of *relations* (and no longer as something hidden-and-seen); for propositions, texts, or institutions, as for the words of a language, the value accorded each element is determined and can be explained only by the relations into which it enters. What must be rediscovered is the overall *organization* of meaning which has determined specific meanings, and to which the elements of those meanings refer in referring to each other. Thus, a “reason” becomes apparent which is in fact a mode of being signified by a system of words. An order appears—the order of “structures.”

What gives criticism the possibility of theoretical rigor is therefore this principle of making radical distinctions. The analysis of relations and interferences allows one to affirm (as, for example, Foucault does in relation to the institutions and ideas concerning madness in the eighteenth century) that “this system of contradictions refers to a hidden coherence” (HF, p. 624). The analysis then takes the form of a “historical structure” (the “structure of the experience a cul-

ture can make of madness," *HF*, p. 478, n. 1), and the coherence it discovers can be held to constitute within history a homogeneous but limited block. There are regions of coherence, with sudden shifts from one to another.

The classic historical concept of *periodicity* is here expanded into a notion of *discontinuity* between mental blocks. This displacement can itself be related to the global situation of consciousness, which has undergone a reversal in the past fifty years. Not long ago, the concept of periodicity was elaborated within the context of a progressive development whose successive stages tended to confirm the self-confidence of the terminal position. The starting point was a present certainty from whose peak could be seen to approach a truth which had been gradually extracted from the errors and illusions once covering it, but was now definitively known. Today, Foucault's thought is developing in a climate of co-existence among heterogeneous cultures, or among irreducible experiences isolated by the primitive symbolizations of the subject (the role of ethnology and psychoanalysis is of capital importance here, cf. *OT*, pp. 373-386). He is therefore led to uncover, beneath the continuity of history, a discontinuity more radical still than the evident heteronomy that lies beneath the fictional homogeneity of our own time. His lucid awareness of the ambiguities of universal monoculture, or totally affective communication, focuses his attention upon the equivocal nature of historical continuity. At one and the same time, the brutal novelty of the present is recognized and constituted as a source of anxiety: behind it lies the abyss of difference. The rifts of time now forbid contemporary thought from believing it holds the truth of what preceded it; it no longer has this peace of mind or recourse. It therefore faces a new risk, with no guarantee. The heterogeneous is for each culture the sign of its own fragility, as well as of its specific mode of coherence. Each cultural system implies a wager affecting all of its members, though none among them is responsible for it. Along with "a mode of being of order," it defines a form of confrontation with death.⁷

"A mode of being of order": the phraseology is Foucault's (cf. *OT*, p. XXI). What are we to understand by that? What is the status of these "historical structures"? In *The Order of Things* Foucault does not define them. He limits himself to writing an "account" (*OT*, p. XXII) of them, as an ethnologist would set out to do for a faraway culture. But his description has to provide some indication of what he is analyzing. He offers the reader "an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible" (*OT*, p. XXI). "What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (*OT*, p. XXII).

To understand the problem and Foucault's object of study, we must return to his initial observation. It is one of surprise. At the opening of his book, a pas-

sage by Borges expresses what this astonishment was for Foucault, and what it will be for others. The passage cites "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" in which it is written that "animals are divided into: a) belonging to the Emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame, d) suckling pigs, e) sirens, f) fabulous, g) stray dogs, h) included in the present classification, i) frenzied, j) innumerable, k) drawn with a fine camelhair brush, l) *et cetera*, m) having just broken the water pitcher, n) that from a long way off look like flies" (*OT*, p. XV). "In the wonderment of this taxonomy," adds Foucault, "the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of a fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*" (*ibid.*).

A hint, and nothing more. It does, however, evoke the reference to another order, another "modality of order," as what baffles and fascinates us. The aberrant is the first signal of another world; but if it stimulates a curiosity eager to escape from its own problematic, it still does so from a desire to grasp "the fundamental codes" of a *different* culture and to rediscover, after the initial surprise, a principle of order. Heteronomy is at the same time the stimulus and what is inadmissible. It is a wound in rationalism. There are thus two stages to the process: first, the apprehension of a system that is *different*; second, the need for a reciprocal localization of systems held to be "different modes of being of order."

The marginal refers to an essential structure, to a "table" or "*tabula*" (*OT*, p. XVII) upon which are inscribed and coordinated analogies and oppositions unthinkable for us. The rare exception, an institution, or a theory, implies, like the tip of an iceberg, a coherence that is not on the same level as ideas and words, but lies "beneath" them. It invites us to wonder "on what 'table,' " according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies are arranged "so many different and similar things" that lie outside our view (*OT*, p. XIX). This applies equally to the confinement of the insane and the seventeenth-century conception of grammar.

When we have perceived that in the past sciences were constituted, experiences reflected, rationalities formed as a function of a "historical *a priori*" different from our own, when we affirm that "the order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical Thinkers" (*OT*, p. XXII), we ourselves are changed by that discovery. Our relation to others, modified by our realization of this process of cultural leveling, transforms our relation to ourselves. The ground of our certainty is shaken when it is revealed that we can no longer *think* a thought from the past.

The surprise that places our *a priori* in question is expressed in the "account" by an effort to locate the rifts on the basis of the systems which slip away or originate at these frontiers. Foucault's dating scheme is hardly original: the passage from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the end of the eighteenth cen-

tury, the middle of the twentieth century. But it carries a weight of its own because of the project the feeling of surprise sidetracks. For a system of thought concerned with identifying a *coherence*, the rift presents itself as an *event*, but "an event rising up from below": more fundamental than the continuity evident in the "surface movement" is a "sudden" change (Foucault emphasizes the suddenness), which may be a "minuscule but absolutely essential displacement" that "topples the whole of Western thought" (OT, p. 238). Thus, "within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way" (OT, p. 50). Something essential happens which has identifiable premonitory signs and consequences, but which in the last analysis remains unexplainable,⁸ "an erosion from outside" (OT, p. 50). A change marks the end of one "system of simultaneity" and the beginning of another. The same words and the same ideas are often reused, but they no longer have the same meaning, they are no longer thought and organized in the same way. It is upon this "fact" that the project of an all-encompassing and unitary interpretation runs aground.

The Discontinuities of Reason

The cracks which form in cultures, in the end breaking them apart, are located on the same "level" as the "system of simultaneity" that analysis identifies as organizing the multiplicity of cultural signs. A problem arises: what is the nature of this "level," said to be that of the "ground" or "epistemological foundation"? What validity does it have? All we have to go on is the manner in which structures arise in Foucault's account. The fact that the "level" at which they are found is defined by a method, or that Foucault's account also narrates a research process, is glossed over. There is a reciprocity between his analytic technique and its ordering of facts, which is necessarily scaled to instruments supplied by a system of interpretation. Thus, the gaps of history are located precisely where the historian's structuralist interpretation comes to a standstill.

The fact that Foucault fails to account for the interference between his method and his results—or rather, that the problem is deferred until a "later work"—is what causes the reader's unease. But at the same time as we rue this omission on so central a point—one which undoubtedly would have led Foucault to situate *himself* in history on the basis of his particular reading of the historical avatars of reason—we must recognize, as previously stated, that his work nevertheless raises the issue at every turn. It reasserts itself here. The question of *dating*, long classified among the givens of historical inquiry, becomes an epistemological problem. It takes on two equivalent forms: Why do these changes in the constitutive order of a culture occur? Why are there standstills in the unfolding of the interpretation? Of course, at the point where his chronological account takes on philosophical dimensions the reader might wonder whether Foucault is simply

going to borrow the historians' old clothes, tailored to the specifications of those whose methods he so rightly criticizes, and then act as though they were the body of history. But the analyses in *Histoire de la folie* and *Naissance de la clinique* support his case well; they demonstrate with remarkable precision how the meat of reality is wrapped up with the adornments of dating.

Reason is thus placed in question by its own history. A heterogeneity breaks apart its self-identity; reason manifests itself in the succession of "modes of being" of order, which does not define a progression, but is on the contrary discontinuous. If Foucault could define what a "ground" *is*, he would be able to invoke an encompassing whole and thereby surmount the heteronomy of historical "reasons" with an appeal to a reason that embraced them all.⁹ But that is exactly what he holds to be impossible. He can therefore only produce an "account" in which the problem of order and the problem of method are raised in identical terms. Within the confines of a *technical* rigor (call it the history of ideas, in spite of Foucault), he formulates a philosophical question that is today "fundamental" (a favorite term of his): the possibility of truth. There is no philosophy and, *a fortiori*, no faith which a problematic such as his fails to touch, and perhaps (but this is what is at issue), circumvent.

The Ambiguities of Continuity: "Archaeology"

Foucault's analysis is too penetrating not to find continuity in the metamorphoses and restructurings characterizing each epistemological period. The subtitle of *The Order of Things* ("An Archaeology of the Human Sciences") already announces the movement which, according to the book, propelled Western thought of the Classical Age toward the formation of the human sciences, by way of three models proper to the nineteenth century, namely biology, economy, and philology—the roots of psychology, sociology, and linguistics. This same movement is behind today's challenge of these sciences by history, ethnology, and psychoanalysis. Primitive scenes, in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, lurk within and determine these developments. Beneath the cultural displacements there persist original wounds and organizing impulses, still perceptible in thoughts that have forgotten them.

Evolution, then, does indeed constitute a "sequence." In a Pascalian twist, Foucault brings continuity to light precisely where a rupture had appeared, just as before he pointed to a discontinuity breaking into the homogeneity of the development of science. But this continuity is indissociable from the equivocal; it is what persists unbeknown to consciousness, in the mode of deception. The vestiges of various kinds disclosed by analysis take the form of an illusion.

On one level, we have a surface permanence which, despite shiftings of ground, keeps words, concepts, or symbolic themes the same. A simple example: the "madman" is spoken of in the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth

centuries, but actually "it is not a question of the *same* malady" (HF, p. 259) in any two of them. The same thing applies to theological exegesis as it does to medicine. The same words do not designate the same things. Ideas, themes, classifications float from one mental universe to another, but at each passage they are affected by structures which reorganize them and endow them with a new meaning. The same mental objects "function" differently.

There is a kind of permanence that has an inverse form. In the history of ideas, new concepts arise which seem to announce a different structure. In reality, they are soft categories that do not determine their content, but only cover it: concepts capable of embracing contradictory terms, floating signifiers in which past fears and perspectives persist. Thus the fear which in the sixteenth century exiled the madman in an effort to avoid diabolical contagion, in the eighteenth century adopts medical terminology and resurfaces in the form of precautions against the contaminated air of the hospitals (HF, p. 431; Eng., p. 204). More generally, each historical region of the *episteme* is the locus of a restructuring demanded (but no longer organized) by the structures of the preceding age. Foucault demonstrates this in the case of psychoanalysis, for example. The family, at the end of the eighteenth century, overwhelmed that age's miners of the mind, and found as its mythic antithesis the social "milieu" (the corruptor of nature). This set the stage for the attack against the father, which Freud considered the destiny of all Western culture (and perhaps of all civilization), whereas in language he saw only a sediment collected in consciousness in the course of the preceding century. He detects and unearths in words what had recently been deposited in them "by a myth of disalienation in patriarchal purity, and by a truly alienating situation in an asylum constituted in the family mode" (HF, pp. 588-589; Eng., p. 253). Guilt also resurfaces in Freudian language, but only because it was embedded there by the replacement of constraint with the technique of *confession* in the philanthropic asylums of the latter part of the eighteenth century (HF, pp. 596-597). In the same way, the valorization of the doctor-patient pairing (which also dates from the eighteenth century) and the concentration of therapeutic assistance in the person of the doctor cleared the way, unbeknown to its inventors, both for Freud's demystification of all the other asylum structures and the reinforcement (forgetful of its origins) of the place accorded the analyst, who, concealed behind the patient's back, judges, gratifies, and frustrates him, becoming, according to Foucault, at the same time the "key" and the "alienating figure" of the therapeutic relation (HF, pp. 608-612; Eng., pp. 273-278).

Contrary to the original intentions behind the invention of a given formula—which are forgotten by those who later represent that formula in a different way—continuity is ruled by the ambiguous. There is a real continuity between the age of hermeneutics (sixteenth century), the age of "representation" (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries), the age of positivism, or the objectification of the

"inside" (nineteenth century), and the present age, but it is lived in the mode of misinterpretation. The issue is not the relation of illusion to truth (as the mythology of progress would have us believe), because the deception is mutual. It is the relation of other to other. The ambiguity proper to the exchanges between cultures, or related to their succession, does not nullify the reality of the connections, but rather specifies their nature. Ambiguity of communication is related to an "anxiety" that intertwines the continuity of history and the discontinuity of its systems: difference.

It is in fact difference which carves the isolating gaps into the homogeneity of language and which, conversely, opens in each system the paths to another. The internal instability of cycles and the ambiguity of their connections do not constitute two problems. Rather, it is in these two forms—the relation to other and the relation to self—that a single unending confrontation agitates history; it can be read in the ruptures that topple systems, and in the modes of coherence that tend to repress internal changes. There is both continuity and discontinuity, and both are deceptive, because each epistemological age, with its own "mode of being of order," carries *within itself* an alterity every representation attempts to absorb by objectifying. None will ever succeed in halting its obscure workings, or in staving off its fatal venom.

Outside Thought

Those who cling to continuity think they can escape death by taking refuge in the fiction of a permanence that is real. Those who box themselves inside the solid walls of the discontinuous systems believe they can keep death an external problem, confined to the absurd event that brings an end to a particular order; they avoid the problem posed by the system of order itself, a problem which first appears in the image of the internal "limit." For the sixteenth century, it was the other world, either divine or demonic; for the seventeenth, "non-being," bestial or imaginary; for the nineteenth, the "inside" dimension (the past, force, dreams).

Internal finitude struggles against the structurings that try to overcome it, and provides the arena for the defense of the same, or self-identity. Alterity always reappears, and in a fundamental way, in the very nature of language. A truth is spoken by the organization of a culture, but it escapes its own collaborators. Certain relations predetermine subjects and cause them to signify something other than what they think they say or can say. To be spoken without knowing it is to be caught dead unawares; it is to proclaim death, believing all the while it is conquered; it is to bear witness to the opposite of what one affirms. Such is the law the historian discovers as soon as he is forced to distinguish language from unconscious intentions. "The presence of the law," says Foucault in his article on Blanchot, "is its dissimulation."¹⁰ Alienation is not simply the germi-

nal stage of a culture, but its internal norm, as well as the relativizing of all individual consciousness. The self-evidence of the "I am" is thus endangered by its own language, that is, by "that outside where the speaking subject vanishes" (PD, p. 525). The truth of all thought is outside thought.

As for "outside thought," "one may assume that it was born of that tradition of mystic thinking which, from the time of Pseudo-Denis, has prowled the borderlands of Christianity; perhaps it has survived over the past millennium or so in the various forms of negative theology" (PD, p. 526). This occasional reference indicates the kind of problem Foucault sets out to interpret. The problem was brought to light, he says, when "Sade ceased to allow anything to speak other than the nudity of desire, as a law without a law of the world" (PD, p. 526); sadism, "a cultural fact of enormous dimension which arose precisely at the close of the eighteenth century," is tied to the era when "unreason, confined for over a century and reduced to silence, reappears, no longer as an image of the world, no longer as *figura*, but as language and desire" (HF, p. 437; Eng., p. 210).

Death only appears within the cohesive web of reason as the position of man in language, or as the evolution of languages. It is not a historical phenomenon, not an individual fact, and is therefore not localizable. Neither is the wild claim of an author who would like to burst through the doors of reflexive philosophy, smash the languid furnishings of consciousness, and plant his black flag there. It is not the end of man that Foucault proclaims, but of the conception of man that believed it had solved, by means of the positivism of the "human sciences" (that "refusal of negative thought," HF, p. 233), the ever-lingering problem of death. Because every system's downfall is the illusion of having triumphed over difference, the question today is posed in terms of this alienation in language every bit as much (it is, after all, the same thing) as it is in terms of the "successive systemic collapses." "The fact that we are already, before the least of our words, governed and paralysed by language" (OT, p. 298) is what leads the quest toward "that region where death prowls" (OT, p. 383), toward the kind of literature in which the law of discourse and "the absolute dispersion of man" (OT, p. 385) coincide.

Thus, it is in his discussions of literary works that Foucault most clearly reveals the radical absence that "lies beneath the sign it produces in order to enable one to approach it as though it were possible to rejoin it" (PD, p. 531). It speaks in the "I." Not only, as Mallarmé thought, and as the new literature reiterates, is the word "the manifest inexistence of what it designates," but the being of language is the visible effacement of the speaker. A forever non-objectifiable expectation is directed toward the nothing that inhabits it, and "the object that would come to fill it could do nothing but efface it" (PD, p. 544). Long before those who speak, language is already waiting for Godot.

Open Questions

Not long ago, in the comic vein of his memorable adventures, Felix the Cat was depicted in a situation analogous to the one we are describing. He is walking at a fast pace, then suddenly notices, at the same time as the viewer, that the ground has gone out from under him: he had left the edge of the cliff he was following a while before. *Only then* does he fall into the void. Perhaps this image expresses the problem and the perception to which Foucault's book bears witness.

The fall is that second moment of realization: the ground upon which we believed we walked and thought has vanished. It plunges reflection back to the necessity of "letting-speak" what is spoken in man, without giving credence to consciousness or to the objects created by any particular configuration of knowledge. A new universe of thought opens up. It may come in the form of a catastrophe, but just for those who only know how to walk on the old "epistemological foundation." Before, the "I" occupied the "king's seat" in the network of representations, but now language takes the privileged position in saying its truth; before, the ego was held to be the invisible center of the known world, but now it is repositioned in perceptual relations and figures only as one term among many within an underlying, fundamental combinatory apparatus; before, continuity was the safeguard and also the *a priori* of a system, but now discontinuity is the jump-off point of any new risk or problem.

Foucault exhibits the eagerness of a Dr. Strangelove in expressing this sudden change. He announces the new era with analyses that are sure to endure, but he leaves many of the questions he raises hanging. Will the prophet of this new *episteme* also be its philosopher? Who is he to know what no one else knows, what so many thinkers have "forgotten" or have yet to realize about their own thought? He acts as though he were omnipresent (since all the heteronomies of history constitute the only account his thought will relate), but he is also absent (since he has designated his own place nowhere in that story). His work sets out to say the truth of language systems, but that truth is tied to no limit, and therefore to no engagement on the author's part. The ruptures within and between language systems are in the end bridged by the lucidity of his universal gaze. In other words, he speaks of the death that founds all language without really confronting the death within his own discourse; in fact, his approach may be a way of avoiding it.

We may thus ask ourselves two questions regarding Foucault. First, what history does he recount? On this, the historians have the floor; they can confirm that his is a reading of history that sifts through the real, decides itself what is significant, and takes refuge in the "density" of history when the surface resists his treatment.¹¹ Second, the philosophic determination of the status of his dis-

course, the clarification of the relation between his particularity and his project (who is speaking? from where?), and the elaboration of the concepts he uses (foundation, ground, positivity, etc.), mark the spot where that magnificent "account" should transform into philosophy.¹²

His work is an open book, of capital importance but uncertain, demystifying but mythic still. Will Mephistopheles become Faust? For now, he fascinates some, annoys others, invites contradictory interpretations, all because he evoked, "below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which we are now attempting to recover, as far as we can, in our discourse, in our freedom, in our thought. But our thought is so brief, our freedom so enslaved, our discourse so repetitive, that we must face the fact that that expanse of shade below is really a bottomless sea" (*OT*, p. 211).

Chapter 13

Micro-techniques and Panoptic Discourse: A Quid pro Quo

In his *Discipline and Punish*,¹ Michel Foucault examines the organization of penal, academic, and medical "surveillance" at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He multiplies synonyms and evocations in an attempt to approximate proper nouns for what are the silent agents of his story (as if these escaped verbal identity): "apparatus," "instrumentations," "techniques," "mechanisms," "machineries," and so on. This very uncertainty and terminological instability is already suggestive. Yet the basic story the book has to tell—that of an enormous quid pro quo or socio-historical deal—postulates a fundamental dichotomy between ideologies and technical procedures, and charts their respective evolutions and intersections. In fact, what Foucault analyzes is a chiasmus: how the place occupied by humanitarian and reformist projects at the end of the eighteenth century is then "colonized" or "vampirized" by those disciplinary procedures that have since increasingly organized the social realm itself. This mystery story narrates a plot of substituted corpses, the sort of game of substitution that would have pleased Freud.

As always, for Foucault, the drama is played out between two forces whose relationship to one another is inverted by the ruse of history. On the one hand, there is the ideology of the Enlightenment, with its revolutionary approach to the matter of penal justice. The reformist projects of the eighteenth century aim

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essentially at doing away with the "ordeal" of the *ancien régime*, with its bloody ritualization of hand-to-hand combat intended to dramatize the triumph of royalty over criminals whose crimes had particular symbolic value. Such projects involved the equalization of penalties, their gradation according to the crime, and their educational value both for the criminals and for society itself.

In actual fact, however, disciplinary procedures evolved in the army and in the schools rapidly come to prevail over the vast and complex judicial apparatus elaborated by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and the new techniques are refined and applied without recourse to any overt ideology: the development of a cellular grid (whether for students, soldiers, workers, criminals, or sick people) transforms space itself into an instrument that can be used to discipline, to program, and to keep under observation any social group. In such procedures, the refinement of technology and the attention to minute detail triumph over theory and result in the universalization of a single, uniform manner of punishment—prison itself—which undermines the revolutionary institutions of the Enlightenment from within and everywhere substitutes the penitentiary for penal justice.

Foucault thus separates two heterogeneous systems. He describes the triumph of a political technology of the body over an elaborated system of doctrine. Yet he does not stop here: in his description of the institution and of the triumphant proliferation of this particular "minor instrumentality"—the penal grid—he also tries to elucidate the workings of this type of opaque power, which is the property of no individual subject, which has no privileged locus, no superiors, and no inferiors, which is neither repressive nor dogmatic in its action, and whose efficacy is quasi-autonomous and functions through its capacity to distribute, classify, analyze, and give spatial individuality to any given object. A perfect machinery. Through a series of clinical—and splendidly "panoptical"—tableaux, Foucault attempts to name and classify the "methodological rules," the "functional conditions," the "techniques" and "processes," the distinct "operations" and "mechanisms," "principles" and "elements" that would constitute something like a "microphysics of power." His text is thus an exhibition of their secrets, an exhibit that has a dual function: 1) to diagram a particular stratum of non-verbal practices and 2) to found a discourse *about* those practices.

Nature and Analysis of the Micro-techniques

How are such practices to be described? In a characteristic strategy of indirection, Foucault isolates the *gesture that organizes discursive space*—not, as in *Madness and Civilization*, the epistemological and social gesture of confining an outcast in order to create the space of reason itself, but rather a minute gesture, everywhere reproduced, by which visible space is partitioned in order to subject

its inhabitants to surveillance. The procedures that repeat, amplify, and perfect this gesture organize in turn that discourse which comes to be called the "human sciences" or *Geisteswissenschaften*. Thus, in Foucault's view, eighteenth-century procedures that constitute a *non-verbal gesture* have been privileged (for historical and social reasons) and have then been articulated through the discourse of contemporary social sciences.

The novel perspectives² opened up by this analysis might also have been prolonged into a whole stylistics, a whole method for analyzing the non-verbal gesture that organizes the text of thought itself. But that is not my purpose here. Rather, I wish to raise several questions relating to these practices.

First Question: In his archaeology of the human sciences—Foucault's explicit project since *The Order of Things*—and in his search for that common "matrix"—the "technology of power"—which could be found to organize both the penal code (the punishment of human beings) and the human sciences (the knowledge of human beings), Foucault is led to make a *selective choice* from among the totality of procedures that form the fabric of social activity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He begins with a proliferating system examined in its *present status* (essentially our contemporary scientific or juridical technology), and moves backward to the past. It is a surgical operation. It consists in *isolating* the cancerous growth from the social body as a whole, and thereby in *explaining* its contemporary dynamic by way of its *genesis* in the two preceding centuries. Drawing on an immense mass of historiographic materials (penal, military, academic, medical), this method disengages the optical and panoptical procedures which can increasingly be found to proliferate within our society, thereby identifying the disguised indices of an apparatus whose structure gradually becomes more precise, complex, and determinate within the density of the social fabric or body as a whole.

This remarkable historiographic "operation" raises two distinct questions at one and the same time: on the one hand, the decisive role of *technological procedures* and apparatuses in the organization of a society; on the other, the exceptional development or privileged status of *one particular category* (i.e., the panoptical) among such apparatuses. We must therefore now ask:

a) How do we explain the *privileged development* of the particular series constituted by Foucault's panoptical apparatuses? It is perhaps not so surprising, when we recall that optical epistemology is fundamental since the sixteenth century in the elaboration of modern sciences, arts, and philosophy. In this case, the panoptical machinery is only a historical effect of this technical scientific and philosophical optical tradition. It does not constitute the victory of anything new, but the victory of a past, the *triumph of an old system* over a new, liberal, and revolutionary utopia. A past model of organization is coming back and "colonizing" the revolutionary projects of a new time. This return of the past suggests a Freudian story.

b) What happened to all the other series of procedures that, in their unnoticed itineraries, failed to give rise either to a specific discursive configuration or to a technological systematization? There are many other procedures besides panoptical ones. These might well be looked on as an *immense reserve* containing the seeds or the traces of alternate developments.

It is, in any case, impossible to reduce the functioning of a whole society to a single, dominant type of procedure. Recent studies (such as that of Serge Moscovici on urban organization,³ and Pierre Legendre on the medieval juridical apparatus⁴) have revealed other kinds of technological apparatuses, which know an analogous interplay with ideology, and prevail for a time before falling back into the storehouse of social procedures as a whole, at which point other apparatuses replace them in their function of "informing" a whole system.

From this point of view, then, a society would be composed of certain practices which, selectively developed and externalized, organize its normative institutions alongside innumerable other practices. The latter, having remained "minor," do not organize discourse itself but merely persist, preserving the premises or the remnants of institutional or scientific hypotheses that differ from one society to another. But all these procedures present the double characteristic underscored by Foucault of being able to organize both space and language in dominant or subordinate ways.

Second Question: It is the final formation or "full" form—in this instance the whole contemporary technology of surveillance and discipline—which serves as the point of departure for Foucault's archaeology: the impressive coherence of the practices he selects is thereby explained. But can we really assume that all procedures in themselves had this coherence? A priori, no. The exceptional and even cancerous development of panoptical procedures would seem to be indistinguishable from their *historic role* as a weapon against heterogeneous practices and as a means of controlling the latter. Thus, their coherence is the effect of a particular historic success, and not a characteristic of all technological practices. Thus, behind the "monotheism" of the dominant panoptical procedures, we might suspect the existence and survival of a "polytheism" of concealed or *disseminated practices*, dominated but not obliterated by the historical triumph of one of their number.

Third Question: What is the status of a particular apparatus when it has become the organizing principle of a technology of power? What is the effect upon it of that process whereby it has been isolated from the rest, privileged, and transformed into a dominant? What new kind of relation does it maintain with the dispersed ensemble of other procedures when it has at length been institutionalized as a penitentiary and scientific system? It might well be that an apparatus privileged in this fashion could lose that efficacy which, according to Foucault, it originally owed its own mute and minuscule technical advances. On emerging from that obscure stratum where Foucault locates the determining

mechanisms of society, it might well find itself in the position of an institution itself imperceptibly colonized by other, still more silent procedures. Indeed, this system of discipline and surveillance, which was formed in the nineteenth century on the basis of preexisting procedures, is today in the process of being "vampirized" by still other ones which we have to unveil.

Fourth Question: Can we go still further? As they have evolved, the apparatuses of surveillance have themselves become the object of elucidation and a part of the very language of our rationality. Is this not a sign that they have ceased to determine discursive institutions? They now belong to our ideology. The organizing apparatuses the discourse can explain would no longer fill that silent role which is their definition for Foucault. At that point (unless we are to suppose that, by analyzing the practices from which it is itself derived, *Discipline and Punish* surmounts its own basic distinction between "ideologies" and "procedures"), we have to ask what apparatus determines Foucault's discourse in turn, an underlying apparatus which by definition escapes an ideological elucidation.

By showing, in a single case, the heterogeneous and equivocal relations between apparatuses and ideologies, Foucault has constituted a new object of historical study: that zone in which technological procedures have specific effects of power, obey logical dynamisms which are specific to them, and produce fundamental turnings aside in the juridical and scientific institutions. But we do not yet know what to make of other, equally infinitesimal procedures that have remained unprivileged by history yet which continue to flourish in the interstices of the institutional technologies. This is most particularly the case of procedures that lack the essential precondition indicated by Foucault, namely the possession of a locus or specific space of their own on which the panoptical machinery can function. Such techniques, which are just as operative though without locus, are rhetorical "tactics." I suggest that these secretly reorganize Foucault's discourse, colonize his "panoptical" text, and transform it into a "trompe-l'oeil."

Micro-techniques to Produce a Panoptical Fiction

When theory, instead of being a discourse upon other preexistent discourses, ventures into non- or pre-verbal domains in which there are only practices without any accompanying discourse, certain problems arise. There is a sudden shift, and the usually reliable foundation of language is missing. The theoretical operation suddenly finds itself at the limits of its normal terrain, like a car at the edge of a cliff. Beyond, nothing but the sea. Foucault works on this cliff when he attempts to invent a discourse that can speak of non-discursive practices.

But we may consider the micro-techniques as building the theory, instead of being its object. The question no longer concerns the procedures organizing social surveillance and discipline, but the procedures producing Foucault's text

itself. In fact, the micro-techniques provide not only the content of the discourse but also the process of its construction.

Recipes to Produce a Theory

As in cooking, here we find subtle "recipes" to get theories of practices. Yet in the same way that a cooking recipe is punctuated with a certain number of action imperatives (blend, baste, bake, etc.), so also the theoretical operation can be summed up in two steps: extract, and then turn over; first the "ethnological" isolation of some practices for obtaining a scientific "object," then the logical inversion of this obscure object into an enlightening center of the theory.

The first step is a "découpe": it isolates a design of some practices from a seamless web, in order to constitute these practices as a distinct and *separate* corpus, a *coherent* whole, which is nonetheless *alien* to the place in which theory is produced. It is the case for Foucault's panoptical procedures, isolated from a multitude of other practices. By this way, they receive an ethnological form. Meanwhile, the particular genre thereby isolated is taken to be the metonymy of the whole species: a part, observable because it has been circumscribed, is used to represent the undefinable totality of practices in general. To be sure, this isolation is used to make sense out of the specific dynamics of a given technology. Yet it is an ethnological and metonymic "découpage."

In the second step, the unity thus isolated is reversed. What was obscure, unspoken, and culturally alien becomes the very element that throws light on the theory and upon which the discourse is founded. In Foucault, procedures embodied in the surveillance systems at school, in the army, or in hospitals, micro-apparatuses without discursive legitimacy techniques utterly foreign to the *Aufklärung*, all become the very ordering principle that makes sense of our own society just as they provide the rationale of our "human sciences." Because of them, and in them, as in a mirror, Foucault sees everything and is able to elucidate everything. They allow his discourse itself to be theoretically panoptical in its turn. This strange operation consists in transforming secret and aphasic practices into the central axis of a theoretical discourse, and making this nocturnal corpus over into a mirror in which the decisive reason of our contemporary history shines forth.

This very "tactic" marks his history as belonging to the same species of practices he analyzes. Foucault, of course, already studies the determination of discourse by procedures in the case of the "human sciences." His own analysis, however, betrays an apparatus analogous to those whose functioning it was able to reveal. But it would be interesting, in regard to a theory of these micro-techniques, to consider the differences between the panoptical procedures Foucault has told us about and the twin gesture of his own narrative, which con-

sists in isolating a foreign body of procedures and inverting its obscure content into a spotlight.

An Art of Making Panoptical Fictions

In this way, Foucault's theory is also part of the art of "scoring." It does not escape its object, that is, the micro-procedures. It is an effect and a network of these procedures themselves. It is a narrative, a theoretical narrative, which obeys rules analogous to those panoptic procedures. There is no epistemological and hierarchical break between the theoretical text and the micro-techniques. Such a continuity constitutes the philosophical novelty of Foucault's work.

This kind of "art" is easy to see at work. It is an art of telling: suspense, extraordinary quotations, ellipses of quantitative series, metonymical samples, etc. A complete rhetorical apparatus is used for seducing and convincing an audience. It also is an art of seizing the opportunity and of making a hit, by crossing old texts and contemporary conjunctures. Foucault has specified himself as a "reader." His reading is a poaching. Hunting through the forests of history and through our present plains, Foucault traps strange things which he discovers in a past literature and uses these for disturbing our fragile present securities. He has an almost magic power for pointing at surprising confessions in historical documents as well as in contemporary ones, for gathering both these past and present curiosities into a system, and for transforming these revelations of non-verbal practices determining our political and epistemological institutions into convincing evidence. His rhetorical art, creating an obviousness that reverses our obvious convictions, is the literary gesture of a certain way of acting. His immense erudition is not the principal reason for his effectiveness, but rather this art of speaking which is also an art of thinking.

His manner of using a panoptical discourse as a mask for tactical interventions within our epistemological fields is particularly remarkable. He practices an art of "scoring" by means of historical fictions. *Discipline and Punish* draws on subtle procedures for "manipulating" erudite exhibitions. It is a calculated alternation between three variants of optical figures: representational tableaux (exemplary narratives),⁵ analytic tableaux (lists of ideological "rules" or "principles" relating to a single phenomenon),⁶ and figurative tableaux (seventeenth-nineteenth century engravings and photographs).⁷ This system combines three sorts of shop-windows: case-study narratives, theoretical distinctions, and past images. It only pretends to show and not to explain how a machinery worked: it makes this opaque process visible and transparent by staging it in three different panoptical settings. Organizing a rhetoric of clarity—or "écriture de la clarté"—it produces an effect of self-evidence in the public. But this theater of clarity is a ruse. It systematically displaces the fields in which Foucault

successfully intervenes. It is a subversive operation, hidden by and within a limpid discourse, a Trojan horse, a panoptical fiction, using clarity for introducing an otherness into our "epistémè." Taken for granted, the panoptical space of our contemporary scientific language is consciously and craftily reorganized by heterogeneous micro-techniques. It is colonized and vampirized, but voluntarily colonized by procedures that obey contrary rules.

This way of thinking cannot have a discourse of its own, because it amounts essentially to a practice of non-locus. The optical space is the frame of an internal transformation due to its rhetorical reemployment. It becomes a façade, the theoretical ruse of a narrative. While the book analyzes the transformation of Enlightenment ideologies by a panoptical machinery, its writing is a subversion of our contemporary panoptical conceptions by the rhetorical techniques of a narrative.

On a first level, Foucault's theoretical text is still organized by the panoptical procedures it elucidates. But on a second level, this panoptical discourse is only a stage where a narrative machinery reverses our triumphant panoptical epistemology. Thus, there is in Foucault's book an internal tension between his historical thesis (the triumph of a panoptical system) and his own way of writing (the subversion of a panoptical discourse). The analysis pretending to efface itself behind an erudition and behind a set of taxonomies it busily manipulates is like a ballet dancer disguised as a librarian. And so, a Nietzschean laughter meanwhile runs through the historian's text.

Two short propositions may be an introduction to a debate, and may take the place of a conclusion:

1) Procedures are not merely the objects of a theory. They organize the very construction of theory itself. Far from being external to theory, or from staying on its doorstep, Foucault's procedures provide *a field of operations within which theory is itself produced*. With Foucault we get another way of building a theory, a theory which is the literary gesture of those procedures themselves.

2) In order to clarify the relationship of theory with those procedures that produce it as well with those that are its objects of study, the most relevant way would be a *storytelling discourse*. Foucault writes that he does nothing but tell stories ("récits"). Stories slowly appear as a work of displacements, relating to a logic of metonymy. Is it not then time to recognize the theoretical legitimacy of narrative, which is then to be looked upon not as some ineradicable remnant (or a remnant still to be eradicated) but rather as a necessary form for a theory of practices? In this hypothesis, *a narrative theory would be indissociable from any theory of practices*, for it would be its precondition as well as its production.

Chapter 14

The Laugh of Michel Foucault

A few years ago, at Belo Horizonte, in the course of a speaking tour of Brazil, Michel Foucault was once again questioned about his place: "So, then, in what capacity do you speak? What is your specialty? Where are you coming from?" This identity request struck him to the quick. It sought to grasp his secret as a man of passage.¹ It had provoked, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, an irritated retort, singular in tone, and in which the movement that produced the work suddenly shone forth:

No, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you.

What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing—with a rather shaky hand—a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.²

A live voice that still eludes the tomb of the text.

To be classified the prisoner of a place and qualifications, to wear the stripes of authority which procure for the faithful their official entry into a discipline, to be pigeonholed within a hierarchy of domains of knowledge [*savoir*] and of positions, thus finally to be "established"—that, for Foucault, was the very figure of death. "No, no." Identity freezes the gesture of thinking. It pays homage to an order. To think, on the contrary, is to pass through; it is to question that order, to marvel that it exists, to wonder what made it possible, to seek, in passing over its landscape, traces of the movement that formed it, to discover in these histories supposedly laid to rest "how and to what extent it would be possible to think otherwise."³ That is how Foucault responded to his questioners at Belo Horizonte, but in words that were better adapted to the subtleties of the Brazilian scene and that designated his philosophical style: "Who am I? A reader."

From Poitiers, where he was born (1926), to the Salpêtrière Hospital, where he finally fell (June 25, 1984), his trajectories crisscrossed domains of knowledge and countries. He visited books just as he went around Paris on bicycle, around San Francisco or Tokyo, with exact and vigilant attention, poised to catch, at the turn of a page or a street, the spark of some strangeness lurking there unnoticed. All these marks of otherness, whether "minuscule lapses" or enormous confessions, were for him citations of an unthought. They are there, he would say, quite readable, but unread because they take the expected and the codified by surprise. When he discovered them he would roll with laughter. Sometimes an irrepressible laugh like the one he mentions apropos a text by Borges, which "when read shatters all the familiar landmarks of thought—our thought, the thought that is of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of beings."⁴ This, he says, is the "birthplace" of the book *The Order of Things*. His other works seem to have the same origin: bouts of surprise (in the same way there are bouts of fever), the sudden jubilatory, semi-ecstatic forms of "astonishment" or "wonder" which have been, from Aristotle to Wittgenstein, the inaugurators of philosophical activity. Something that exceeds the thinkable and opens the possibility of "thinking otherwise" bursts in through comical, incongruous, or paradoxical half-openings of discourse. The philosopher, overtaken by laughter, seized by an irony of things equivalent to an illumination, is not the author but the witness of these flashes traversing and transgressing the gridding of discourses effected by established systems of reason. Nor has he prepared in advance a place to keep his finds. These are the events of a thought yet to come. This surprising inventiveness of words and things, this intellectual experience of a disappropriation that opens possibilities, is what Foucault marks with a laugh. It is his philosophical signature on the irony of history.

Hence his complicity with the great detectors of the surprises of language and the chance events of thought, from the Sophists down to Roussel or Magritte. But his practice of astonishment constantly provides new departures for the relentlessness, in turn imperious and fragile, meticulous, irritable, always tenacious, with which he seeks to elucidate this "other dimension of discourse" revealed to him through chance encounters. It even gives the tone of a Western to his archival and analytical work aimed at unraveling the truth games that are first signaled by paradoxical spotlights. Try as he may, the care he puts into controlling, classifying, distinguishing, and comparing his readerly finds is incapable of stilling the tremble of awakening that betrays in his texts his manner of discovery. His works, then, combine the laugh of invention with the concern for exactitude, even if the proportions vary, and even if, over the years, the exactitude gradually wins out over the laugh, either (perhaps) because of the allergy his style (more than his theses) provoked among the practitioners of well-established scientific systems, or because his surgical passion for lucidity developed, becoming in his last two books an ascetic clarity, stripped even of its lively virtuosity. Leaving aside this evolution, and the polemics tied to his *oeuvre* as to his shadow, what is important in his work is first of all this exceptional exercise of astonishment, transformed into an assiduous practice of the "births" of thought and of history.⁶

His "stories," as he called them, recount how new problematics appear and become established. They often take the form of surprises, as in detective novels. For example, the progressive liberalization and diversification of criminal law over the course of the eighteenth century is interrupted, reversed, "cannibalized" by the proliferation of military and pedagogical procedures of surveillance, which impose the panoptic system of the prison everywhere—a development one did not expect.⁷ You presume that power is identifiable with the appropriation of isolatable, hierarchical, and legal apparatuses? No, it is the expansion of anonymous mechanisms that "normalize" the social space as they move across institutions and legality.⁸ You presume that a bourgeois morality made sex a secret to be hidden away? No, the techniques of confession transformed sex into a tireless producer of discourses and truths.⁹ Thus, from book to book, the analysis pinpoints these turnabouts, which, disturbing the constituted domains of knowledge, even the most authoritative (even Marx, even Freud), generate new ways of thinking. Whatever the discussions to which this analysis gives rise, the analysis itself is based not on the personal ideas of an author but on that which history itself makes visible. It is not Mr. Foucault who is making fun of domains of knowledge and predictions, or pre-visions; it is history that is laughing at them. It plays tricks on the teleologists who take themselves to be the lieutenants of meaning. A meaninglessness of history, a mocking and nocturnal god, ridicules the schoolmasters' authority and withdraws from Foucault himself the moralistic or pedagogical role of being an "intellectual"

who is always on top of things. The lucidity comes from an attentiveness, always mobile, always surprised, to what events show us without our knowing it.

To this attentiveness which joins philosophy (the analysis of conditions and implications) with history (events and systems), we must add an odd, yet ever-present aspect of the *oeuvre*: its visual character. These works are studded with tables and illustrations. The text is also cadenced by scenes and figures. *Madness and Civilization* opens with the image of the ship of fools;¹⁰ *The Order of Things*, with Velasquez's "Las Meninas";¹¹ *Discipline and Punish*, with the narrative of the torture of Damians,¹² and so on. Is this by chance? Or is it to solicit the reader? But each book presents a scansion of images on the basis of which develops the intricate work of distinguishing the book's conditions of possibility and formal implications. Actually, these images institute the text. They cadence it like successive solicitations of Foucault himself. He recognizes in them the scenes of a difference, the black suns of "theories" beginning to show. Forgotten systems of reason stir in these mirrors. On the level of the paragraph or phrase, quotes function in the same way; each of them is embedded there like a fragment of a mirror, having the value not of a proof but of an astonishment—a sparkle of other. The entire discourse proceeds in this fashion from vision to vision. The step that marks the rhythm of the discourse's forward march, in which that march finds support and from which it receives its impulse, is a visual moment. The analysis is constantly using it as a point of departure in order to make explicit, in the form of lists (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th . . .) and taxonomical tables that still pertain to the visual, the elements put into play by the iconic or narrative image. This surprise-image therefore plays a role, in turn heuristic and recapitulative, analogous to that of the geometrical figure under the gaze of the mathematician: like a right-angled triangle, it brings together at a glance the possible or already demonstrated properties developed by a series of theorems.

This optical style may seem strange. Did not Foucault find the panoptic machine to be at the very heart of the system of surveillance that spread from the prison to all the social disciplines by means of a multiplication of techniques allowing one to "see without being seen"?¹³ Moreover, he exhumed and pursued, following them into the most peaceful regions of knowledge, all the procedures that are based on confession and productive of truth, in order to pinpoint the technology by means of which visibility transforms space into an operator of power. In fact, the visible becomes for him the arena of the new stakes of power and knowledge. Already a major locus for Merleau-Ponty, the visible constitutes for Foucault the contemporary theater of our fundamental options. It is here that a use of space for policing purposes is confronted by a vigilance attuned to what else happens there. Mustered on this terrain of our epistemological wars, the work of philosophy opposes the systems that subject space to surveillance with paradoxes that chance encounters produce in it; it opposes the panoptic leveling with discontinuities revealed in thought by chance. Two prac-

tices of space clash in the field of visibility, the one ordered by discipline, the other based on astonishment. With this combat, reminiscent of those of the Greek gods in their heaven, is effected the "reversal" of the technologies of "seeing without being seen" into aesthetics of ethical existence.

By exhuming the implications of aleatory events, Foucault invented the loci of new problematics. With each of his books, he offers a hitherto undrawn map of the possibility of "thinking otherwise." He is that "new cartographer" that Gilles Deleuze depicted with such friendly acuity.¹⁴ These maps present tools proportioned to different issues. Among themselves, they do not form a system, but a series of "Essays" [including the sense of "tries"], always having to do with that "curiosity"—that astonishment—"which allows one to get away from oneself."¹⁵ They thus compose a "plurality of possible positions and functions."¹⁶ This heterogeneity appears not only between the regions that they describe (the birth of a system of reason on the basis of a new treatment of madness, the differentiation of domains of knowledge within the same epistemological configuration, the determination of historiography by the hierarchical place of its production, the nature of disciplinary power, the reversal of a sexual ethic relating to boys into a heterosexual ethic), but still more fundamentally between the problematics put into play (the instituting break, the various modalizations of the same framework of postulates, the silent logic of techniques, the constitution of sexuality as a moral activity, and so on). It is a question of "discontinuous practices,"¹⁷ born of inventions that arise from chance encounters. The event that is elicited by the "wild profusion of beings" adds to each carefully constructed map another possibility. None of these maps defines a destiny or truth of thought. These successive places are not linked by the progress of an Idea that would gradually formulate itself, but by a common way of thinking. They answer to the laughs of history. They attest to the necessity of inscribing these chance happenings one after another in our domains of knowledge; they do not undertake, by homogenizing all the discourses, to return their dazzling discontinuities to the shadows. Rarely has philosophical astonishment been treated in a manner so mindful of its possible developments and respectful of its surprises.

Political activity has the same style. It does not appropriate for itself a meaning of history. It does not constitute a strategy, much less a doctrine. It responds to events with the same kind of faithfulness described above in relation to the fortuities of the text. It keeps to the events with the same rigorous constancy and precision, with a view to bringing out the implications of the unthought that breaks through the grid of the established order and accepted disciplines. The chance occurrences of political and social current events, the condition of inmates in French prisons, the Iranian revolution, the repression in Poland, and so many other singular encounters elicited in Foucault the kind of astonishment that generates action. These interventions were not guaranteed success—and

were not offered ideologically, from somewhere above the fray—any more than his maps were. They did not shield themselves from the process of chance that engendered them. Rather, their point of departure was a movement whose ethical character, as Kant was already saying, has to do neither with what seems possible nor with the law of facts. The political gesture is also an "Essay," undertaken with as much lucidity as it can have, and relating to the discoveries made possible by a semi-journalistic "curiosity" attentive to the avatars of the times and of people. Thus Foucault's philosophical inventiveness, that founder of discursivities, traces its path once again, this time in the social field, with the same indefatigable expectation of a history that is other.