MICHEL FOUCAULT

REMARKS ON MARX

Conversations with Duccio Trombadori

Translated by R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito

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Preface
Changing One's Mind

I first decided to translate *Colloqui con Foucault* while living in Salerno shortly after Foucault's death in 1984. I had hoped to write a brief sketch of Foucault's reception in Italy to introduce the "Italian" Foucault to English-speaking readers. While he was still alive I had the impression that Foucault enjoyed a greater influence on Italian intellectual life than was the case in England and America; this impression was strengthened at the time of his death, when every major Italian newspaper devoted considerable space to an assessment of his career.

One reason why Foucault's work has generally had such a large impact in Italy is that translations have rapidly followed the publication of his works in France. The translation of the

second volume of *The History of Sexuality* reached a second printing within five months of his death. A few months later, a group of radical feminists in Rome devoted a weekend of seminars to discussing the relevance of Foucault's last work to their own concerns. I soon realized that I could never hope to provide an adequate history of Foucault's reception in Italy. So I changed my mind.[1]

Duccio Trombadori conducted his series of interviews with Foucault at the end of 1978, when Foucault was still preoccupied with the question of power. Within a few years, however, he began to change his mind about the overall purpose of his work. With his characteristic refusal to remain locked into one kind of thinking, he once again challenged efforts to systematize his thought. Just as we had begun to believe we could sum up his project with such terms as "power / knowledge" or "the microphysics of power," there he was, taking obvious delight in shocking us by rejecting his own earlier conviction (powerfully stated at the end of the fifth conversation here) that the true theme of his work was power. Instead, as he concluded near the end

of his career, his real objective all along had been "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."[2] But this description is misleading: Foucault never ceased to demonstrate how the history of subjectification is inseparable from the history of subjection. If in the final completed volumes of *The History of Sexuality* he appears to shift his ground considerably (as he explains in the opening chapters of *The Use of Pleasure*), the question of power remains relevant to his later concern with ethics, when he turned to the problematic of techniques of the self in the Graeco-Roman world and its inheritors.

In this series of interviews from 1978, however, we find few indications of Foucault's later directions (though he does begin to adumbrate a theory of "governmentality"). These interviews therefore provide a contribution to our understanding of Foucault's thinking in the late 1970s. So far as I am aware, these interviews represent the longest continuous series of published conversations with a single interlocutor. The range of topics and wealth of detail thus make these discussions perhaps the single best source for

understanding Foucault's own views of his career at that time.

But more important, I think, these interviews are valuable for the *dialogue* that emerges. Trombadori was a journalist for *L'Unità*, the daily newspaper of the Italian Communist Party. Foucault's antipathy toward Communist parties (especially the P.C.F.) is well known; it is extremely rare to find him engaged in serious discussion with a Communist intellectual. Despite the suspicions that occasionally surface on both sides in the discussion, the tone always remains one of mutual respect.[3] Many writers have attempted to analyze Foucault's relation to Marxism; these interviews shed additional light on that topic. Here we may recognize many of the strengths and weaknesses of two opposed positions: the desire to forge a revolutionary program by means of a mass political organization that provides global strategies as well as local tactics, on the one hand, is met by the desire to maintain a radical skepticism toward previous analyses of power relations and the strategies they entail, on the other. Indeed, Foucault challenges the very notion of political representation. While his views

on the role of the intellectual expressed here and elsewhere (especially in his well-known interview with Deleuze) merit our attention, the impasse reached in the dialogues that follow seems symptomatic of the political impasse the left was facing in the 1980s in the West, and whose effects were finally felt in the general collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the final months of the decade.

In one of his final interviews, Foucault bitterly expressed disillusionment with the Socialist Party and the left alliance governing France at that time. The government criticized leftist intellectuals, he tells us, for not speaking out on behalf of the fragile alliance to lend it the moral legitimacy it lacked. As he concluded in what may have been his final interview:

> The role of the intellectual does not consist in telling others what they must do. What right would they have to do that? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions, and programs that the intellectuals have managed to formulate in the course of the last two centuries. The

> job of an intellectual does not consist in molding the political will of others. It is a matter of performing analyses in his or her own fields, of interrogating anew the evidence and the postulates, of shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, of dispelling commonplace beliefs, of taking a new measure of rules and institutions.... it is a matter of participating in the formation of a political will, where [the intellectual] is called to perform a role as citizen.[4]

Foucault saw that his main task was to challenge the way we think. In changing his mind so often during his career, he hoped to change our minds, too. The thoughts he expresses in his first interview below on writing an "experience-book" deserve to be remembered by anyone who would reduce Foucault's project to the creation of either a "true" history or a kind of "fiction" — though he himself describes his work in both ways at different times. The "difficult problem of truth," as he says here, is one he never resolved, nor was interested in resolving.

While Foucault emphatically rejects the label of philosopher during his conversations with Trombadori, he later described his activity in exactly those terms. In the opening chapter of *The Use of Pleasure*, he writes in a moving passage:

> There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. But, then, what is philosophy today — philosophical activity, I mean — if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it. . . .[5]

In reply to Marx's famous thesis that philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world when the real point is to change it, Foucault would no doubt have argued that our constant task must be to keep changing our minds.

R. J. Goldstein
Baltimore, 1991

A Note on the English Translation

We have been unable to obtain access to the unpublished original French version of the interviews. When French words appear in parentheses, these have been surmised from the Italian. Our translation of Duccio Trombadori's Italian translation attempts to remain as literal as possible. We have occasionally changed the punctuation but have generally retained the frequent use of inverted commas in the original. All notes not attributed to the editor are by R. James Goldstein. Thanks are due to Anna Maria Fiorelli, who helped improve the translation at its earliest stage. Thanks also to Paola Fimiani of Cooperativa 10/17 for encouragement and for providing access to Italian materials.

Introduction
Beyond the Revolution
Duccio Trombadori

I met with Michel Foucault in Paris at the end of 1978. At that time (though rather less so today [1981]), he was the object of a great deal of discussion. After a decade of an almost uninterrupted enthusiasm for Marxist "language," many people were circulating his vocabulary, and the "micro-physics of power" became symptomatic

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Duccio Trombadori, born in Rome in 1945, holds a degree in the philosophy of law. The author of a study on the political thought of Antonio Gramsci, he has taught at the University of Rome. As a journalist, he has been editor of the cultural page of *L'Unità*. At the time of the publication of *Colloqui con Foucault*, he was a political and parliamentary correspondent for the newspaper.

of a radical, libertarian aspiration. Beyond the questions of fashion, this peculiar ideological transition deserved, and still deserves, some consideration on account of the relative fragility of a certain theoretical Marxism (immediately preceding 1968) and the weak resistance it showed to the revival of various kinds of neo-irrationalist arguments and cultural options.

That reason, if no other, compelled me as a journalist to seek a discussion with Foucault: to focus on the influence, points of theoretical intersection, and cultural and historico-political convergence that could explain the particular agreement between the French intellectual's research and the peculiar roots and the spirit of the European movements of resistance, the transgressive impulses that have been manifested from 1968 until today.

Marxism has entered into relation with all that, in Foucault's opinion, as no more than a fragile ideological covering. Or rather, the troublesome scaffolding of "indomitable discursivities" (to which the hyper-theorizing Marxism of the '60s is supposed to have been reduced) somehow got in the way (so Foucault thinks) of a more substantial, deeper expression

of libertarian needs that are ready to strike at power in its intimate rationality and in its capacity to "govern" individuals.

Not without reason, and with a good dose of presumption, Foucault tended to make his discourse on power coincide with the *internal truth* of the radical movements of resistance:

> If I look back today at my past [he observes during the discussion] I can see that the true motivating force was really this problem of power. Ultimately I had done nothing but attempt to trace the way in which certain institutions, in the name of "reason" or "normality," had ended up exercising their power on groups of individuals, in relation to established ways of behavior, of being, of acting or speaking, by labeling them as anomalies, madness, etc. In the end, I had only produced a history of power.[6]

Power, then, as a problem, as "that which must be explained," which does not refer to principles and foundations — least of all to economic ones — but to the very action of its constitutive mechanisms, to the relations that

inform it and to the discourses that produce it. The Foucauldian "archeological" project consists entirely in this: far removed from classical Marxism, projected entirely within the horizon opened up by Nietzsche, the "discourse on power" is centered in thought that intends to proceed "in order to have no face."[7] The presumption is to pass beyond subjectivity and every "history of ideas," letting the material framework of "events," in their irreducible discontinuity, appear in the theoretical description.

In its constitutive process, "reason" in and of itself is violence: the regime of truth in some ways represents its concealment. All of Foucault's thought revolves around this assumption, beginning with the reflections on the "limit-experience" to the studies on madness, to the attempts at the archeological reconstruction of the relation between "words" and "things."[8] The objections to this attitude are well-known, diverse, and come from fields of thought both different from and similar to Foucault's. One profound criticism remains that of the lack of individuating *real subjects* who are capable of determining a relation of power: in the context of the tensions of

a discursive formation or of a particular apparatus in which knowledge and power are intertwined, *who* struggles against *whom*? In response to Jacques-Alain Miller's hostile question, Foucault in turn has answered: "we all fight against each other," in a bundle of temporary coalitions whose primary elements would be "individuals, or even sub-individuals."[9] Then would not our final hopes really be extinguished — of us, the subjects? Foucault heeds the objection — humanistic, phenomenological, Sartrean, and so on — by immediately specifying that in his opinion the individual is at the same time an "effect" of power and "the element of its articulation."[10] But in this case, what consistency could the word "struggle" ever have? What, outside of an apparent dynamic already entirely predetermined, could possibly change the terms of the "relation of power"?

Foucault encounters a similar difficulty when he seems to oscillate between two versions of power — though I am uncertain whether they are opposed or complementary. On the one hand, power is the dispersion of the political: in and through languages, etc. On the other hand, it is

the mode of a production that seems totalizing ("We have no need to totalize that which is invariably totalized on the side of power," Foucault says in a conversation with Gilles Deleuze; "if we were to move in this direction, it would mean restoring the representative forms of centralism and hierarchical structure").[11] Moreover, if power "totalizes," how can the immanence of the individual "disciplinary fields" be explained (a condition of every microphysics of power) without that immanence immediately dissolving into a mere appearance that is not "productive" of specific techniques of relations? Doesn't the idea of an all-encompassing, all-inclusive Power reappear (which Foucault himself has taken pains to reject) as the foundation of his discourse?

There is no escaping the impression that Foucault, far from providing a new stimulus to demands for liberation, limits himself to describing a mechanism of pure imprisonment: a "mapping" of power that would hardly know how to replace the antagonism implicit in dialectical criticism. On the other hand, a necessary consequence of setting aside all dialectical solutions — the premise of any thinking conducted "in the void left by the disappearance of man" —

is the denial of the idea of revolution as an "upheaval of praxis." It is just on this issue (it has been observed) that a lack of movement from the "microphysics" to the "physics" of power would be revealed, a movement that would be capable of extending the Foucauldian archeological gaze from the local level to a more general level of relations of domination. In reflecting on the category of "governmentality," and in reconsidering the systems and apparatuses of power that presided during the origin of the modern states, Foucault has attempted to respond to criticisms of this kind.[12]

He also returns to this issue in our conversation, referring to the origins and the character of a "disciplinary civilization" in the West, whose crisis is thought to be a decisive moment just as the century is ending.[13] Procedures, techniques, and methods that guarantee the "government" of human society, both "in the Western world and in the socialist one," are called into question: in contributing to the "genealogy" of this crisis, Foucault identifies the task and the meaning of a possible intellectual "commitment" that opposes every possible role of "mediation" in the consensus. Particularly interesting in this regard would

be a testing and comparison with what is developing in Marxism concerning studies on the changes in the form of the modern state, the multiplication of specializations, and the end of power as a concentrated unity.

For some time now, people in Italy, for example, have been considering the possibility of rethinking the theory of contradiction to extend it beyond the Marxian framework, and of redefining the relation between power and social classes, once the two-dimensional schemes have been dismantled and a series of unsymmetrical poles has been identified, which are characteristic of the modern "diffusion of the political" as the prevailing articulation of the state. From this point of view, the level of the state in politics would remain decisive, albeit noticeably altered. This is to disagree with many, including Foucault, who seem to announce an "end to political suffering" as they turn their gaze toward the exclusive effect of the "micropowers" and to the strategy of local and particular struggles.

Foucauldian radicalism fails, in effect, to hypothesize another possible response beyond the pure and simple "refusal of politics." If there's a moral, it is an intimation not to "enter the game"

while proceeding with a sharp criticism that is always, however, condemned to "marginality." The warning is this: if one really wants to assure the impossibility of "the reproduction of the form of the state apparatus within revolutionary movements," it is necessary to start, without any pretense to totalizing, "at a minute level."[14] Frankly, it remains unclear how under these conditions it would be possible to plan the creation of that "new form of right," announced by Foucault, which is disengaged from that incriminated couple, the "right of sovereignty/mechanism of discipline."[15] The anti-Jacobin basis of the position, played out in the form of an attack on the Marxist revolutionary tradition, seems to end up with the absence of a plan and a "technique" of antagonism. Is this the price paid for the radical refusal of the "rules of the game"? In this case, the thematic of "liberation" would be reduced, as has been observed, to the simple criterion of delimiting zones of "autonomy," of "other spaces" with respect to the mechanisms of domination — a self-imposed exclusion from the political that is capable on its own of reconsecrating "power" in its "sovereignty."[16]

The meaning of these criticisms and pointed

questions is present in the conversations with Foucault that I reproduce in these pages with the sole regret that I did not have the opportunity to elaborate, on the level of criticism and contents, as much as I would have liked. Nonetheless, the outline of an unusual intellectual biography clearly emerges here, grounded in the historical and cultural landscape of contemporary France, where the figures of Bataille, Klossowski, Bachelard, and Lévi-Strauss stand out among others. And then there is always present Foucault's confrontation with the "theoretical humanism" of the existentialists (with Sartre leading the way, who is polemically alluded to in a moving reference to the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968); and his polemic with the "Marxism" of the Frankfurt School. To conclude, I would draw attention to Foucault's preliminary observations concerning the relation between truth and experience in his works, where the theme of language returns powerfully, as well as the "instrumental" and "dreamlike" character that compels him to write books "in order to change myself and no longer to think the same thing as before."✣

1

How an 'Experience-Book' Is Born

Duccio Trombadori: I think one could explain the interest which has been concentrated on the results of your thought, especially in recent times, in this way: there are few people, notwithstanding the different ideological "languages" or points of view, who would not

be willing to recognize the progressive and disconcerting dissociation between "words" and "things" in the contemporary world. This also justifies the meaning of our discussion: an attempt to understand better the leaps you've made in the course of your investigations and research, the changes of field in your analysis, and the acquisition of new theoretical understandings. From your studies of "originary (*originaire*) experience" in *The History of Madness* to the theses more recently presented in *The History of Sexuality*, it seems that you proceed by leaps, by shifting the levels of investigation.[17] If I wanted to characterize your thought in order to reveal its essential and continuous character, I could begin by asking: in the light of your most recent research on "power" and the "will to knowledge," what do you think you have surpassed in your earlier work?

Michel Foucault: Many things have certainly been surpassed. I'm perfectly aware of having continuously made shifts both in the things that have interested me and in what I have

already thought. In addition, the books I write constitute an experience for me that I'd like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of changed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I have already thought, I'd never have the courage to begin it. I write precisely because I don't know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think. As a consequence, each new work profoundly changes the terms of thinking which I had reached with the previous work.

In this sense I consider myself more an experimenter than a theorist; I don't develop deductive systems to apply uniformly in different fields of research. When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.

Duccio Trombadori: The idea of a work as "experience" should in any case suggest a methodological point of reference. Or, if nothing else, it should permit the possibility of extracting the directions taken in a method,

within the relationship between the means employed and the results obtained in the investigation.

Michel Foucault: I never know at the beginning of a project what I'll think at its conclusion. Thus it is difficult to indicate clearly what the method is which I employ. Each of my books is a way of dismantling an object, and of constructing a method of analysis toward that end. Once a work is finished, I can of course, more or less through hindsight, deduce a methodology from the completed experience. And thus I happen to write alternatively what I'd call books of exploration and books of method. Books of exploration: *The History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, etc. Books of method: *The Order of Things*, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. And now, after having finished *Discipline and Punish* and while waiting to finish *The History of Sexuality*, I am setting down certain thoughts in articles, interviews, etc.

There's no fixed, definite rule, but a series of precise considerations of completed works

which can help me define other possible objects of investigation. If you want an image, think of a network of scaffolding that functions as a point of relay between a project being concluded and a new one.

Thus I don't construct a general method of definitive value for myself or for others. What I write does not prescribe anything, neither to myself nor to others. At most, its character is instrumental and visionary or dream-like.

Duccio Trombadori: What you're saying confirms the eccentricity of your position; and in a certain sense it explains the difficulties encountered by critics, commentators, and interpreters in the attempt to locate or to attribute to you a precise place within contemporary philosophical thought.

Michel Foucault: But I don't consider myself a philosopher. What I do is neither a way of doing philosophy nor a way of suggesting to others not to do it. As far as I'm concerned, the most important authors who have — I won't say formed me — but who have enabled me

to move away from my original university education, are: Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski. All of them people who were not "philosophers" in the strict, institutional sense of the term. What most struck and fascinated me about them is the fact that they didn't have the problem of constructing systems, but of having direct, personal experiences. At the university, however, I had been instructed to attempt to understand those great philosophical monuments, which when I was a student were called Hegelianism, phenomenology....

Duccio Trombadori: You speak of phenomenology: but all phenomenological thought is centered on the problem of experience, in which these thinkers place their trust in order to delineate the theoretical horizon of their philosophy. In what sense, then, do you distinguish yourself from the phenomenologists?

Michel Foucault: The phenomenologist's experience is basically a way of organizing the conscious perception (*regard réflexif*) of any

aspect of daily, lived experience in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meaning. Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, on the contrary, try through experience to reach that point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or extreme.[18] They attempt to gather the maximum amount of intensity and impossibility at the same time. The work of the phenomenologist, however, essentially consists of unfolding the entire field of possibilities connected to daily experience.

Moreover, phenomenology tries to grasp the significance of daily experience in order to reaffirm the fundamental character of the subject, of the self, of its transcendental functions. On the contrary, experience according to Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille has rather the task of "tearing" the subject from itself in such a way that it is no longer the subject as such, or that it is completely "other" than itself so that it may arrive at its annihilation, its dissociation.

It is this de-subjectifying undertaking, the idea of a "limit-experience" that tears the

subject from itself, which is the fundamental lesson that I've learned from these authors. And no matter how boring and erudite my resulting books have been, this lesson has always allowed me to conceive them as direct experiences to "tear" me from myself, to prevent me from always being the same.

Duccio Trombadori: Work as a continually unfolding experience, the extreme relativity of method, a de-subjectifying tension: these are three essential aspects of your attitude toward thought, as I understand it. Starting with these aspects taken together, one wonders what certainty there could be in the results of such research: what would be the definitive "criterion of truth" which follows from certain premises of your way of thinking?

Michel Foucault: The problem of the truth of what I say is very difficult for me, and it's also the central problem. It's essentially the question which up to now I have never answered.

In the course of my works, I utilize methods that are part of the classic repertory:

demonstration, proof by means of historical documentation, quoting other texts, referral to authoritative comments, the relationship between ideas and facts, the proposal of explanatory patterns, etc. There's nothing original in that. From this point of view, whatever I assert in my writing can be verified or refuted as in any other history book.

Despite that, people who read me, even those who appreciate what I do, often say to me, laughing: "but in the end you realize that the things you say are nothing but fictions!" I always reply: who ever thought he was writing anything but fiction?[19]

If, for example, I had wanted to write the history of psychiatric institutions in Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, I'd certainly never have written a book like *The History of Madness*. But the problem isn't that of humoring the professional historians. Rather, I aim at having an experience myself — by passing through a determinate historical content — an experience of what we are today, of what is not only our past but also our present. And I invite others to share

the experience. That is, an experience of our modernity that might permit us to emerge from it transformed. Which means that at the conclusion of the book we can establish new relationships with what was at issue; for instance, madness, its constitution, its history in the modern world.

Duccio Trombadori: The efficacy of your discourse comes into play completely in the balance between the force of the demonstration and the capacity to refer to an experience that might lead to a transformation of the cultural horizons within which we judge and experience our present. I still don't understand how, in your opinion, this process is related to what we called before the "criterion of truth." That is to say, to what extent are the transformations which you are talking about in a relationship to truth; or how do they produce "truth-effects"?

Michel Foucault: There is a peculiar relation between the things I've written and the effects they have produced. I'm not saying this out of

vanity. Look at the fate of *The History of Madness*: as soon as it was published, it was very well received in some literary circles (Blanchot, Roland Barthes); considered with curiosity at first by psychiatrists; totally ignored by historians who didn't consider it interesting, etc. Then, after a few months, the level of hostility was raised to the point that the book was judged a direct attack against modern psychiatry and a manifesto of anti-psychiatry. This was absolutely not my intention for at least two reasons: first, when I wrote the book in Poland in 1958, anti-psychiatry didn't exist (Laing himself was little known); second, it wasn't a matter in any case of a direct attack on contemporary psychiatry, because it stopped at analyzing facts and events which took place no later than the beginning of the nineteenth century. And so why did people insist on seeing in that work a direct attack on contemporary psychiatry? I'm convinced that the reason is this: the book constituted for me — and for those who read or used it — a transformation of the relation (marked historically, theoretically, and also

from the ethical point of view) which we ourselves have with madness, the institution of psychiatry, and the "truth" of that discourse.

So here is a book that functions as an experience, much more than as the demonstration of a historical truth. Thus I return to the discourse on "truth": it is evident that in order to have such an experience through a book like *The History of Madness*, it is necessary that what it asserts is somehow "true," in terms of historically verifiable truth. But what is essential is not found in a series of historically verifiable proofs; it lies rather in the experience which the book permits us to have. And an experience is neither true nor false: it is always a fiction, something constructed, which exists only after it has been made, not before; it isn't something that is "true," but it has been a reality.

To summarize, then: the difficult relation with truth is entirely at stake in the way in which truth is found used inside an experience, not fastened to it, and which, within certain limits, destroys it.

Duccio Trombadori: This "difficult relation with truth": is it a constant that accompanies your research, and which may also be recognized in the series of your works that followed *The History of Madness*?

Michel Foucault: The same thing could be said about *Discipline and Punish*. The inquiry is limited to an investigation covering the period up to about 1830. But even in this case readers, whether critics or not, took it as a description of modern society. You won't find an analysis of the present in the book, although it's true that for me it was a matter of living out a certain experience related to contemporary life.

Here too the investigation makes use of "true" documents, but in such a way as to furnish not just the evidence of truth but also an experience that might permit an alteration, a transformation, of the relationship we have with ourselves and our cultural universe: in a word, with our knowledge (*savoir*).

Thus this game of truth and fiction — or if you prefer, of evidence and fabrication —

will permit us to see clearly what links us to our modernity and at the same time will make it appear modified to us. This experience that permits us to single out certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, penalization, etc.) and at the same time to separate ourselves from them by perceiving them in a totally different form, must be one and the same experience.

This procedure is central to all my work. And what are its consequences? First of all, that there does not exist a theoretical background which is continuous and systematic. That implies, secondly, that there is no book that I've written without there having been, at least in part, a direct personal experience. I had a personal, complex, direct relation with madness, psychiatric hospitals, and illness. And even with death: when I was working on *The Birth of the Clinic*, arguing about the subject of death in medical knowledge, it took place at a time when these things had a certain importance for me. Thirdly, starting from experience, it is necessary to clear the way for a transformation, a metamorphosis which isn't

simply individual but which has a character accessible to others: that is, this experience must be linkable, to a certain extent, to a collective practice and to a way of thinking. That is how it happened, for example, for such movements as anti-psychiatry, or the prisoners' movement in France.

Duccio Trombadori: In indicating, or as you say, in clearing the way for a transformation capable of being linked to a collective practice, I find already the outline of a methodology or a particular type of "teaching." Doesn't it seem so to you? And if so, doesn't that seem to contradict another requirement that you've mentioned, of avoiding a discourse that prescribes?

Michel Foucault: I would reject this term "teaching"; such a term would reflect the character of a work, of a systematic book that leads to a method that can be generalized, a method full of positive directions, of a body of "teachings" for the readers. In my case it's another matter entirely: my books don't have

this kind of value. They function as invitations, as public gestures, for those who may want eventually to do the same thing, or something like it, or, in any case, who intend to slip into this kind of experience.

Duccio Trombadori: But isn't it true that a "collective practice" must lead us back to values, criteria, and behavior which transvalue individual experience?

Michel Foucault: An experience is, of course, something one has alone; but it cannot have its full impact unless the individual manages to escape from pure subjectivity in such a way that others can — I won't say re-experience it exactly — but at least cross paths with it or retrace it. Let's return for a minute to the book on prisons. In a certain sense it is a historical investigation. But its audience appreciated or detested it not as a historiographical work. All its readers felt or had the impression that it was about them, the world today, or their relations with "contemporaneity," in the forms by which the latter is accepted and recognized

by everyone.... We feel that something contemporary has been brought up for discussion. And in effect I began writing this book only after having participated for some years in work groups — groups involved in reflections "upon" and struggle "against" penal institutions. It was complex and difficult work, carried out with prisoners, their families, prison guards, magistrates, etc.

When the book came out, various readers — particularly prison guards, social workers, etc. — gave this singular judgment: "It is paralyzing. There may be some correct observations, but in any case it certainly has its limits, because it blocks us, it prevents us from continuing our activities." My reply is that it is just that relation that proves the success of the work, proves that it worked as I had wanted it to. That is, it is read as an experience that changes us, that prevents us from always being the same, or from having the same kind of relationship with things and with others that we had before reading it. This demonstrates to me that the book expresses an experience that extends beyond my own.

The book is merely inscribed in something that was already in progress; we could say that the transformation of contemporary man is in relation to his sense of self.[20] On the other hand, the book also worked *for* this transformation; it has been, even if in a small way, an agent. That's it. This, for me, is an "experience-book" as opposed to a "truth-book" or a "demonstration-book."✣

2

The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth'

Duccio Trombadori: I'd like to make an observation at this point. Your speak of yourself and of your research as if the latter had developed almost independently of its historical context — and above all of the cultural relationships — within which your research came to maturity. You've cited Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot: how did you arrive at them? What

was the intellectual scene in France like, and what was the prevalent theoretical debate during the period of your intellectual formation? What led you to the choices and principle directions of your thought?

Michel Foucault: I've already spoken of Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille: they are the writers who permitted me to free myself from the others who had formed me during my university education at the beginning of the 1950s. I've already spoken of Hegel and phenomenology: that was the core of a university education during that period in France. To do philosophy then — as it still is today, for the most part — essentially meant to study the history of philosophy. This history proceeded under the definitions of the range of the Hegelian system, on the one hand, and of the philosophy of the subject, on the other, in the form of phenomenology and existentialism. Hegel controlled the field to a great extent. For France, it was a kind of recent discovery, after the work of Jean Wahl and the lesson of Hyppolite. It was a Hegelianism

deeply penetrated by phenomenology and existentialism, which hinged on the theme of the "unhappy consciousness." And essentially, that was the best the French university could offer; it was the widest form of understanding possible for the contemporary world which had just emerged from the tragedy of World War II and the great upheavals that had preceded it: the Russian Revolution, Nazism, etc. If Hegelianism presented itself as the way to think rationally through the tragedy experienced by the generation which immediately preceded ours and which was still hanging over us, outside the university Sartre enjoyed the greatest following, with his philosophy of the subject. The meeting point of these two tendencies was Merleau-Ponty, who developed the existentialist discourse within a field such as that of the intelligibility of the world, of reality.

It is in relation to this intellectual panorama, if you will, that my choice was brought to maturity: on the one hand, not to become a philosophy professor, and on the other, to find something completely different from ex-

istentialism. Thus my encounter with Bataille, Blanchot and, through them, my reading of Nietzsche. What did they represent for me? First of all, an invitation to call into question the category of the "subject," its primacy and its originating function. And then, the conviction that an operation of that kind would not have made any sense if it had been confined to speculation: to call the subject into question had to mean to live it in an experience that might be its real destruction or dissociation, its explosion or upheaval into something radically "other."

Duccio Trombadori: Was that kind of orientation conditioned only by the critical attitude towards the prevalent climate of philosophical opinion, or did it also grow out of thinking about dimensions of French reality which presented themselves at the end of the war? I'm thinking of the relation between politics and culture, and of the way in which politics was experienced and interpreted by new generations of intellectuals.

Michel Foucault: For me, politics was essentially a way of testing how much I was maturing in my theoretical reflections. An opportunity to have an experience à la Nietzsche or Bataille. For anyone who was twenty right after the World War, for anyone who had endured rather than participated in that tragedy, what on earth could politics represent when it was a matter of choosing between the America of Truman or the U.S.S.R. of Stalin? Or between the old French S.F.I.O.[21] and the Christian Democrats, etc.? Many young intellectuals, including myself, judged that it would be intolerable to have a "bourgeois" professional future as a professor, journalist, writer, or whatever. The very experience of the war had shown us the necessity and the urgency of creating a society radically different from the one in which we had lived; a society that had accepted nazism, had prostituted itself before it, and then had come out of it *en masse* with De Gaulle. In the light of all of that, many young people in France had had the reaction of total rejection. One not only wanted a different world and a different society, one

also wanted to go deeper, to transform oneself and to revolutionize relationships to be completely "other." It's clear, then, that the Hegelianism which I have spoken to you about, and which was proposed as an answer for us at the university with its model of "continuous" intelligibility, wasn't capable of responding to our needs. Even less so phenomenology and existentialism, which firmly maintained the supremacy of the subject and its fundamental value, without any radical breaks.

What did one find instead in Nietzsche? The idea of discontinuity, the announcement of a "Superman" who would surpass "man." And then in Bataille, the theme of the "limit-experiences" in which the subject reaches decomposition, leaves itself, at the limits of its own impossibility. All that had an essential value for me. It was the way out, the chance to free myself from certain traditional philosophical binds.

Duccio Trombadori: You've spoken of the tragic experience of the Second World War and of

the substantial impossibility of explaining it by means of the speculative patterns of traditional philosophy. Why, though, do you wish to include the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre among these failures? Hadn't existentialism too perhaps represented, and above all in France, a reaction to the theoretical tradition, an attempt to reconsider the role of the intellectual in his or her own time?

Michel Foucault: In a philosophy like Sartre's as well, it was essentially the subject which restored meaning to the world. This point was not questioned. It was the subject which attributed meanings. But here the question arose for me: can it be said that the subject is the only form of existence possible? Can't there be experiences in which the subject, in its constitutive relations, in its self-identity, isn't given any more? And thus wouldn't experiences be given in which the subject could dissociate itself, break its relationship with itself, lose its identity? Wasn't this perhaps the experience of Nietzsche, with the metaphor of the Eternal Return?

Duccio Trombadori: Who, besides the authors already mentioned, commented or reflected on the works of Nietzsche at that time?

Michel Foucault: The discovery of Nietzsche occurred outside of the university. Because of the use to which the Nazis had put him, one didn't talk about Nietzsche, or give courses on him; on the contrary, a "continuist" reading of philosophical thought predominated, an attitude toward the philosophy of history that in some ways was held in common by Hegelianism and existentialism. And to tell the truth, this was a tendency equally shared by Marxist culture.

Duccio Trombadori: Only now do you refer to Marxism, and to Marxist culture: as if it were the great Absence. But it doesn't seem to me that one can say this.

Michel Foucault: I'd like to speak of Marxist culture later. For the moment I'm interested in pointing out something that seems rather curious to me. For many of us as young

intellectuals, an interest in Nietzsche or Bataille didn't represent a way of distancing oneself from Marxism or communism. Rather, it was almost the only path leading to what we, of course, thought could be expected of communism. This need for the total rejection of the world in which we found ourselves living was certainly not satisfied by Hegelian philosophy. On the other hand, one was searching for intellectual paths to get to where something totally different seemed to be taking shape or already existed, that is, communism. Thus it was that without knowing Marx very well, refusing Hegelianism, and feeling dissatisfied with the limitations of existentialism, I decided to join the French Communist Party. That was in 1950. A Nietzschean Communist! Something really on the edge of "liveability." And, if you like (I too knew it) something a bit ridiculous, perhaps.

Duccio Trombadori: You were registered in the P.C.F., having arrived there via a particular intellectual path. To what extent did that experience influence you and your theoreti-

cal research? What was your experience as a communist militant? Why did you decide to leave the Party?

Michel Foucault: In France the movement of young people into the C.P. occurs very quickly. Many went in and out without there being any moment of a definite break. When I left it was after the famous "doctors' plot" against Stalin, in the winter of 1952; and my departure took place because of a persistent feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. A little while before the death of Stalin, the news was spread that a group of Jewish doctors had tried to kill him. André Wurmser held a meeting in our Communist student cell in order to explain, in effect, how the plot was to have unfolded. No matter how unconvinced we were, we still forced ourselves into believing what they told us. This was part of an attitude — I'd call it disastrous, but it was mine and it was my way of staying in the Party — of being obligated to sustain the opposite of what's believable; this was part of that exercise of the "dissolution of the self" and of the search for a way of being "other."

Thus we took Wurmser's speech for the truth. Three months after Stalin's death, however, it became known that the doctors' plot was a total invention. What happened then? We wrote to Wurmser, more or less asking him to come and explain to us how come the assassination attempt that he had talked about had never taken place. We didn't get any answer. You're going to say: that was the way things happened then, it was a minor incident.... The fact is that from that moment on I maintained my distance from the P.C.F.[22]

Duccio Trombadori: The episode you're recounting seems a representative scene from the past, a tragic situation that also had its own conditions of appearance: the Cold War, the harshness of Stalinism, a particular relationship between ideology and politics, Party and militants. Under analogous circumstances, and perhaps under worse ones, however, others didn't choose the disassociation from politics, but chose rather to fight and to criticize. I don't think your solution was the best one.

Michel Foucault: I'm well aware that I furnish proof to anyone who wants to rebuke me for having been a Communist in the worst sense, for the wrong reasons, like a petit bourgeois, etc. . But I'm saying these things because they're true and because I'm convinced that I wasn't the only one who had this attitude. In any case, my brief experience with the Party was useful, above all, for what it enabled me to see. I witnessed and took part in a series of episodes which I accepted and shared with others because of that kind of "will to change oneself" which I spoke to you about. Not a good reason, of course: that slightly ridiculous side of the conversion, the asceticism, the self-flagellation, which is one of the important elements of the way in which many students — even in France today — dedicate themselves to the activity of the Communist Party. I saw intellectuals, for example, who abandoned the Party at the time of the Tito affair. But I know others who entered just at that moment, and for those reasons, because of the way all that had happened. And furthermore, they entered almost as a kind of

response to those who, disappointed, had turned in their membership cards.

Duccio Trombadori: After your brief experience in the Communist Party was concluded, you didn't participate in any other political activities?

Michel Foucault: No, I continued to immerse myself in my studies and I finished them. I followed Louis Althusser, who worked militantly in the P.C.F. It was also somewhat under his influence that I had decided to join. And when I left the Party, he pronounced no anathemas, nor was it on that account that he decided to break off relations with me.

Duccio Trombadori: Your connection, or at least a certain intellectual relationship with Althusser, has an origin which is more distant — and perhaps more intimate, I don't know — than is commonly understood. I'm referring particularly to the fact that your name has often been coupled with Althusser's in the polemics about structuralism which domi-

nated the scene of theoretical debate in France during the 1960s. Althusser is a Marxist, you are not, nor are Lévi-Strauss and others, yet the critics have more or less grouped you all together under the term "structuralists." How do you explain this? What was the common ground, if there was one, of your research?

Michel Foucault: There was one point in common among those who in the last fifteen years were called "structuralists," though they were not that at all, with the exception of Lévi-Strauss: I mean Althusser, Lacan, and myself. What was this essential point of convergence? It was a matter of calling this theme of the subject into question once again, that great, fundamental postulate which French philosophy, from Descartes until our own time, had never abandoned. Setting out with psychoanalysis, Lacan discovered, or brought out into the open, the fact that the theory of the unconscious is incompatible with a theory of the subject (in the Cartesian sense of the term as well as the phenomenological one). Sartre, too, and with him Politzer, had rejected psy-

choanalysis by criticizing the theme of the unconscious, judging it incompatible with the philosophy of the subject. The difference rests in the conclusions: indeed, Lacan concluded that it was precisely the philosophy of the subject which had to be abandoned on account of this incompatibility, and that the point of departure should be an analysis of the mechanisms of the unconscious. In turn, Lévi-Strauss also managed to call the theory of the subject into question through the structural analyses that could be conducted on the basis of the findings of linguistics; this also occurred as a result of literary experiences, as in the case of Blanchot and Bataille. Following another route, Althusser performed a similar task when he elaborated his criticism of French Marxism, which was imbued with phenomenology and humanism and which made the theory of alienation, in a subjectivist key, into the theoretical basis for translating Marx's economic and political analyses into philosophical terms. Althusser reversed this point of view. Returning to Marx's analyses, he asked himself if they themselves manifested

that conception of human nature, of the subject, of alienated man, etc., upon which rested the theoretical positions of certain Marxists as, for example, Roger Garaudy.[23] We know that his answer was radically negative.

It was more or less this complex of thought and analysis that was summed up by the term "structuralism" during the '60s. But it's not simply a matter of structuralism or the structuralist method—it all served as a basis for and a confirmation of something much more radical: the calling into question of the theory of the subject.

Duccio Trombadori: You reject the definition of structuralist as an inadequate label. You prefer to return to the theme of the "decentering of the subject," referring above all to the idea of "limit-experiences" according to a trajectory that passes from Nietzsche to Georges Bataille. Yet it is undeniable that a great deal of your thought and of the maturation of your theoretical discourse occurred by means of a critical passage through the problems of epistemology and the philosophy of science.

Michel Foucault: That's true. One of the essential points of my intellectual formation is found also in reflecting on science and the history of science. In a certain sense, this is a field of problems quite distant from those raised by Nietzsche, Bataille, etc. But up to what point? When I was a student, the history of science and its problems had come to find itself in a strategic position. The theoretical debates were nearly entirely centered on the theme of scientific knowledge (*science*): this was examined in terms of its foundation, its rationality, its history. Such was the case with phenomenology, or those phenomenologists who had developed that side of Husserlian thought directed towards examining the foundations and objectivity of knowledge (*connaissance*). But an analogous discourse also came out of the Marxist camp to the extent that Marxism, in the years following the Liberation, had acquired an important role which was not only theoretical but also part of the daily life of young students and intellectuals. Indeed, Marxism claimed to be a science or at least a general theory of the

"scientificity" of science: a kind of tribunal of reason which would permit us to distinguish what was science from what was ideology. That is, a general criterion of the rationality of every form of knowledge. This entire tangled knot of problems and this field of investigation forced one to ask questions about science and its history. To what extent, wondered the phenomenologist, can one grasp and reveal a rational, absolute foundation in the "historicity" of sciences? And on the other hand, the Marxists posed the question: up to what point can Marxism account for the history of science, the birth and development of mathematics, theoretical physics, etc., by reconstructing the history of society according to Marxist schematics?

This condensed set of problems that I have summarily described — in which the history of science, phenomenology, and Marxism were to be identified — was absolutely central then: a great many of the problems of the time were refracted there as in a lens. And I still recall the influence that Louis Althusser himself had on me in that regard, who was

slightly older than I but already a young professor then.

Duccio Trombadori: In what way did the problematic which revolved around the history of science take part in your intellectual formation?

Michel Foucault: Paradoxically, somewhat in the same sense that Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille did. The question was: to what extent can the history of science question its own rationality, limit it, or introduce external elements? What are the contingent effects which are introduced into science from the moment it has a history and develops in a historically determined society? These questions were followed by others: can one produce a rational history of science? Can a criterion of intelligibility be discovered amid the various accidents, chances, and the possibly irrational elements that are insinuated in the history of science?

If these were more or less the problems advanced by a Marxist or phenomenological

kind of thinking, for me the questions were posed instead in a slightly different way. My reading and assimilation of Nietzsche returns precisely in this connection: what's necessary is not so much a history of rationality as a history of truth itself. That is, rather than asking of science to what extent its history has approached the truth (or had impeded access to it), wouldn't it rather be necessary to recognize that the truth consists of a certain relationship that discourse or knowledge has with itself? And doesn't this relationship contain within itself its own history?

What most struck me in Nietzsche is that for him the rationality of a science, a practice, or a discourse isn't measured by the truth that it is in a position to produce. Rather, truth itself has a share in the history of discourse, and in some ways has an internal effect on a discourse, or on a practice.

Duccio Trombadori: Nietzsche's writing on the "history of truth" and on the limits of the "theoretical man" doubtless represents a shift in perspective with respect to the horizon of

classical epistemology, since in a certain sense he reduces its premises to zero, proclaiming the fundamental "untruth of knowledge." But I'm interested in knowing: how did you come to connect the analysis of the origins of science with that of the "limit-experience," or of experience as transformation?

Michel Foucault: I more or less posed the problem like this: couldn't a science be analyzed or conceived of as an experience, that is, as a particular relationship that is established in such a way that the subject itself of the experience might be seen as altered? To put it another way, in scientific practice, wouldn't the subject as much as the object of knowledge be constituted? And isn't the historical origin of a science to be found precisely in this reciprocal genesis of the subject and object? What is the truth-effect that is produced in this way? Its consequence would be that there isn't just one truth that is "given." And this doesn't carry with it the affirmation of an irrational history, and even less of the falsity of a science; on the contrary, it confirms the

presence of a real and intelligible history, of a series of collective rational experiences (which respond to a set of quite precise and identifiable rules) in the course of which the knowing subject is constructed as much as the object which is known.

Thus it seemed to me that the best way to understand this process of formation in the history of the sciences was to investigate the process within the less consolidated disciplines whose constitution was relatively more recent, and in a certain sense closer to their origins and their immediate urgency. Those kinds of science, then, whose scientific character was least certain and which sought to understand what was less susceptible of being placed within a determinate scheme of rationality. This was the case with madness. It was a matter of understanding how, in the Western world, madness had become a precise object of analysis and scientific investigation only starting in the eighteenth century, even though there had previously been medical treatises concerning (in brief chapters) "maladies of the spirit." It could thus be

verified that at the very moment in which this object, "madness," took shape, there was also constructed the subject judged capable of understanding madness. To the construction of the object madness, there corresponded a rational subject who "knew" about madness and who understood it. In *The History of Madness* I tried to understand this kind of collective, plural experience which was defined between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and which was marked by the interaction between the birth of "rational" man who recognizes and "knows" madness, and madness itself as an object susceptible of being understood and determined.

Duccio Trombadori: That "originary gesture" which would determine the separation and confrontation of reason and non-reason (with the consequences for the destiny of Western culture which you yourself have analyzed) would seem to reveal itself as a preliminary, essential condition of historical development, or of the history of modern reason. Wouldn't this limit-experience which opens up the

possibility of history be constituted in an atemporal dimension outside history itself?

Michel Foucault: I have taken pains to show how my work consisted neither in a form of "apology" for madness — this goes without saying — nor in the affirmation of a history of irrationality. On the contrary, I wanted to indicate how that experience — which constituted madness as object together with the subject that understands it — could only fully be understood by referring rigorously to certain well-known historical processes: the birth of a particular normalizing society which was linked to practices of confinement, which in their turn were connected with a precise economic and social situation corresponding to the phase of urbanization and the growth of capitalism and with the existence of a fluctuating, dispersed population which entered into friction with the needs of the economy and the state, etc.

Thus I sought to produce a history, the most rational one possible, of the constitution of a knowledge (*savoir*), and of a new relationship of objectivity, of something that I

could even define as the "truth of madness." That of course doesn't mean that by means of this type of "knowledge" one has effectively organized criteria that are capable of uncovering madness in its truth; no, it's rather an experience that is constituted, the "truth of madness," with the possibility of an objective understanding and of the reciprocal constitution of a subject.

Duccio Trombadori: Let's step back for a moment. In reconstructing your intellectual development, and in particular with respect to epistemological problems, you haven't once named Gaston Bachelard. Yet it has been noted (not wrongly, I think) that the "rational materialism" of Bachelard, founded on the primacy of a scientific "praxis" which can "construct" its own objects of analysis, might in some ways constitute a background to the lines of research that you have developed. Don't you agree?

Michel Foucault: I read the books of Bachelard a lot when I was a student: in his reflections on the discontinuity of the theory of the sciences,

and in the idea of the working of reason upon itself in the moment in which it constitutes for itself objects of analysis, there was an entire network of elements that I collected and then used again. But within the sphere of the philosophy of science, it was perhaps Georges Canguilhem who had the greatest influence on me, even if this was in a later period. He is the person who more than anyone else has examined thoroughly the problems of biology in general, trying to show how it was man himself as a living individual who called himself into question in this experience.

By means of the establishment of the biological sciences, man, while establishing a certain kind of knowledge (*savoir*), was also changing himself as a living individual. Owing to the fact that he was able to operate on himself, change his own conditions of life and his life itself, man was constructing a biology that was nothing other than the reciprocal form of the attempt of the life sciences to encompass the general history of the species. This is a very important consideration in Canguilhem who, I believe, recognizes in

himself a certain affinity with Nietzsche. That is why we find around the figure of Nietzsche, in spite of the paradox, a certain affinity, a certain nexus of movement and communication between the discourse about the dissociation of the subject in "limit-experiences" (about which we spoke when we were dealing with Bataille) and the discourse on the transformation of the subject itself through the elaboration of a knowledge (*savoir*).

Duccio Trombadori: According to you, how does one establish a relationship between the "limit-experiences," which in a certain sense precede the elaboration of "reason" and, on the other hand, "knowledge" (*savoir*), which is thought to define the historical limit of a cultural horizon?

Michel Foucault: When I use the word "knowledge" (*savoir*), I do so in order to distinguish it from *a* knowledge (*connaissance*). The former is the process through which the subject finds himself modified by what he knows, or rather by the labor performed in order to

know. It is what permits the modification of the subject and the construction of the object. *Connaissance*, however, is the process which permits the multiplication of knowable objects, the development of their intelligibility, the understanding of their rationality, while the subject doing the investigation always remains the same.

I have used this as a premise the better to explain my idea of an "archeology of knowledge." It's a question, then, of understanding once more the formation of a knowledge (*connaissance*), that is, of a relation between a determinate subject and a determinate field of objects, and of grasping it in its historical origin, in that "movement of knowledge" (*savoir*) that renders it possible. Everything that I have occupied myself with up till now essentially regards the way in which people in Western societies have had experiences that were used in the process of knowing a determinate, objective set of things while at the same time constituting themselves as subjects under fixed and determinate conditions. For example, knowing madness by being

constituted as a rational subject; knowing economics by being constituted as the laboring subject; or knowing law by being constituted as the subject that has a relation with the law, that is capable of committing crimes, etc. This involvement or commitment of oneself, therefore, always exists within the object of one's own "knowledge" (*savoir*). Starting out with this awareness (*conscience*) in particular, I have taken pains to understand how man had reduced some of his limit-experiences to objects of knowledge (*connaissance*): madness, death, crime. Here, if you like, the themes of Georges Bataille may be recognized, reconsidered from the point of view (*optique*) of a collective history, that of the West and its knowledge (*savoir*). The relationship between limit-experiences and the history of truth: I am more or less imprisoned or wrapped up in this tangle of problems. I see them better by threading together again certain episodes of my life: what I'm saying has no objective value; but perhaps it can serve to clarify the problems that I've tried to shed light on, and their succession.

Duccio Trombadori: One last observation on the cultural components of your intellectual formation: I'm referring to "phenomenological anthropology" and the attempt to join phenomenology and psychoanalysis. One of your first publications (from 1954) is an introduction to *Traum und Existenz* by Biswanger,[24] in which you take up the idea of the dream or the imaginary as the "originary space" which is constitutive of "man"

Michel Foucault: Reading what has been defined "existential analysis" or "phenomenological psychiatry" certainly was important for me: it was a period when I was working in psychiatric hospitals, and I was looking for something different to counterbalance the traditional grids of the medical gaze.[25] Certainly those superb descriptions of madness as fundamental, unique experiences that could not be superimposed on others, were crucial. On the other hand, I think that Laing too was very impressed by all that: for a long time, he also referred to existential analysis (he was more of a Sartrean, I a Heideggerian). But we didn't

stop at that point. Laing developed his research, which was connected to his function as a physician. An enormous labor; and he was the true founder, together with Cooper, of anti-psychiatry. As far as I'm concerned, however, I think that existential analysis was useful above all in order better to delimit and circumscribe academic psychiatric knowledge (*savoir*), which could be burdensome and oppressive.

Duccio Trombadori: To what extent, on the other hand, have you taken up and assimilated Lacan's teaching?

Michel Foucault: From what I've managed to learn about his theories, Lacan has certainly influenced me. But I haven't followed him in a way that would enable me to say that I've had an in-depth experience of his teaching. I've read some of his books; however, it's well known that in order to understand Lacan well, it's not only necessary to read him but also to listen to his lectures, participate in the seminars he gives, and, if possible, to undergo

analysis with him. I haven't done any of that. In 1955, when Lacan commenced the essential part of his teaching, I was already outside France.

Duccio Trombadori: Have you lived much outside France?

Michel Foucault: Yes, for many years. I worked abroad as an assistant professor or as a lecturer in the universities of Uppsala, Warsaw, and Hamburg. Among other things, this was precisely during a crucial period for France, during the war with Algeria. While that event had very important repercussions in the intellectual world and in all of French culture, I experienced it somewhat like a foreigner. Moreover, by observing the facts like a foreigner, I managed more easily to understand the absurdity and to discern with greater clarity what the necessary conclusion of that war would be. Of course I was against the conflict. But being abroad, without experiencing directly what was happening in my country, I personally didn't participate in one of the

most decisive experiences of modern France.

When I returned, I had just finished writing *The History of Madness*, a book which followed a mixed collection of research projects, and which in a certain sense also echoed the direct experience I had had during those years. I'm referring to the experience of Swedish society, an "over-medicalized," protected society where all social perils were in some ways attenuated by subtle and studied mechanisms; and to the experience of Polish society, where the mechanisms of "internment" were of quite a different type.... It was a matter of concrete, very important experiences of two different forms of society: but they were on a completely different wavelength from France, which was completely seized by the climate of war and by the problems which were bringing a period of history to a close, the period of colonization. *The History of Madness* was also the product of this singular difference with regard to French reality, and it was favorably received right away only by people like Blanchot, Klossowski, and Barthes. There were differ-

ent reactions among doctors and psychiatrists: a certain interest on the part of some who were of liberal and Marxist orientations; total rejection, on the other hand, on the part of others who were more conservative. On the whole, however, as I've already told you, my work was not taken seriously: indifference and silence were the main reactions. Little importance was granted to that kind of research.

Duccio Trombadori: What were your reactions to this attitude? A short time afterwards, *The History of Madness* was to be recognized, even by those who didn't share its theses, as a work of considerable importance. How do you explain this initial quasi-indifference?

Michel Foucault: I have to confess to you that I was a bit amazed. But I was wrong. French intellectual circles at that moment were attracted by interests of a completely different sort. Marxism, science, and ideology were being discussed a lot. I think the lack of willingness to accept *The History of Madness*

may be explained in this way: first, it was historical research, and at the time attention was predominantly dedicated to theory and to the discussion of the great conceptual systems; second, an analytic field like experimental psychiatric medicine was considered marginal with respect to the complexity of the debate in progress; and then, after all, didn't madness and the mentally ill represent something that was located at the margins of society? I believe that these were more or less the reasons for the lack of interest or silence which surrounded the book. I repeat, I was surprised and disappointed by this reaction; I'd thought that there were things in my work that should have interested precisely those intellectuals who were most dedicated to the analysis of social and political systems. I myself had sought to understand the origin and formation of a discourse like that of psychiatry by beginning with determinate historical situations. I had then attempted to define it in its social and economic functions, trying to produce a history of psychiatry by starting with the changes in the modes of production that had

intervened and that had collided with the population in such a way as to cause not only the problem of pauperization or of epidemic in general; but also of the differences between the separate categories of the "poor" and the "sick," therefore also of the mentally ill. I was convinced that all of that would have to interest the Marxists, if no one else. Instead, there was just silence.

Duccio Trombadori: What, in your judgment, permitted interest in your text to be reignited, even unleashing, as we know, fierce polemics?

Michel Foucault: Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to trace a history of this occurrence. It was just in the period immediately before 1968, when the first symptoms of what would occur in that year were already becoming evident, that reactions and attitudes changed or became radicalized.

What was happening? These problems of madness, of systems of confinement, and

processes of social normalization had become a kind of delectable morsel of which, in the circles of the extreme left above all, almost no one wanted to deprive him or herself. In the face of that, everyone who thought it necessary to maintain a distance from what was emerging used my book as a target: showing how idealized it was, how it didn't grasp the substance of the problem, etc. The point was reached where *Evolution psychiatrique* — a very important group of doctors in France — decided to dedicate an entire meeting in Toulouse to the purpose of "excommunicating" *The History of Madness*.[26] Bonafé himself, the Marxist psychiatrist who had been one of those who greeted my work with interest when it came out, condemned it after '68 as an ideologizing and falsified work. Thus, in this merging of polemics and in the renewal of interest in certain topics, *The History of Madness* became news again.

Duccio Trombadori: What effects were provoked in psychiatric circles by the regained cur-

rency of your discourse? It is during those years that an entire movement of opposition to traditional psychiatry began to gain force, creating problems for an entire system of established cultural "balances."

Michel Foucault: The history, condition, and problems of French psychiatry present interesting aspects that it would be worthwhile to reflect on. Indeed, right after the war a tendency was shown here in France to reconsider the practice of traditional psychiatry; it was a spontaneous impulse that had originated within medical circles themselves. Projects, reflections, analyses, and research on the function of psychiatry were placed on the agenda: and with such anticipations that what has been called anti-psychiatry could probably have been born in France in the early 1950s. If that didn't happen, it is owing to these reasons, in my opinion: first, many of those psychiatrists were very close to Marxism, if not actually Marxists; and also for this reason they were forced to concentrate their attention on what was happening in the U.S.S.R. since

Pavlov, on reflexology, on a "materialist" psychiatry, and on an entire set of theoretical and scientific problems that certainly couldn't be carried very far. Some of them went to study in the U.S.S.R. But it isn't clear to me that they spoke or wrote about that experience afterwards. For that reason, I think — and I'm not saying it aggressively — the Marxist climate progressively brought them to an impasse. I also believe that in a short while, and perhaps on account of their psychiatric profession, many were forced to set the problem of the reconsideration of psychiatry within their own positions under the weight of an overwhelming, bureaucratic administration. Thus, on account of these impasses, persons who through their capabilities, interests, and knowledge could have anticipated an entire series of problems concerning the status of psychiatry, remained in some ways removed from the successive development of events.

And during the explosion of "anti-psychiatry" in the 1960s, they had a more and more marked attitude of rejection that as-

sumed aggressive tones. It was then that my book was placed on the "index," as though it were the "gospel of the devil." I know that in some circles, *The History of Madness* is still spoken of with incredible contempt.✣

3

'But Structuralism was not a French Invention'

Duccio Trombadori: In reconsidering the polemics arising from your writing, I'd like to recall now those which, in the 1960s, followed the heated debate over "structuralism." There was during that period an intense debate, and harsh tones concerning you were not lacking, on Sartre's part, for example. But I

remind you of other judgments concerning your thought: Garaudy spoke of "abstract structuralism"; Jean Piaget of "structuralism without structures"; Mikel Dufrenne of "neo-positivism"; Henri Lefebvre of "neo-Eleatism"; Silvie Le Bon of a "desperate positivism"; Michel Amiot of "cultural relativism," or of "historicist scepticism," etc. A set of observations and a crossing of different languages, even in opposition to one another, was converging in the criticism of your theses, more or less after you had published *The Order of Things* [1966]. But the cultural climate in France, heated as it was, most probably depended on the wider polemic concerning structuralism. What value do you assign today to those judgments and to the more general significance of those polemics?

Michel Foucault: This problem of structuralism is a difficult one to unravel. If we managed to, however, it would be very interesting. Let's set aside for the moment an entire series of exasperated polemics that had that touch of theatricality and sometimes grotesque for-

mulation that often goes along with such polemics in France. Among these I would also place Sartre's most well-known statement concerning me, which named me as "the last bulwark of the bourgeoisie." Poor bourgeoisie: if it had needed *me* as a "bulwark," it would have lost power long ago!

Having said this, however, we must wonder how on earth this phenomenon of structuralism provoked such anger as to make someone utter such truly absurd things. When serious, reasonable people lose control, we must stop and wonder what justifies all that. I myself have often wondered: and I've managed to formulate a series of hypotheses, though I couldn't tell you how accurate they are. Let's start off first of all with an observation. At the end of those polemics, during the mid-sixties, an entire series of intellectual figures were defined as "structuralists" who had conducted completely different kinds of investigations, but having one point in common: the need to oppose that set of philosophical elaborations, considerations, and analyses centered essentially on the theoreti-

cal affirmation of the "primacy of the subject." One went from the kind of Marxism that agonizes over the concept of alienation, to phenomenological existentialism centered on lived experience, to those tendencies of psychology that in the name of experience and of making it adequate to man — let's say the "experience of the self" — rejected the theme of the unconscious. It's true that the "structuralists" needed to oppose all that. And the exasperated polemics against them can be explained starting from there.

But I think that behind all that scuffling there was something deeper, a history that was not much considered at the time. Structuralism as such, in fact, was surely not discovered by the "structuralists" of the '60s, *nor was it even a French invention*. Its real origin is found in an entire series of investigations developed in the U.S.S.R. and Central Europe around the 1920s. This great cultural expansion, in the fields of linguistics, mythology, folklore, etc., which had preceded and in a certain sense coincided with the Russian Revolution of 1917, had afterwards been swept away and almost crushed by the Stalinist

steamroller. Structuralist culture had then ended up circulating in France through more or less underground channels that were little known at any rate: think of the phonology of Troubetzkoy, or of the influence of Propp on Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss, etc. So it seems to me that in the aggressivity with which certain French Marxists, for example, opposed the "structuralists" of the '60s there was a kind of historical knowledge (*savoir*): that is, of the fact that structuralism had been the great cultural victim of Stalinism. I don't know if you agree with what I'm saying.

Duccio Trombadori: I would say that you privilege a certain cultural current by "victimizing" it. It wasn't only structuralism that was swept away, as you say, by the "Stalinist steamroller," but an entire series of tendencies and cultural and ideological expressions that the October Revolution had set in motion. I don't think we can make clear-cut distinctions. Marxism too, for example, was reduced to a body of doctrine, damaging its critical flexibility, its openness.

Michel Foucault: Yes, but it's necessary to explain this curious fact: how a phenomenon like structuralism, which is so specific, could ever have excited so much hostility in the 1960s; and why the label "structuralism" was assigned to a series of intellectuals who were not structuralists, or who at least rejected that label. I remain convinced that to find a satisfying answer we must shift the center of gravity of the analysis. Basically the problem of structuralism in Europe has been nothing other than the consequence of the more important problems that were being posed in the Eastern European countries. First of all one must account for the effort made during the period of de-Stalinization by so many intellectuals — Soviet, Czechoslovak, etc. — to acquire a degree of autonomy from the political establishment and to free themselves from official ideologies. To do that, they had available just that kind of occult tradition from the '20s which I've spoken about, and which had a double value: on the one hand, it concerned one of the main forms of innovation which Eastern Europe was able to offer Western

culture (formalism, structuralism, etc.); on the other hand, this culture was linked, directly or indirectly, to the October Revolution, and its main exponents were identified with it. The picture becomes clearer: at the moment of de-Stalinization, the intellectuals had tried to recover their autonomy by reweaving the threads of that tradition which was culturally prestigious and which from one political point of view couldn't be accused of being reactionary and Western. It was revolutionary and East European. Thus the idea was to reactivate and return these tendencies to circulation, in thought and in art. I think the Soviet authorities gave perfectly ample warning of the danger and didn't want to run the risk of an open confrontation which, however, many intellectual forces were headed for.

That's why it seems to me that what happened in France was a kind of blind and unaware consequence of all of this. The more or less Marxist circles, both Communists and others influenced by Marxism, must have had the premonition that in "structuralism," as it

was practiced in France, there was something that sounded somewhat like the death-knoll of traditional Marxist culture. *A left culture that was not Marxist was about to emerge.* From this we have the origin of certain reactions that right away took aim at investigations that did not toe the line — the Marxist, technocratic, idealist one, etc. — more or less as in the U.S.S.R. Certain judgments that appeared in *Les temps modernes* were very similar to those of the last Stalinists, or to those advanced during the Khruschev period, concerning formalism and structuralism.

Duccio Trombadori: I think that here, too, you force your hand a bit, in the sense that an analogy of judgment is still not a convergence of a cultural position, much less a political one.

Michel Foucault: I'd like to tell you two stories that are sufficiently exemplary. I'm not completely certain about the first one, which was told to me a few years ago by a Czechoslovakian emigrant. One of the most impor-

tant Western philosophers, a Frenchman, was invited to give a lecture in Prague — I'm not sure whether it was at the end of '67 or the beginning of '68. The Czechs awaited him with great apprehension. He was the first important non-Communist philosopher to be invited during a period of great cultural and social ferment, the blossoming of the "Prague Spring." It was expected that he would speak more or less about what in Western Europe did not coincide with traditional Marxist culture. Instead, from the start of the lecture, the French philosopher had it out with that group of intellectuals, the "structuralists," who were supposedly at the service of big capital and who were attempting to oppose the great Marxist ideological tradition. By saying that, he probably thought he was doing the Czechs a favor, proposing a kind of dialogue in the form of an "ecumenical Marxism"; instead, without noticing it, he hit precisely on what the intellectuals of that country were doing. At the time, he furnished the Czech authorities with an exceptionally good weapon that permitted them to launch an attack against

structuralism, which was judged a reactionary, bourgeois ideology even by a non-Communist philosopher. As you can see, it was a great disappointment.

I pass now to the second story, where I'm a direct protagonist. In 1967 it was proposed that I give a series of lectures in Hungary. I had proposed, among other things, to deal with the subjects of the debate in progress on structuralism. All the arguments were assembled, and I began my series of lectures in university auditoriums and theaters. When the moment came when I was supposed to speak about structuralism, however, I was advised that on that occasion the lecture would be delivered in the office of the president of the university: it is so specialist a subject, they told me, that there isn't much interest. I didn't think things were like that. I talked about it with my young interpreter, and he replied: "There are three things we cannot discuss at the university: nazism, the Horty regime, and structuralism." I was disconcerted. But in thinking back over this episode, I too began to understand that essentially the problem of

structuralism was a problem of Eastern Europe, and that the heated arguments and confused fate to which the topic was subjected in France were only the consequence, certainly poorly understood by everyone, of a much more serious and difficult struggle taking place in the countries of Eastern Europe.

Duccio Trombadori: In what sense do you speak of "consequence"? Didn't the theoretical debate taking place in France have its own specific originality that extended beyond the question of structuralism?

Michel Foucault: If you like, the considerations that I've made can be useful in judging precisely the intensity and character of the debate that was taking place in Western Europe. Indeed, behind what was called "structuralism," a series of important questions was being raised: a certain way of putting theoretical problems, without centering any longer on the "subject"; then, of forms of analysis that, though rigorously rational, were not of the Marxist variety. It was the birth, I think, of

a kind of theoretical reflection that was separating itself from the great Marxist obedience. For this reason, in some ways, the values and the struggle at stake in the East were being transposed onto what was happening in the West.

Duccio Trombadori: I don't quite grasp the meaning of this "transposition." The resurgence of interest in the structuralist method and its tradition in Eastern Europe had very little to do with the line of "theoretical antihumanism" expressed by the French "structuralists"

Michel Foucault: Perhaps I haven't explained myself.... But basically what happened in the East and West was essentially the same kind of thing, within certain limits. Because what was at stake was this: to what extent is it possible to constitute forms of thought and analysis that are not irrationalistic, that are not coming from the right, and that moreover are not reducible to Marxist dogmatism? These are the complex problems, with all the de-

velopments they have had, that are included in the vague and confused term of "structuralism." And why did this term appear? Because the debate on structuralism was actually the central position at stake in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. And on the other hand, something about structuralism was in question there that was analogous to what was being proposed in France, which is to say: to what extent is it possible to conduct a theoretical, rational, scientific program of research that can surpass the laws and dogmatism of dialectical materialism? As you can see, there was a close analogy with what was happening in France. Only that in France, it was not structuralism in the strict sense that was at the heart of the debate, while in Eastern Europe it was really structuralism that they wanted to hide and combat, as is still the case today. Thus you can see how the meaning of an entire series of anathemas is better explained....

Duccio Trombadori: But oddly, one of the objects of these "anathemas" was also Louis

Althusser, whose investigation was fully identified with Marxism—or rather, proclaimed to be its most faithful interpretation. So Althusser too was among the "structuralists." Why then did a Marxist work like *Reading Capital* and your book, *The Order of Things*, published in the mid-sixties and of a dissimilar orientation, both become targets of a common "anti-structuralist" polemic?

Michel Foucault: Other than the theoretical opposition to the primacy of the "subject," I wouldn't know exactly why Althusser, who was not a structuralist, also fell under that definition. As far as I'm concerned, I believe that basically they wanted to make me pay for *The History of Madness* by attacking the other book, *The Order of Things*, in its place. *The History of Madness* had caused a lot of trouble, despite everything: this work, which shifted the attention from the elevated problems to minimal questions, which instead of discussing Marx proceeded to analyze such trivialities as the internal practices of mental hospitals, etc.... The scandal, which should

have exploded about ten years earlier, was to arrive at the publication in 1966 of *The Order of Things*: it was spoken of as a purely formal, abstract text. All these were things that couldn't be said about my first work on madness. But if serious attention had been paid to *The History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* that followed, one could have noticed that *The Order of Things* did not represent a point of arrival and conclusion for me at all. It was a work that was set within a specific dimension and conceived to deal with a series of subjects. I certainly didn't resolve all my worries in that book, especially the methodological ones; however, right at the end of the book, I reaffirmed that it was essentially an analysis conducted within the field of the transformation of knowledge (*savoir*) and a knowledge (*connaissance*). And I recognized the need to go further into a series of problems and causes, starting from those results. If my critics had read the preceding works, if they hadn't wanted to forget them, they would have had to recognize that already in them I had proposed a series of problems, explana-

tions, and causes. It's partially the result of the old, well-rooted vice of judging a book as if it were a kind of absolute, perfectly elaborated in each of its elements. But as you know, I write books in progression: the first leaves open problems upon which the second one rests; which, in turn, requires another one. And all of that doesn't happen in linear fashion or continuity; these same texts overlap and criss-cross one another.

Duccio Trombadori: What linked a "book of method" like *The Order of Things* to "books of exploration" like those on madness and the clinic? What problems compelled you to complete the transition to a more systematic rethinking from which you extracted the notion of *episteme* or the set of rules that govern "discursive practices" in a determinate culture, or in a historical period?

Michel Foucault: With *The Order of Things* I developed an analysis of methods, procedures, and classifications in the order of Western experimental scientific knowledge (*savoir*).

This was a problem that I had pointed to, while working on *The Birth of the Clinic*, when I came across it in relation to the problems of biology, medicine, and the natural sciences. But I had already encountered the problems of classificatory medicine when working on *The History of Madness*, since a similar methodology had begun to operate precisely in regard to mental illness. As you see, it was a thematic that was shifted like a pawn on a chessboard, from move to move, sometimes with zigzags, sometimes jumping from one square to another. For this reason I decided to systematize in a text the complex picture that was taking shape during my investigations. Thus came about *The Order of Things*: a very technical book that was especially directed at specialists of the philosophy of science. I had conceived of it after discussing it with Georges Canguilhem, and with it I intended to address scholars above all. But to tell the truth, those weren't the problems that excited me the most. I have already spoken to you about the "limit-experiences"; this is really the theme that fascinates me. Madness, death, sexuality,

crime: these are the things that attract my attention most. Instead, I have always considered *The Order of Things* a kind of formal exercise.

Duccio Trombadori: Surely you don't want me to think that *The Order of Things* had no importance for you! That text marked a notable transition in the order of your thought. The field of investigation was no longer the "originary experience" of madness, but the criteria and organization of culture and history....

Michel Foucault: I don't say these things to undo the results that I obtained in that work. But *The Order of Things* is not my "true" book: it has its "marginality" compared to the depth of participation and interest which is present in and which subtended the others. Nevertheless, by some peculiar paradox, *The Order of Things* has been the book that has had the greatest success with the public. Probably because of the unheard of concentration of criticism that it received at the time of its

publication, everyone wanted to buy it. Tens of thousands of copies were sold. It's a paradox that is due to the unhealthy character of the consumption of a theoretical text in relation to the quantity of criticism that appears in newspapers and magazines.

Duccio Trombadori: Do you wish to specify, then, the significance that you attributed to the book at the time you decided to write it?

Michel Foucault: Above all, I had tried to order and compare three scientific practices. By "scientific practices" I mean a certain way of regulating and constructing discourses that in their turn define a field of objects, and determine at the same time the ideal subject destined to know them (*connaître*). It had seemed rather peculiar to me that three distinct fields — natural history, grammar, and political economy — had been constituted in their rules more or less during the same period, around the seventeenth century, and had undergone, in the course of a hundred years, analogous transformations. A rigorous com-

parative study of heterogeneous practices, by its very nature, did not permit the individuation of the possible relation between the birth of the analysis of wealth and the development of capitalism, for example. The problem was not that of knowing how political economy arose, but of finding points in common that existed between different discursive practices: a comparative analysis of the procedures internal to scientific discourse. It was a problem that interested very few people at the time. But the fundamental question that was essential then and still remains so today is this: how, approximately, can a type of knowledge (*savoir*) with pretenses to scientificity arise from a real practice? It's always a current problem, and the one dominant over all others.

Duccio Trombadori: This "dominant problem" — the constitution of a knowledge from a social practice—nonetheless remained in the sidelight in *The Order of Things*. Among the most pointed barbs of criticism directed at the book, I think, was the accusation of structural

"formalism," or of the reduction of the problem of history and society to a series of "discontinuities" and "ruptures" inherent in the structure of knowledge (*connaissance*).

Michel Foucault: To those who blame me for not having dealt with this problem or for not having faced up to it, I respond that I wrote *The History of Madness* also in order that it be known that I don't ignore the problem. And that if I haven't discussed it in other works, it's because I've chosen to develop other themes. One can also debate the legitimacy of certain comparisons made between the different discursive practices, keeping in mind, however, that what I did was designed to bring into the open a series of problems that are certainly not secondary.

Duccio Trombadori: In any case, in *The Order of Things* you reduced Marxism to an episode definitively within the *episteme* of the nineteenth century. In Marx there was supposed not to have been an epistemological break with an entire cultural horizon. This underes-

timation of Marx's thought, and of his revolutionary import, provoked very heated critical reactions.

Michel Foucault: It's true. There was a great dispute about this point, as though it were a wound. Now that it has become such a fashion to relegate to Marx much of the responsibility for the gulags of our time, I might be awarded the certificate of paternity for a certain type of criticism. But it is absolutely false: I wanted to confine my observations to Marx's political economy. I never spoke of Marxism, or if I used this term, I did so in order to refer to the history of political economy. And to tell the truth, I don't consider it so absurd to sustain that Marxist economics—for its fundamental concepts and the general rules of its discourse—belongs to a type of discursive formation that first took shape at around the time of Ricardo. In any case it was Marx himself who affirmed that his political economy was indebted in its fundamental principles to David Ricardo.

Duccio Trombadori: What purpose had that reference, albeit marginal, to Marxism? Doesn't that manner of confining the judgment of Marxism to a side reflection of not more than about ten pages seem a little hurried to you?

Michel Foucault: I intended, in effect, to react to something; precisely against a certain hagiographic exultation of Marxist political economy, which was due, I believe, more than anything else, to the historical fate of Marxism as a political ideology that was born in the nineteenth century but had its greatest effects in the twentieth century. That, however, doesn't prevent the rules of Marx's economic discourse from sharing the *episteme* of the criteria of the formation of scientific discourse proper to the nineteenth century. To say so is not a monstrosity. What really seems curious to me is the fact that many couldn't tolerate that.

I think this may be understood by taking account of this particular conjunction: on the one hand, there was the absolute refusal of traditional Marxists to accept the most mini-

mal critical observation that could injure even slightly Marx's prestige and theoretical supremacy. And they, moreover, were not even the most aggressive at the time. Rather, I think that the Marxists most interested in questions of political economy were not so scandalized by what I asserted. On the other hand, those who immediately had a real shock were those young neo-Marxist intellectuals who were completing their theoretical formation and who in general opposed the traditional intellectuals of the French Communist Party. Those who were to become, it should be understood, the Marxist-Leninists or even the Maoists in 1968. For them Marx was the object of a very important theoretic battle, directed against bourgeois ideology but also against the Communist Party, which they blamed for theoretical inertia, for not knowing how to do anything but transmit dogmas, etc.

Within this generation of "anti-P.C.F." Marxists, in which prevailed the exaltation and evaluation of Marx as the "threshold" of an absolute scientificity, there was the most

intense reaction. They did not forgive me for what I had written and they sent me insulting letters....

Duccio Trombadori: When you speak of "Marxist-Leninists" or "Maoists," to whom are you referring in particular?

Michel Foucault: It's more or less a matter of those same intellectuals who, as I've said, after May '68 gave all those "hyper-Marxist" speeches, with the diffusion of a vocabulary borrowed from Marx in an unusual form; and which, moreover, as you know, would be abandoned in the course of a few years. At that moment of unlimited exaltation of Marx, of a generalized "hyper-Marxicization," what I had written was evidently intolerable insofar as it was limited to quite restricted evidence and arrived at a judgment of Marx himself.

Duccio Trombadori: I think that this attitude of rejection, nonetheless, was the last in order of appearance with the others listed: the theme of "structuralism," the resistances of a certain

Marxist tradition, the "decentering" of the philosophy of the "subject"

Michel Foucault: And also the fact, if you like, that basically one couldn't take too seriously someone who concerned himself with madness on the one hand and who on the other hand reconstructed a history of the sciences in such a bizarre, peculiar way, given the problems that were universally considered valid and important. The convergence of this entire series of reasons which we have listed undoubtedly contributed to the anathema pronounced against *The Order of Things*. On everyone's part: *Les temps modernes*, *Esprit*, *Nouvel observateur*, on the right, on the left, at the center: everywhere, an incredible hailstorm. And the book, which I expected to sell a few hundred copies, had an enormous success.

Duccio Trombadori: The second half of the '60s is a crucial point in the history of European culture, not only in France, for the upheavals that were brewing. And the historical under-

standing of that period is still distant today. Was "hyper-Marxism" truly the sign of a recovery or of a genuine return to the discourse of Marx? What real processes were set in motion? What horizon of values was being delineated? They are all open problems that perhaps have not yet been put in the necessary terms.

Michel Foucault: What happened in those years should be understood in greater depth, taking account of the considerations that you are making as well. Thinking back to that period, I would say that what was about to happen definitely did not have its *own* proper theory, its *own* vocabulary. The changes afoot also occurred in relation to an entire set of philosophical and theoretical systemizations and to an entire kind of culture that had marked approximately the first half of our century. "Things" were about to fall apart, and the right vocabulary didn't exist to express this process. Now, in *The Order of Things*, perhaps people recognized a peculiarity, a "difference" in relation to the current, prevalent

vocabulary; and that called forth both interest and reaction. But let's return to the question of vocabulary. What happened? In the meantime France was experiencing the end of the colonial period. And the fact that in the balance of global order France no longer had the supremacy it once held is not a small matter for a country whose culture has always been bound up in national glorification. Secondly, it was becoming more and more apparent that everything that people had tried to hush up concerning the U.S.S.R. — from Tito to Hungary to Czechoslovakia — had been a progressive upsetting of designs and values, especially in left circles. Finally, the war with Algeria must be remembered. In France, those who had fought in the most radical way against the war were mostly enrolled in the P.C.F. or were very close to the Communist Party. But in this action they had not been completely supported by the Party, which at the time of the war had an uncertain and ambivalent attitude. And it paid very dearly for that, with a progressive loss of control over the orientation of young people and students, all the way through the great

conflicts of the years 1968–70. It was with the war with Algeria that a long period came to an end in France during which on the left it had been believed a bit naively that the Communist Party, just struggles, and just causes were all one. To the point that even when the Party was criticized, it was concluded that despite everything it was on the right side. But after Algeria this kind of unconditional adherence was over, and was reaching the breaking point. Certainly it wasn't easy to formulate this new critical position, precisely because the right vocabulary was missing, given that no one wanted to take up the one formulated with categories of the right.

One still hasn't dispensed with the problem, actually. And I think that is one of the reasons why many questions remained tangled and the theoretical debates ended up so violent and confused. I mean, reflecting on Stalinism, the politics of the U.S.S.R., or the oscillations of the P.C.F. in critical terms, while avoiding the language of the right, was a complex operation that created difficulties. Isn't that perhaps still the case today?

Duccio Trombadori: I would say so. But apropos of "vocabulary": when you wrote *The Archeology of Knowledge*, you created a further shift regarding the conceptual purchase of the "*epistemes*" and "discursive formations," by means of the notion of the "enounced" (*énoncé*) as the material or institutional condition of scientific discourse.[27] Don't you think that this notable change of direction — which seems to me still to define the current field of your investigations — don't you think this was owing in some ways to the climate as well, to the theoretical and practical submovements that were being shaped in the years 1968–70?

Michel Foucault: No, I had written *The Archeology of Knowledge* before 1968, even if it was only published in 1969. And it was essentially an effort to reply to all those debates on "structuralism" that I thought had mixed up and confused a lot of matters. Therefore it doesn't seem right to me to connect the significance of the book with May in France, or with '68 in general. Think instead of the

confusion generated by the term "structuralism." You recalled earlier Piaget's criticism of me. Well, I remember that at the time one of Piaget's students sent me one of his texts, in which he explained how I, while doing an essentially structuralist analysis, nevertheless lacked a theory of structuralism. A couple of months afterwards, Piaget in turn published a book describing me as a theorist who lacked an analysis of structures. Exactly the opposite of what his student thought. You understand that when even disciple and master are unable to agree on what structuralism and structure mean, the discussion is completely fraudulent and useless. The critics of my works didn't know themselves exactly what they were talking about. And then, I tried to indicate how all my works revolved around a series of problems of the same kind: and that is, how was it possible to analyze that particular object, discursive productions, both in their internal rules and in their conditions of appearance, of emergence. *The Archeology of Knowledge* was born accordingly.✣

4

Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse: Who Is a 'Negator of History?'

Duccio Trombadori: With the events of '68, another theoretical current regained strength and was confirmed as a point of reference of notable importance in youth culture. I'm speaking of the Frankfurt School: Adorno, Horkheimer, and much more than them,

Marcuse, found themselves with their works at the center of student ideological debates. The struggle against repression, the anti-authoritarianism, the escape from "civilization," the radical denial of the "system": all these were themes that with more or less intellectual confusion were debated as watchwords by masses of youths. I'd like to know how your thought is related to that theoretical current, also because you don't seem to have dealt with it directly.

Michel Foucault: It would be necessary to understand better why, despite the work of many of its exponents in Paris after their expulsion from German universities by the Nazis, the Frankfurt School passed by unnoticed for a long time in France. It began to be discussed with a certain intensity and frequency only in relation to the thought of Marcuse and his Freudian-Marxism. In any case, I knew little about the Frankfurt School. I had read certain texts of Horkheimer's dedicated to an entire ensemble of discussions whose meaning I understood with difficulty, and in which I felt

a certain laxness, above all concerning the historical materials analyzed. Then I recall having read a book on penal problems and the mechanisms of punishment that had been written in the U.S.A. by Kircheimer.

At that point I realized how the Frankfurt people had tried ahead of time to assert things that I too had been working for years to sustain. This even explains a certain irritation shown by some of them who saw that in France there were experiences that were — I won't say identical but in some ways very similar. In effect, correctness and theoretical fecundity would have asked for a much more thorough acquaintance with and study of the Frankfurt School. As far as I'm concerned, I think that the Frankfurt School set problems that are still being worked on. Among others, the effects of power that are connected to a rationality that has been historically and geographically defined in the West, starting from the sixteenth century on. The West could never have attained the economic and cultural effects that are unique to it without the exercise of that specific form of rationality. Now, how

are we to separate this rationality from the mechanisms, procedures, techniques, and effects of power that determine it, which we no longer accept and which we point to as the form of oppression typical of capitalist societies, and perhaps of socialist societies too? Couldn't it be concluded that the promise of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason, has been, on the contrary, overturned within the domain of Reason itself, that it is taking more and more space away from freedom? It's a fundamental problem that we all debate, that is common to so many, whether Communists or not. And this problem, as we know, was singled out by Horkheimer before the others; and it was the Frankfurt School that measured its relationship with Marx on the basis of this hypothesis. Wasn't it Horkheimer who sustained that in Marx there was the idea of a society as being like an immense factory?

Duccio Trombadori: You assign great importance to this current of thought. To what do you attribute the anticipations and the results

attained by the Frankfurt School that you've briefly summarized?

Michel Foucault: I think that the Frankfurt School had a greater likelihood of knowing and analyzing early on with exact information what was happening in the U.S.S.R. And this was within the framework of an intense and dramatic political struggle, while Nazism was digging the grave of the Weimar Republic; this was set against the background in Germany, where Marxism and theoretical reflection on Marx had a robust tradition of more than fifty years.

When I recognize all these merits of the Frankfurt School, I do so with the bad conscience of one who should have known them and studied them much earlier than was the case. Perhaps if I had read those works earlier on, I would have saved useful time, surely: I wouldn't have needed to write some things and I would have avoided certain errors. At any rate, if I had encountered the Frankfurt School while young, I would have been seduced to the point of doing nothing else in life

but the job of commenting on them. Instead, their influence on me remains retrospective, a contribution reached when I was no longer at the age of intellectual "discoveries." And I don't even know whether to be glad or to feel sorry about it.

Duccio Trombadori: You have spoken to me up to now only about what you have found attractive about the Frankfurt School. But I wish to know how and for what reasons you distinguish yourself from them. For example, from the Frankfurt people or their school there has come the clear criticism of French "structuralism." I remind you for instance of the writings of Alfred Schmidt concerning Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, and you as well: indicated in general as "negators of history."

Michel Foucault: Certainly distinctions exist. Schematically one can affirm that the conception of the "subject" that was adopted by the Frankfurt School was quite traditional, was of a philosophical character. Then, it was noticeably impregnated with humanism of a

Marxist type. That also explains the particular articulation of the latter with certain Freudian concepts, in the relationship between alienation and repression, between "liberation," disalienation, and the end of exploitation. I'm convinced that given these premises, the Frankfurt School cannot by any means admit that the problem is not to recover our "lost" identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth; but instead, the problem is to move towards something radically Other. The center, then, seems still to be found in Marx's phrase: man produces man. It's all in how you look at it. For me, what must be produced is not man identical to himself, exactly as nature would have designed him or according to his essence; on the contrary, we must produce something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.

Secondly, let's think about the verb "to produce." I don't agree that this production of man by man occurs in the same way, let's say, as that of the value of riches, or of an object of use, of the economic type. It's a question

rather of the destruction of what we are, of the creation of something entirely different, of a total innovation. Now it seems to me that the idea they had of this "production of man by man" basically consisted in the need to free everything that, in the repressive system connected with rationality or the repression of exploitation linked with class society, had been experienced at a distance from man and his fundamental essence.

Duccio Trombadori: Probably the difference rests in the refusal or impossibility for the Frankfurt School to think of the "origin" of man in the historical-genealogical sense, rather than in "metaphysical" terms. It is the theme or the metaphor of the "death of man" that is in question.

Michel Foucault: When I speak of the "death of man," I mean that it's a matter of fixing a rule of production, an essential term, to this "production of man by man." In *The Order of Things* I was wrong to present this "death" as something that was already in progress more

or less during our time. I was confusing and mixing together two aspects. The first is a phenomenon at a reduced scale: the evidence that in the various "human sciences" as they were developed and in which man had invested his very subjectivity even while transforming it, man had never found himself in the presence of his own "nature." At the heart of the human sciences was not to be found the "human essence." If the promise of the human sciences had been to allow us to discover man, they certainly hadn't maintained it. But as a general cultural experience, it was a matter rather of the constitution of a new "subjectivity" through the operation of a "reduction" of the human subject into an object of knowledge (*connaissance*). The second aspect that I mixed up and confused with the first is that in the course of their history, men had never ceased constructing themselves, that is, to shift continuously the level of their subjectivity, to constitute themselves in an infinite and multiple series of different subjectivities that would never reach an end and would never place us in the presence of

something that would be "man." Man is an animal of experience, he is involved *ad infinitum* within a process that, by defining a field of objects, at the same time changes him, deforms him, transforms him and transfigures him as a subject. By speaking of the "death of man" in a way that was confused, simplifying, and a bit prophetic, I wanted in substance to say these things; but it's not that I believe I touched them thoroughly. And so, clustering round these themes there is of course a clear incompatibility with the Frankfurt School.

Duccio Trombadori: How is this divergence from them—which can be measured with respect to the discourse of "anti-humanism" — how is this distance reflected with regard to the mode of conceiving of and analyzing history?

Michel Foucault: The relation with history is another thing that disappointed me. It seemed that they did little history, that they referred to research done by others, to a history already written and valorized, and that they presented

it as explanatory background. Some of them, especially scholars of Marxist orientation, sustain or have sustained that I am a "negator" or "denier" of history (*négateur*). I think Sartre says it too. About them, it could be said rather that they are "users of history" as others have already fabricated it. By this I don't mean that it's necessary to construct history as one pleases, but it's a fact, for instance, that I have never felt fully satisfied with the results reached by others in the field of historical research. Even if I have referred to and used many historical studies, I have always tried to conduct at first hand the historical analyses in the fields that interested me. I think instead that when they make use of history, they reason thus: they think that the work of the professional historian furnishes them a kind of material foundation on which to construct the reasoning on this or that theoretical, sociological, psychological, or other type of problem. An attitude of that kind implies two postulates. First, what the philosophers say cannot be considered history (what passes through someone's head is a social phenom-

enon but does not belong to the order of history); and second, once it is admitted that a history has been done well and speaks of economics, it will certainly have in and of itself an explanatory value.

But to reason in this way is at once too modest and too naive. Too modest because in the final analysis what passes through someone's head, including the philosophers, definitely is part of history: to say something is itself an event. To sustain a scientific discourse is not something that is connected from above or to the side of history: it is part of history as much as a battle or the invention of the steam engine or an epidemic. It won't be a question of events of the same kind, but it is always a matter of events. When I speak of this or that doctor who has uttered so much nonsense about madness, isn't that, like the battle of Waterloo, history? Now I come to the naive bit of reasoning. No matter how important the value of economic analyses may be, it seems to me a naïveté typical of those who aren't historians by profession to assert that an analysis based on changes of

economic structure is in itself of explanatory value. It is not obligatory at all. I'll give an example: it was wondered with a certain interest a few years ago why the things that were forbidden in sexual matters during the eighteenth century were concentrated for the most part on masturbation. Some theorist wished to explain the phenomenon by revealing that, at the time, the marriage age had been raised, and young people were forced to be celibate for a longer time. Now this fact, which is evidently linked to precise economic reasons, no matter how relevant it is, does not explain the origin of the ban — if for no other reason, then because one doesn't begin to masturbate the year before marriage. And then, even admitting that the raising of the age of marriage left great masses of the young celibate for years, one has yet to understand why the response to that phenomenon had to be greater repression, rather than a widening of sexual freedom. It may be too that the question of the marriage age, with all its links to the rise of the new capitalistic mode of production, is useful to our understanding.

But when it is a matter of such delicate analyses as the production of a system of knowledge (*savoir*) or of a discourse, with its mechanisms and internal rules, it is necessary to go much deeper. And it is probable that one won't arrive at a single solution or an explanation in terms of necessity. Indeed, it would already be plenty if one managed to establish links between what one is attempting to analyze and the phenomena with which it is connected.

Duccio Trombadori: Do you believe, then, that the exercise of theoretical thinking is always linked to a particular elaboration of historical material? Wouldn't "thinking" be nothing other than a way of doing or interpreting history?

Michel Foucault: I say what I do in order to reaffirm that the intelligibility that I try to produce cannot be reduced to the projection of a history (let's say social-economic history) onto a cultural phenomenon so as to make the latter appear a necessary and extrinsic product of that cause. There is no clear-cut

necessity: the cultural product is also part of the historical fabric. This is the reason why I find myself obliged to conduct first-hand historical analyses. So you see then that this idea of passing me off as a "negator of history" is really amusing. I do nothing *but* history. It is interesting nonetheless to understand why I am accused of "negating" history. Evidently for the fact that I do not use those kinds of historical analyses— intangible, sacred, and all-explanatory — to which, on the contrary, others turn. And these "others" are the ones who accuse *me* of negating history. It is certain that if I had wished, I could have cited in my works this or that page of Mathiez or of some other historian. I haven't done so because I don't conduct the same type of analysis. There you have it. In the end, this idea that I would refuse history comes not so much from professional historians as from philosophical circles, where they don't know in detail the kind of relationship, at once detached and reverent, that historical analysis requires. And so it is easier to conclude with the argument that I "negate" or "deny" history.✣

5

Between 'Words' and 'Things' during May '68

Duccio Trombadori: During and just after May of 1968 in Paris, many French intellectuals participated in student struggles: it was an experience that addressed again, in new terms, the question of the "commitment," the relationship with politics, the possibilities, and

the limits of social action. Your name does not figure among these. At least until the early '70s, you were absent from the debate that at the time involved other figures in the French intellectual world. What was your experience of May of '68 like, and what did it mean for you?

Michel Foucault: During that May, as happened in the period of the Algerian War, I was not in France: I was still a bit displaced, marginal, let us say. And on this occasion, too, when I returned to Paris I brought with me a foreigner's way of seeing things, with the expected result: what I had to say was not always easily received. I remember that Marcuse said reproachfully one day, where was Foucault at the time of the May barricades? Well, I was in Tunisia, on account of my work. And I must add that this experience was a decisive one for me. Indeed, in my lifetime I've had the good fortune to observe several important realities. In Sweden, I saw a social-democratic country that functioned "well"; in Poland, a popular democracy that

functioned "badly." I knew at first hand the Federal Republic of Germany at the moment of its economic boom in the 1960s. And finally, I lived in an underdeveloped country, in Tunisia, for two and a half years. It was a shocking experience: just before May of '68 in France, there were student agitations of incredible violence there. That was in March of the same year: strikes, boycotting of classes, and arrests were to take place one after another for the entire year. The police entered the university and attacked many students, injuring them and throwing them into jail.

They were sentenced to eight, ten, even fourteen years of prison. Some of them are still there doing time. Finding myself a professor, French, and immersed in that reality, I had a better way of understanding it and situating it in relation to what was happening in other universities in the world. I was respected in a certain sense by the local authorities, and that enabled me to perform easily a series of actions and at the same time to grasp accurately the reactions of the French government toward what was going on. And I

must say that their attitude left something to be desired. During those upheavals I was profoundly struck and amazed by those young men and women who exposed themselves to serious risks for the simple fact of having written or distributed a leaflet, or for having incited others to go on strike. Such actions were enough to place at risk one's life, one's freedom, and one's body. And this made a very strong impression on me: for me it was a true political experience.

Duccio Trombadori: Do you mean that you had a direct political experience?

Michel Foucault: Yes. Since the time of my adherence to the P.C.F., through all the events that followed in the passing years which I've already told you about, the experience of politics had left a rather bad taste in my mouth. I had closed myself up in a kind of speculative scepticism. I don't hide it. At the time of Algeria, there too I hadn't been able to participate directly, and when I did so, it happened without placing my personal safety

at risk. In Tunisia, however, I felt compelled to give personal support to the students, to experience and take part in something absolutely different from all that muttering of political speeches and debates that occurred in Europe. I mean that if I think for instance of what Marxism was and how it functioned among us as students during the years 1950–52; or when I think of what it represented for a country like Poland, where for most young people it had become an object of total disgust (leaving aside the question of their social conditions) and where it was taught like the catechism; or if I recall all those cold, academic debates on Marxism in which I participated during the early 1960s in France.... Well! In Tunisia, on the contrary, everyone was drawn into Marxism with radical violence and intensity and with a staggeringly powerful thrust. For those young people, Marxism did not represent merely a way of analyzing reality; it was also a kind of moral force, an existential act that left one stupefied. And I felt disillusioned and full of bitterness to think of how much of a difference there was

between the way the Tunisian students were Marxists and what I knew of the workings of Marxism in Europe (France, Poland, etc.). So, Tunisia, for me, represented in some ways the chance to reinsert myself in the political debate. It wasn't May of '68 in France that changed me; it was March of '68, in a third-world country.

Duccio Trombadori: You give a great deal of importance to the character of the "existential act" that is linked to political experience. Why? Perhaps you think it is the only guarantee of "authenticity"? And don't you think there was a connection, for the young Tunisians, between the Marxist ideological choice and the determination with which they acted?

Michel Foucault: What I mean is this: what on earth is it that can set off in an individual the desire, the capacity, and the possibility of an absolute sacrifice without our being able to recognize or suspect the slightest ambition or desire for power and profit? This is what I saw in Tunisia. The necessity for a struggle was

clearly evident there on account of the intolerable nature of certain conditions produced by capitalism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. In a struggle of this kind, the question of direct, existential, I should say physical commitment was implied immediately. Finally, the reference to theory. This was not, I think, the essential thing. Let me explain: the theoretical Marxist preparation offered to Tunisian students was not very in-depth; nor was it developed very deeply. The real debate among them, on the choices of strategy and tactics, on what to do, did not involve a detailed analysis of the various Marxist ideological tendencies. It was something else entirely. And that led me to believe that without a doubt the role of political ideology, or of a political perception of the world, was indispensable to the goal of setting off the struggle; on the other hand, I could see that the precision of theory, its scientific character, was an entirely secondary question that functioned in the debates more as a means of deception than as a truthful, correct, and proper criterion of conduct.

Duccio Trombadori: Didn't you also find in France the signs of that active and direct participation that you experienced in Tunisia? What made you decide, after the events of May of '68, to enter into contact with the student struggles, thus developing a dialogue and a stance that on several occasions would lead you to take sides, and to commit yourself directly to such movements as the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, concerning prison conditions, along with other intellectuals such as Sartre, Jean-Marie Domenach, and Maurice Clavel?[28]

Michel Foucault: When I returned to France in November–December 1968, I was quite surprised and amazed — and rather disappointed — when I compared the situation to what I had seen in Tunisia. The struggles, though marked by violence and intense involvement, had never brought with them the same price, the same sacrifices. There's no comparison between the barricades of the Latin Quarter and the risk of doing fifteen years in prison, as was the case in Tunisia. We have already discussed that "hyper-Marxism" in France,

that unleashing of theories, anathemas, the splitting up into factions — all very disturbing and of very little interest. All of this was really the reverse, the polar opposite of what had attracted me to Tunisia. To such a point that, from that moment on, I decided to remain aloof from that round of endless discussions, of "hyper-Marxistization," of indomitable discursivity, that was the life of the universities, and especially of Vincennes in 1968–69.[29] So, I tried to accomplish a series of actions that would really imply a personal, physical commitment that was real and that posed problems in concrete, precise, definite terms, within a determinate situation.

Only by starting from there could the necessary investigations and analyses be developed. I tried, while working in the G.I.P. on the problem of prisoners, to accomplish some sort of total experience. That provided me the opportunity to stitch together the loose ends that had troubled me in works like *The History of Madness* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, with what I had been able to experience and know in Tunisia.

Duccio Trombadori: When you bring up the subject of May of 1968, you always speak about it with the tone of someone who wants to dismiss the value of the experience. You seem to see only the grotesque, ideological side of the events that occurred. No matter how fair it is to reveal its limits—and among these, the splintering into factions—I don't believe that the phenomenon of that mass movement that manifested itself in all of Europe can be so easily dismissed.

Michel Foucault: May of '68 was an experience of exceptional importance, without a doubt. Just now I was speaking of it in relation to the experience I had of it in France during its waning phase. But it is certain, in any case, that without May of '68, I would never have done the things I'm doing today; such investigations as those on the prison, sexuality, etc., would be unthinkable. The climate of 1968 was decisive for me in these matters. I didn't mean to imply that May of '68 was without importance. Some of its consequences, some of the more visible and super-

ficial aspects that followed and were produced by the experience of May of '68, were completely foreign to me. Yet I am convinced that in the end, what was really at stake also in France, and what accounted for change in so many things, was of the same nature as that experience I had come to know in Tunisia. The difference is that in France, somewhat absurdly, the May experience was overshadowed by the phenomenon of splinter groups, by the fragmentation of Marxism into small bodies of doctrine that pronounced excommunication upon one another.

In effect, it is true that there had been some changes and that I myself felt much more at ease as compared to the way I had felt in preceding years; the things that had always concerned me were beginning to become part of the public domain, beginning to be understood and appreciated. Many problems were becoming current that in the past had not been treated with comparable attention. There was nothing similar to this, except perhaps English anti-psychiatry. But in order to get beyond or deeper into the matter, it was neces-

sary to pass through it, to create an opening in that consistent yet simultaneously fragmented wall of factions and endless disagreements. It was a question of reaching a new kind of relationship, a new kind of collaboration between "intellectuals" and "non-intellectuals" that would be completely different from that of the past.

Duccio Trombadori: But on what basis, on what contents and reasoning, was a relationship established from the moment that the "languages" were no longer "communicating"?

Michel Foucault: It is true I did not possess the vocabulary that was most frequently used. I took other routes. And yet in a certain sense there were some points in common: on the level of concrete preoccupations, of real problems, there was some understanding. Indeed, there were many people then who were passionately concerned with the problems of mental institutions, with madness, with prisons; others were interested in medicine, life, death, in all of these very concrete aspects of existence that pose huge theoretical questions.

Duccio Trombadori: Your inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, afterwards published under the title *The Order of Discourse* (*L'Ordre du discours*), is from 1970.[30] In this university address, by analyzing the "procedures of exclusion" that control discourse, you began to examine in greater detail the relation between knowledge (*savoir*) and power. The question of the dominance that power exercises over truth, of the will to truth, marks a new, important stage in your thought. How did you manage to pose in these terms—or rather, to localize—this problem? And in what way do you think the thematic of power, as you have developed it, came into contact with the impetus of the youth movement of '68?

Michel Foucault: It would be necessary to take up the threads of our discussion once more and ask: what was it that had troubled me and determined my existence and my work up until that moment? And what, on the other had, was the moving force that guided the youth movement of '68? I wonder, for example, what was the meaning of the serious

dissatisfaction that was being expressed, and which I had experienced, in Swedish society? And then, what did the analogous unhappiness in Poland indicate, which was repeatedly witnessed, even though it was recognized on many sides that the conditions of material life were no worse than at other times? And then again, what was the meaning of that outburst of radical revolt that the Tunisian students had attempted? What was it that was being questioned everywhere? I think my answer is that the dissatisfaction came from the way in which a kind of permanent oppression in daily life was being put into effect by the state or by other institutions and oppressive groups. That which was ill-tolerated and continuously questioned, which produced that sort of discomfort, was "power." And not only state power, but also that which was exercised within the social body through extremely different channels, forms, and institutions. It was no longer acceptable to be "governed" in a certain way. I mean "governed" in an extended sense; I'm not referring just to the government of the state and the men who

represent it, but also to those men who organize our daily lives by means of rules, by way of direct or indirect influences, as for instance the mass media. If I look today at my past, I recall having thought that I was working essentially on a "genealogical" history of knowledge. But the true motivating force was really this problem of power. Ultimately I had done nothing but attempt to trace the way in which certain institutions, in the name of "reason" or "normality," had ended up exercising their power on groups of individuals, in relation to established ways of behavior, of being, of acting or speaking, by labeling them as anomalies, madness, etc. In the end, I had only produced a history of power. On the other hand, thinking back to May of '68, and going beyond a certain inadequate, "hyper-theorizing" vocabulary, I ask: who today would not say that in general it was all a question of rebellion against an entire network of forms of power that made their mark on youth culture and on certain strata of society? From all these different experiences, including my own, there emerged only one word,

like a message written with invisible ink, ready to appear on the page when the right chemical is added; and that word is *power*.✣

6

The Discourse on Power

Duccio Trombadori: From the early 1970s until today, your discourse on "power" has emerged more clearly, through articles, interviews and dialogues with students, young militants, leftists, and intellectuals. This series of reflections you later summarized in certain pages of *La volonté de savoir* (*The History of*

Sexuality: An Introduction). A body of criticism has already taken shape with various responses, at least as approximate as the discourse that you yourself have initiated, on power and the relations of power. Let me ask you: are we witnessing a new principle for explaining reality, as many have observed, or is it a matter of something else?

Michel Foucault: There have been gross misunderstandings, or I have explained myself badly: I have never presumed that "power" was something that could explain everything. It was not my objective to substitute an explanation based on power for one based on economics. I tried to coordinate and systematize the different analyses and approaches formulated with regard to power, without depriving them of what was empirical, that is, in a certain sense something that remained to be clarified. *For me, power is that which must be explained.* Every time I think about the experiences lived in contemporary societies, or about the investigations I have made, I always come up against the question of

"power." It's a question that no theoretical system — whether it be a philosophy of history or a general theory of society or of politics — has ever managed to account for. Who is in a position to explain these mechanisms of power, these relations of power (which I too have recorded and seen at work), that exist within the problems of madness, medicine, the prison, etc.? I have tried to contend with this small set of as yet unclear problems concerning the "relations of power," as if that were something that needed to be explained. And certainly not as a principle of explanation for all the rest. For these reasons, I strive to advance progressively, always aiming at furnishing the most suitable and general explanation. But I am only at the beginning of my work; I have certainly not finished. For this reason, too, I do not understand what has been asserted regarding the fact that for me power was a sort of abstract principle, which imposed itself as such and which I, after all, did not account for. I do not account for it? But no one has ever accounted for it.

In facing such elusive problems, it is better to advance step by step, examining different fields one at a time, in order to see how a theory of power might be elaborated. Or better still, since this is my real problem, how we might formulate a general conception of the relations between the constitution of a knowledge (*savoir*) and the exercise of a power. And as I told you, I'm only at the beginning.

Duccio Trombadori: One of the observations that could be made of the way in which you confront the theme of power is this: the extreme fragmentation or "localization" of the questions ends up impeding the transition from a dimension that we might even call "corporate" to a vision of the totality within which the particular problem is inserted.

Michel Foucault: It's a question they often ask me: you raise local problems, but you never situate yourself in relation to an ensemble of choices. Yes, the problems that I pose are always concerned with local and particular issues. But I wonder: how could one do oth-

erwise, for example, in the case of madness and the psychiatric institutions? If we want to pose problems in a concise, accurate way, shouldn't we look for them in their most particular and concrete forms?

I think so. First of all because it seems to me that none of the major discourses that can be produced about society is so convincing that it may be trusted; and if one really wants to construct something new and different, or in any case if one wants the great systems finally to be open to certain real problems, it is necessary to look for the data and the questions in which they are hidden. And then I'm not convinced that intellectuals — starting from their bookish, academic, and erudite investigations — can point to the essential problems of the society in which they live. On the contrary, one of the main opportunities for collaboration with "non-intellectuals" is in listening to their problems, and in working with them to formulate these problems: what do the mentally ill say? What is life like in a psychiatric hospital? What is the job of a nurse? How do the sick react? etc.

Duccio Trombadori: Perhaps I didn't explain myself. I do not dispute the need to raise local problems, even in a radical way, if it is necessary. Moreover, I am sensitive to what you say about intellectual work. Nevertheless, it seems to me that that way of confronting problems by particularizing them ends up inhibiting the possibility of their coordination in relation to other problems in the general understanding (*vision*) of a determinate historical and political situation.

Michel Foucault: Localizing problems is indispensable for theoretical and political reasons. But that doesn't mean that they are not, however, general problems. After all, what is more general in a society than the way in which it defines its relation to madness? Or the way in which society is recognized as "rationality" personified? And why does society confer power on "reason" and on *its* own "reason"? Why is this rationality made to count as "reason" in general, and why in the name of "reason" can the power of some men be established over others? As you see, this is

one of the most general problems that one could pose to a society: it is an inquiry into its functioning and its history. Furthermore, how is what is legal distinguished from what is not? Doesn't the power that is conferred on the law perhaps pose the problem of the effects of division and rending asunder which the law works on the body of society? These are some other questions which are among the most general imaginable. It is quite true that I localize problems, but I believe that this permits me to make others emerge from them that are very general, or at least as general as those that are so judged according to habitual practice. Isn't the rule of reason at least as general a question as that of the rule of the bourgeoisie?

Duccio Trombadori: When I spoke of a general understanding (*vision*), I was referring essentially to the political dimension of a problem, and to the necessity of its articulation in a wider action or program that at the same time is linked to certain historico-political conditions.

Michel Foucault: The generality that I try to make apparent is not of the same type as others. And when I am blamed for localizing problems, confusion is created between the local character of my analyses and an idea of generality similar to the one usually discussed by historians, sociologists, economists, etc.

I don't advance problems that are less general than those usually proposed by political parties, or by certain great theoretical systems. It has never been the case that the Communist Party or the Socialists have set as the agenda for their work, for example, the definition of the power that "reason" holds over "unreason." That is probably not their task. But if that is not their task, even less do their problems concern me.

Duccio Trombadori: What you say is perfectly acceptable. But you seem to confirm a certain closure, or unwillingness to open your discourse clearly onto the level of the "political."

Michel Foucault: If you prefer, I will pose the question in another way. Why haven't the

great theoretico-political apparatuses that organize our society and that define the criteria of consensus ever reacted to the truly general problems that I have sought so hard to illuminate? When I raised the problem of madness, which is a general problem in every society and very important in the history of ours, why in the world was the first reaction one of silence and at times of ideological condemnation? Furthermore: do you know how the P.C.F. responded when I, together with others, tried to pose the problem of prisons in France, in a concrete way, by working alongside those who were leaving prison, prison guards, and the families of prisoners? One of its local daily newspapers, from the Parisian suburbs, wondered why we who were doing this work had not already been put in prison, and what our hidden connections with the police were, since they tolerated us and let us carry on our work.

That's why I say, how can one accuse me of not posing general problems, with not ever taking a position with respect to the larger questions posed by the political parties? In

fact, when I pose general problems I am anathemized; then, when it is noticed that the anathema hasn't stuck, or when a certain importance to the problems being raised is recognized, I am blamed for not being capable of developing an entire series of questions in, yes, "general" terms. But I reject that type of "generality" which above all, as it is construed, has as its first effect that of condemning me in my way of posing problems, or of excluding me from the work I do. I am the one who poses the problem for others: why do they reject the general problems as *I* pose them?

Duccio Trombadori: I'm not familiar with the episode that you have just mentioned concerning your work on the problem of the prison. However, I didn't wish to refer to the question of your relations with French politics, and in particular with the politics of the P.C.F. I was raising a more general issue. For every local problem, one always faces the need to find solutions — even if provisional and temporary ones — in political terms.

From this arises the need to shift one's way of seeing things from a particular analysis to the examination of real possibilities, within which a process of change and transformation can advance. It is in this balance between the local situation and the general picture that the "political" function is at stake.

Michel Foucault: This too is an observation that people often make of my thought: you do not ever say what the concrete solutions to the problems you pose could be; you do not make proposals. The political parties, to the contrary, are held to take a position toward particular events: you don't help them with your attitude. I would respond in this way: for reasons that essentially pertain to my political choice, in the widest sense of the term, I absolutely will not play the part of one who prescribes solutions. I hold that the role of the intellectual today is not that of establishing laws or proposing solutions or prophesying, since by doing that one can only contribute to the functioning of a determinate situation of power that to my mind must be criticized.

I understand why the political parties prefer having ties with intellectuals who offer solutions, or propose them, because in that way the parties can establish ties of like with like. The intellectual advances a proposal, the party criticizes it, or formulates another; now I reject the role of alter-ego, the double and at the same time the alibi of the political party.

Duccio Trombadori: But don't you think you have a "role" anyway with your writings, articles, and essays? And what is it?

Michel Foucault: My role is to address problems effectively, really: and to pose them with the greatest possible rigor, with the maximum complexity and difficulty so that a solution does not arise all at once because of the thought of some reformer or even in the brain of a political party. The problems that I try to address, these perplexities of crime, madness, and sex which involve daily life, cannot be easily resolved. It takes years, decades of work carried out at the grassroots level with the people directly involved; and the right to

speech and political imagination must be returned to them. Then perhaps a state of things may be renewed, whereas in the terms by which it is being posed today, it could only lead to a dead-end. I carefully guard against making the law. Rather, I concern myself with determining problems, unleashing them, revealing them within the framework of such complexity as to shut the mouths of prophets and legislators: all those who speak *for* others and *above* others. It is at that moment that the complexity of the problem will be able to appear in its connection with people's lives; and consequently, the legitimacy of a common enterprise will be able to appear through concrete questions, difficult cases, revolutionary movements, reflections, and evidence. Yes, the object is to proceed a little at a time, to introduce modifications that are capable of, if not finding solutions, then at least of changing the givens of a problem.

It is all a social enterprise (*travail*). I would like to facilitate this work, with its special problems, by working inside the body of society; and I'd like personally to be able to

participate in this enterprise without delegating the responsibility to any specialist, much less to myself. What counts is doing it so that within society the problems may be modified and the impasses unblocked. In a word, it is necessary to do away with spokespersons.

Duccio Trombadori: I'd like to give you a concrete example. A couple of years ago, public opinion in Italy was stirred by the case of a boy who had killed his father after a tragic history of beatings and humiliations which he had undergone along with his mother. How may homicide be judged when committed by a minor who, in the case in question, had reached the limit of a series of incredibly violent acts inflicted on him by his parent? The court was embarrassed, public opinion strongly divided, the arguments heated. Here is an episode for which the solution to a very delicate problem must be found, if only temporarily. And here is the decisive function of "balance," and of "political" choice. The boy who killed his father was condemned, albeit relatively lightly, given the existing penal

code; and naturally, the case is still discussed today. Wouldn't it be necessary to take up a position in situations of this kind?

Michel Foucault: I was asked by some Italians to make a statement concerning this episode. I answered that I didn't know anything about it, that I was unable to express an opinion. During the same period there was an analogous case in France. A thirty-year-old man, after killing his wife, had sodomized and then finished off a boy of twelve years with a hammer. The murderer was one who had spent more than fifteen years in psychiatric institutions (more or less from the age of ten to twenty-five): society, the psychiatrists, and the medical institutions had declared him not responsible and taken him under their custody, making him live in frightful conditions. When he got out, he committed that horrendous crime within two years. Here is a person who, having been declared not responsible until yesterday, becomes responsible all of a sudden. Yet the most amazing thing in the whole episode is that the murderer declared: "It's true, I am

responsible for what happened: you made a monster of me, and as a result, since I'm a monster, cut off my head." They gave him a life sentence. Since I have worked in the past with research groups on the problems of psychiatric examinations, one of the killer's lawyers asked me to intervene in the press and take up a position on this case. I answered no. He was a terrifying head-basher, and I didn't have the prescription in my pocket; what sense would it have made, then, to start prophesying or playing the role of the censor? No, I don't accept having a "political" role attributed to me. I play my role at the moment I make problems evident in all their complexity, by provoking doubts and uncertainties and calling for profound changes. It is a strenuous labor that aims at changes much more radical than would be the case if I were asked to work at drafting a law that regulates in the short term the question of psychiatric examination, for example. The problem is much more complex and profound. It gives meaning not only to the field of the relations between medicine and justice, but also to that

of the relations between law and "knowledge" (*savoir*): that is, the way in which a scientific knowledge is able to work within a system which is itself a product of the law. It's an enormous, gigantic problem. And then I say: what sense does it make to reduce the burden by assigning to this or that legislator — it doesn't matter if it is a philosopher, politician, etc. — the task of drawing up a new law? The most important thing is that this conflict between the law and knowledge that is so difficult to overcome, be tested and stirred up deep within society to the point that society allows a new balance of relations to flourish by itself.

Duccio Trombadori: I wouldn't be so optimistic about these "automatisms" that you hope for, which are supposed to lead to a new balance between the law and knowledge by means of a movement within civil society.

Michel Foucault: I haven't spoken about civil society. And on purpose, because I hold that the theoretical opposition between the state

and civil society which traditional political theory belabors is not very fruitful. And this is also one of the reasons why I am led to raise the question of power by grasping it where it is exercised and manifested, without trying to find fundamental or general formulations; without considering, for example, the presence of a state which would be the holder of power, which would exercise its sovereignty upon a civil society which itself would not be the depository of analogous processes of power. For these reasons, if for no others, I think that the theoretical opposition between the state and civil society is not pertinent.

Duccio Trombadori: Be that as it may, don't you think that in the long run, by evading in some way the "political" dimension, your proposal risks representing a kind of "distraction," considering the contingent and complex stakes in question that are placed in society but have their immediate reflection on the level of institutions and parties?

Michel Foucault: Another old accusation: that I take up particular problems in order to distract

attention from others that are general and essential. I repeat: what I take up *is* general, perhaps more so than anything else. We live in a social universe in which the formation, circulation, and utilization of knowledge present a fundamental question. If the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society, the accumulation of knowledge has not been any less so. Now, the exercise, production, and accumulation of this knowledge cannot be dissociated from the mechanisms of power; complex relations exist which must be analyzed. From the sixteenth century on it has always been considered that the development of the forms and contents of knowledge was one of the greatest guarantees of the liberation of humanity. It is a postulate of our Western civilization that has acquired a universal character, accepted more or less by everyone. It is a fact, however — I was not the first to ascertain this — that the formation of the great systems of knowledge has also had effects and functions of subjection and rule. This leads us to reexamine more or less entirely the postulate according to which the development of knowledge is

undoubtedly the guarantee of liberation. Doesn't this seem to you in all its effects a general problem? Do you believe that such a discourse is distracting with respect to the problems set by the political parties? Of course, one is dealing with questions not immediately assimilable or capable of integration, also because the political parties, when all is said and done, accept only generalities that fit into a program, serve as factors of unity and consensus, or are suitable to this or that tactical occasion.

But it cannot be accepted that certain problems are defined as local or distracting simply because they do not pass through the filter of generalities that are accepted and codified by the exigencies of the political parties.

Duccio Trombadori: When you face the question of "power," you seem to do so without referring directly to the distinction between the "effects" with which power manifests itself within the state and diverse institutions. In this sense, someone has stated that power for

you is, as it were, without a face, omnipresent. Wouldn't there be a difference, then, let's say, between a "totalitarian" and a "democratic" regime?

Michel Foucault: In *Discipline and Punish* I tried to show how a certain type of power that was exercised on individuals through their upbringing, through the formation of their personalities, was connected in the West to the birth not only of an ideology but also of a regime of the liberal kind. In other political and social systems — the absolutist monarchy, feudalism, etc. — an analogous exercise of power on individuals would not have been possible. I always analyze quite precise and localized phenomena: for example, the formation of disciplinary systems in eighteenth-century Europe. I don't do this in order to say that Western civilization is a "disciplinary civilization" in all its aspects. The systems of discipline are applied by one group upon another. There is a difference between governing and being governed. And I emphasize that. Then, I take pains to explain adequately

why these systems arose in a determinate period, in which country, in response to which needs; consequently, I don't speak of societies that wouldn't be specified in time and geographical location. I really don't see how anyone can complain that I don't establish differences, for example, between regimes that are totalitarian or not. In the eighteenth century, totalitarian states, in the modern sense, didn't exist.

Duccio Trombadori: If one wished to consider your investigations as an "experience" of modernity, what teaching could one draw from it? That in readdressing the great, unresolved questions of the relation between knowledge and power, in both "democratic" and "totalitarian" societies, no substantial difference between the former and the latter would emerge in the last analysis. That is to say: the mechanisms of power that you analyze are identical, or nearly so, in every kind of society in the modern world.

Michel Foucault: When objections of this kind are raised against me, I recall those psychia-

trists who, upon reading *The History of Madness* (which deals with arguments related to the eighteenth century), said: Foucault is attacking us. It wasn't my fault if they recognized themselves in what I wrote. This probably proves only that an entire series of things has not changed. When I wrote the book on prisons, I certainly made no reference to the prisons of the popular democracies or of the U.S.S.R.; I was referring to France in the eighteenth century. The analysis stops at 1840, on the issue of determinate processes; and it could have been extended. But then someone says: so then, you don't differentiate between a totalitarian and a democratic regime! And what makes them think that? A reaction like that only proves that the things I say are being recognized, in the end, as *contemporary*. You can locate them in the U.S.S.R. or in a Western country, it doesn't matter. But the fact is that they are recognized. I'm the one who struggles to show, on the contrary, how it is a question of problems that are clearly situated historically in a determinate period. The others, however, demonstrate with their reaction that they don't

grasp the differences.

Once that is clarified, I'd wish to say that it is quite true that the technologies of power can be transferred from one field to another during the course of history. Their history is relatively autonomous with respect to the economic processes that are developed. Think of the techniques utilized in the Latin American slave colonies, which may be found again in France or England in the nineteenth century. Thus there exists a relative, not absolute, autonomy. But I have never held that a mechanism of power is sufficient to characterize a society.

What about concentration camps? They're an English invention. That doesn't mean, however, nor does it authorize the view that England is a totalitarian country. Of course concentration camps have been one of the principal instruments of totalitarian regimes: here, then, is an example of the transposition of a technique of power. But I have never said nor would I dream of thinking that the existence of concentration camps in democratic countries and totalitarian ones alike means

that there are no differences between the two realities.

Duccio Trombadori: O.K. But think for a moment of the "political" functionality, of the results of your discourse on the formation of "common sense." Wouldn't the rigorous and very delimited analysis of the technologies of power induce a kind of reaction of indifference with respect to the values and the major choices of the different contemporary political and social systems?

Michel Foucault: There's a tendency that I wouldn't give much credence to — of absolving a certain political regime of its responsibilities in the name of the "principles" that inspire it. It is democracy — or better still, the liberalism that matured in the nineteenth century — which has developed extremely coercive techniques that in a certain sense have become the counterbalance to a determinate economic and social "freedom." Individuals certainly could not be "liberated" without educating them in a certain way. I

don't see why it would be a misunderstanding of the specificity of a democracy to say how and why it needs, or needed, a network of techniques of power. If these techniques are then taken up by regimes of the totalitarian kind, well: why should individuating the fact and putting it in evidence cancel the difference between the two realities and the two regimes? In any case, a difference of "value" cannot be affirmed if this cannot be articulated with an analysis or an analyzable difference. It's not a question of saying, this is better than that, if one doesn't first say what this or that consists of. I do not wish, as an intellectual, to play the moralist or prophet. I don't want to say that the Western countries are better than the ones of the Eastern bloc, etc. The masses have come of age, politically and morally. They are the ones who've got to choose individually and collectively. What counts is saying how a certain regime functions, in what it consists, so as to prevent an entire series of manipulations and mystifications. But the masses have to make the choice.

Duccio Trombadori: A couple of years ago the fashion of the New Philosophers was spread in France, a cultural current which for brevity's sake we could say was based on the "refusal of politics." What was your attitude and your judgment toward them?

Michel Foucault: I don't know much about the New Philosophers; I've read very little of their work. I know however that the thesis is attributed to them according to which there can be no alternative: the "master" is always the "master" and we are trapped no matter what happens. I don't know if this really is their basic thesis. However, it is exactly the opposite of mine, since I try to conduct precise and differential analyses with the specific intention of indicating how things are transformed, how they change and are modified, etc. When I study the mechanisms of power, I try to analyze their specificity: nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a "Master" who imposes his own law. Rather than indicating the presence of a "master," I worry about comprehending the effective

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mechanisms of domination; and I do it so that those who are inserted in certain relations of power, who are implicated in them, might escape them through their actions of resistance and rebellion, might transform them in order not to be subjugated any longer. And if I don't ever say what must be done, it isn't because I believe that there's nothing to be done; on the contrary, it is because I think that there are a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge, on the part of those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they're implicated, have decided to resist or escape them. From this point of view all of my investigations rest on a postulate of absolute optimism. I do not conduct my analyses in order to say: this is how things are, look how trapped you are. I say certain things only to the extent to which I see them as capable of permitting the transformation of reality.

Duccio Trombadori: I'd like to remind you now of the contents of a letter you sent to *L'Unità* on December 1, 1978. In it you expressed, among other things, the willingness to face

the Italian Communist intellectuals, to discuss a variety of issues. I quote these issues from you: "the functioning of the capitalist and socialist states, the types of societies characteristic of these various kinds of countries, the success of the revolutionary movements in the world, the organization and strategy of the parties of Western Europe, the partial development everywhere of the apparatuses of repression and institutions of national security, the difficulty in connecting local struggles with the general stakes being waged...." A discussion of this kind ought not to be polemical, or directed at widening fields of analysis and numbers of interlocutors, "shedding light," that is, "on the differences that separate them and therefore on the dimensions of the investigation." I'd like to ask you: what is the meaning, if you can specify it, of this proposal of yours?

Michel Foucault: Well, it was a matter of emphasizing themes as the basis of a possible discussion; indeed, it seems to me that through the current economic crisis and the great

oppositions and conflicts that are marked out between "rich" and "poor" nations (between industrialized and non-industrialized countries), it may be clearly seen how in the more developed nations a crisis of "government" has begun. And by "government" I mean the set of institutions and practices by which people are "led," from administration to education, etc. It is this set of procedures, techniques, and methods that guarantee the "government" of people, which seems to me to be in crisis today. This is true for the Western world as well as for the socialist world: I think people in both worlds are feeling more and more discomfort, difficulty, and impatience with the way they are "led." It is a phenomenon that has its effect in daily life and that expresses itself in particular and diffuse forms of resistance, sometimes in revolt over questions that regard, as a matter of fact, daily life, as well as other general choices (take for example the reactions regarding nuclear problems, or those related to choices of location in this or that economic bloc). I think that in the history of the West we can identify

a period that in some ways resembles our own, even if, of course, things never repeat themselves twice, not even tragedies in the form of comedies. I'm speaking of the period following the Middle Ages. I mean that from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries an entire reorganization of the "government" of people took place: Protestantism, the development of the great nation-states, the formation of the authoritarian monarchies, the administration of territories, the Counter-Reformation, all representing a shift in the balance between the Catholic Church and the rest of the world. All of these events changed the way of managing and governing people, both in their individual relations and in their social and political ones. It seems to me that we are not very far from a similar period today. All relationships are again being questioned, and the first people to do so are evidently not those who manage and govern, even if they cannot fail to notice the existing difficulties. We are, I believe, at the beginning of a huge crisis of a wide-ranging reevaluation of the problem of "government." As for

me, I've always tried to raise problems, even if they are particular ones. But I think the polemics that have emerged regarding all these events do not yet permit us to take steps forward. The political parties, for example, don't seem to grasp the generality of the questions at stake.

Duccio Trombadori: In an investigation like this one, you have observed, "the instruments of analysis are uncertain — when they're not lacking entirely." And certain analyses can be conducted from very different starting points, and orientations and judgments can be determined. On the other hand, you hope for an encounter that might overcome polemics....

Michel Foucault: What I have said or declared has often been attacked, and sometimes violently, by certain French Communist intellectuals, and by certain of their Italian counterparts as well. Since I don't speak Italian, I have unfortunately been unable to understand the meaning of their criticisms, and I have never responded to them. But what we see

today on more sides is a willingness to abandon certain methods in theoretical debates. What I mean is this: rather than take up the position where one person says something and the other one denounces him as an "ideologue of the bourgeoisie," as a "class enemy," etc., couldn't we begin to attempt a serious discussion? Everything that I've thought about the crisis of "governability" comes to this: if we recognize this as an important problem, why can't we start from there to widen the debate? Second, I seem to understand that the Italian Communists are more inclined toward embracing an entire series of problems that are linked, for example, to medicine, or the local management of economic and social matters, problems that I, for my part, have also tried to face in my investigations. Take for example the relation between legislation and regulation in contemporary societies: it is a general problem, but with quite precise and localized effects. I think many of the Italian Communist intellectuals are willing to recognize the interest and importance of this problematic. Then why not discuss it together?

Duccio Trombadori: But still apropos of polemics, you have also stated clearly that you don't like and will not accept those kinds of arguments "which mimic war and parody justice." Could you explain to me more clearly what you meant by saying this?

Michel Foucault: What is tiresome in ideological arguments is that one is necessarily swept away by the "model of war." That is to say that when you find yourself facing someone with ideas different from your own, you are always led to identify that person as an enemy (of your class, your society, etc.). And we know that it is necessary to wage combat against the enemy until triumphing over him. This grand theme of ideological struggle has really disturbed me. First of all because the theoretical coordinates of each of us are often, no, always, confused and fluctuating, especially if they are observed in their genesis.

Furthermore: might not this "struggle" that one tries to wage against the "enemy" only be a way of making a petty dispute without much importance seem more serious than it really is? I mean, don't certain intellec-

tuals hope to lend themselves greater political weight with their "ideological struggle" than they really have? A book is consumed very quickly, you know. An article, well.... What is more serious: acting out a struggle against the "enemy," or investigating, together or perhaps divergently, the important problems that are posed? And then I'll tell you: I find this "model of war" not only a bit ridiculous but also rather dangerous. Because by virtue of saying or thinking "I'm fighting against the enemy," if one day you found yourself in a position of strength, and in a situation of real war, in front of this blasted "enemy," wouldn't you actually treat him as one? Taking that route leads directly to oppression, no matter who takes it: that's the real danger. I understand how pleasing it can be for some intellectuals to try to be taken seriously by a party or a society by acting out a "war" against an ideological adversary: but that is disturbing above all because of what it could provoke. Wouldn't it be much better instead to think that those with whom you disagree are perhaps mistaken; or perhaps that you haven't understood what they intended to say?✣

Notes

1 Michael Clark, *Michel Foucault: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1983) omits many important Italian listings, including *Colloqui con Foucault.* For supplementary information through the 1970s, see Paolo Veronesi, "I poteri di Foucault (bibliografia 1954–1979)," *Materiali Filosofici*, 1/2 (1980): 123–41.

2 "The Subject of Power," Afterword to Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208.

3 For a more polemical attack on his Communist critics from the same year, see "Precisazioni sul potere: risposta ad alcuni critici," *Aut Aut* 167/8 (1978): 3–11. The same issue contains an essay in which Toni Negri criticizes Foucault.

4 *L'Espresso* (15 July 1984), 61.

5 *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House–Vintage, 1985), 8–9.

6 Trombadori continues to quote from this passage from one of the interviews.

7 *L'archéologie du savoir*, Italian translation (Milan: Rizzoli, 1971), 1–24 (Trombadori's note); *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock; New York: Random House-Pantheon, 1972; rpt. New York: Harper & Row), 17. We shall provide cross references to published English translations and quote these when possible.

8 We have consistently translated *limite* as "limit" rather than "boundary" or "extreme" after the example of Bouchard and Simon in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29–52 (translators' note).

9 Conversation appearing in *Ornicar? Bulletin périodique du Champ freudien*, Italian translation (Padua: Marsilio, 1978), 266–95 (Trombadori's note); English translation in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press; New York: Random House, 1980), 208.

10 *Microfisica del potere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 184–85 (Trombadori's note); *Power/Knowledge*, 98.

11 *L'arc* 49 (2nd trimestre, 1972); published in *Microfisica del potere*, 109-118 (Trombadori's note); *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 212. The statement quoted is actually by Deleuze.

12 "La governmentalità" (Italian transcript by Pasquale Pasquino of a lecture given at Collège de France, February, 1978), published in *Aut Aut*, 167–168 (Sept.–

Dec. 1978): 12–29 (Trombadori's note); trans. Rosi Braidotti, *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (Autumn, 1979): 5–21.

13 Trombadori here cites Foucault's comparison between the present age and the later Middle Ages, which appears near the end of the final interview.

14 Interview in *Quel corps* (Oct. 1975), published in *Microfisica del potere*, 138–45 (Trombadori's note); cf. *Power/Knowledge*, 61.

15 *Microfisica del potere*, 191-94 (Trombadori's note); *Power/Knowledge*, 106.

16 See M. Cacciari, "Critica della 'autonomia' e problema del politico," in *Crisi del sapere e nuova razionalità* (Bari: De Donato, 1978) (Trombadori's note).

17 *Madness and Civilization* is the title of the abridged translation of *Histoire de la folie*; we have translated the title literally. English speakers should also be aware of allusions to the original titles of *The Order of Things* and *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* when the discussion refers to "words and things" and the "will to knowledge."

18 Foucault has elsewhere used the term "transgression" to name the theme of the "limit." See "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29–52.

19 Cf. Foucault's description of his work as "fabrication" in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press; New York: Random House, 1980), 212.

20 We have consistently translated *homme* as "man"

rather than adding a feminist signification that is absent in the original; cf. Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 11.

21 *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière*, the old French socialist party active from 1905 until the present Socialist Party was founded in 1969.

22 See Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London: Tavistock; New York, Methuen, 1980), 2–5 for a discussion of Foucault's education and his Communist experience.

23 Garaudy was "a former member of the Central Committee of the P.C.F., expelled during the sixties for being a Eurocommunist ten years too early" (Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, eds., *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy* [Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979], 28).

24 Ludwig Binswanger, *Le rêve et l'existence*, translated by Jacqueline Verdeaux, with an introduction by Michel Foucault (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954).

25 We translate *régard* as "gaze," following the example set by A. M. Sheridan Smith in the main text of *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Random House–Vintage, 1975).

26 The proceedings of this meeting were published as *La conception idéologique de* L'histoire de la folie *de Michel Foucault: Journées Annuelles de* L'évolution psychiatrique *6 et 7 décembre 1969*, in *L'évolution psychiatrique: cahiers de psychologie clinique et de psychopathologie générale* 36, no. 2 (1971).

27 The word *énoncé* has no exact equivalent in English and is usually translated as "statement." Our translation attempts to preserve the French distinction between *énoncé* and *énonciation*. See Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London, Tavistock; New York, Methuen, 1980), 99, for a discussion of this difficulty.

28 Foucault created the G.I.P. in February 1971 with the help of other intellectuals (including Domenach) in order to provide prisoners with an opportunity to be heard. On the G.I.P., see Paul Patton, "Of Power and Prisons," *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, eds. (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 109–110. Patton cites Marc Kravetz, "Qu'est-ce que le GIP?", *Magazine littéraire* 101 (June, 1975); and Daniel Defert and Jacques Donzelot, "La charnière des prisons," *Magazine littéraire* 112/113 (May, 1976).

29 The University of Paris VII (Vincennes).

30 The original English translation was entitled "Orders of Discourse," trans. Rupert Swyer, *Social Science Information* 10 (April 1971): 7–31. The more widely known reprint, the appendix to *The Archeology of Knowledge*, misleadingly retitles the piece "The Discourse on Language." For a list of corrections to the English translation, see *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, 102–105.