FOUCAULT
BLANCHOT

Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside

by Michel Foucault

Translated by Brian Massumi

Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him

by Maurice Blanchot

Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman

ZONE BOOKS · NEW YORK

1987

ZONE BOOKS
New York, New York

Originally published as *La pensée du dehors*

Michel Foucault tel que je l'imagine

Printed in Canada

Distributed by The MIT Press,
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 87-61270

ISBN 0-942299-02-7

Michel Foucault's *La pensée du dehors*
first appeared in *Critique*, no. 229 (1966).

Contents

Maurice Blanchot:

The Thought from Outside

Michel Foucault

I Lie, I Speak

In ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: "I lie." "I speak," on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test.

The force of these assertions is not in fact the same. As we know, Epimenides' argument can be mastered if, discourse having been slyly folded back upon itself, a distinction is made between two propositions, the first of which is the object of the second. The grammatical configuration of the paradox cannot suppress this essential duality, try as it might to dodge it (particularly if the paradox is locked into "I lie" in its simple form). Every proposition must be of a higher "type" than that which serves as its object. That the object-proposition recurs in the proposition that designates it; that the Cretan's sincerity is compromised the instant he speaks by the content of his assertion; that he may

indeed be lying about lying – all this is less an insurmountable logical obstacle than the result of a plain and simple fact: the speaking subject is also the subject about which it speaks.

In forthrightly saying "I speak" I am exposed to none of these perils; the two propositions hidden in the statement ("I speak" and "I say that I speak") in no way compromise each other. I am protected by the impenetrable fortress of the assertion's self-assertion, by the way it coincides exactly with itself, leaving no jagged edges, averting all danger of error by saying no more than that I am speaking. Neither in the words in question nor in the subject that pronounces them is there an obstacle or insinuation to come between the object-proposition and the proposition that states it. It is therefore true, undeniably true, that I am speaking when I say that I am speaking.

But things may not be that simple. Although the formal position of "I speak" does not raise problems of its own, its meaning opens a potentially unlimited realm of questions, in spite of its apparent clarity. "I speak" refers to a supporting discourse that provides it with an object. That discourse, however, is missing; the sovereignty of "I speak" can only reside in the absence of any other language; the discourse about which I speak does not pre-exist the nakedness articulated the

moment I say, "I speak"; it disappears the instant I fall silent. Any possibility of language dries up in the transitivity of its execution. The desert surrounds it. In what extreme delicacy, at what slight and singular point, could a language come together in an attempt to recapture itself in the stripped-down form, "I speak"? Unless, of course, the void in which the contentless slimness of "I speak" is manifested were an absolute opening through which language endlessly spreads forth, while the subject – the "I" who speaks – fragments, disperses, scatters, disappearing in that naked space. If the only site for language is indeed the solitary sovereignty of "I speak" then in principle nothing can limit it – not the one to whom it is addressed, not the truth of what it says, not the values or systems of representation it utilizes. In short, it is no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority. And the subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse (what holds it, what uses it to assert and judge, what sometimes represents itself in it by means of a grammatical form designed to have that effect) than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues.

It is a widely held belief that modern literature is characterized by a doubling back that enables it to des-

ignate itself; this self-reference supposedly allows it both to interiorize to the extreme (to state nothing but itself) and to manifest itself in the shimmering sign of its distant existence. In fact, the event that gave rise to what we call "literature" in the strict sense is only superficially an interiorization; it is far more a question of a passage to the "outside": language escapes the mode of being of discourse – in other words the dynasty of representation – and literary speech develops from itself, forming a network in which each point is distinct, distant from even its closest neighbors, and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all. Literature is not language approaching itself until it reaches the point of its fiery manifestation; it is rather language getting as far away from itself as possible. And if, in this setting "outside of itself," it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion. The "subject" of literature (what speaks in it and what it speaks about) is less language in its positivity than the void language takes as its space when it articulates itself in the nakedness of "I speak."

This neutral space is what characterizes contemporary Western fiction (which is why it is no longer mythology or rhetoric). The reason it is now so necessary to think through fiction – while in the past it was a matter of thinking the truth – is that "I speak" runs counter to "I think." "I think" led to the indubitable certainty of the "I" and its existence; "I speak," on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear. Thought about thought, an entire tradition wider than philosophy, has taught us that thought leads us to the deepest interiority. Speech about speech leads us, by way of literature as well as perhaps by other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears. No doubt that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self-evidence of "I think."

The Experience of the Outside

The breakthrough to a language from which the subject is excluded, the bringing to light of a perhaps irremediable incompatibility between the appearing of language in its being and consciousness of the self in its identity, is an experience now being heralded at diverse points in culture: in the simple gesture of writing as in attempts to formalize language; in the study of myths as in psychoanalysis; in the search for a Logos that would be like the birthplace of all of Western reason. We are standing on the edge of an abyss that had long been invisible: the being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject. How can we gain access to this strange relation? Perhaps through a form of thought whose still vague possibility was sketched by Western culture on its margins. A thought that stands outside subjectivity, setting its limits as though from without, articulating its end, mak-

ing its dispersion shine forth, taking in only its invincible absence; and that at the same time stands at the threshold of all positivity, not in order to grasp its foundation or justification but in order to regain the space of its unfolding, the void serving as its site, the distance in which it is constituted and into which its immediate certainties slip the moment they are glimpsed – a thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge, constitutes what in a word we might call "the thought from the outside."

It will one day be necessary to try to define the fundamental forms and categories of this "thought from outside." It will also be necessary to try to retrace its path, to find out where it comes to us from and in what direction it is moving. One might assume that it was born of the mystical thinking that has prowled the borders of Christianity since the texts of the Pseudo-Dionysus: perhaps it survived for a millennium or so in the various forms of negative theology. Yet nothing is less certain: although this experience involves going "outside of oneself," this is done ultimately in order to find oneself, to wrap and gather oneself in the dazzling interiority of a thought that is rightfully Being and Speech, in other words, Discourse, even if it is the silence beyond all language and the nothingness beyond all being.

It is less rash to suppose that the first rending to throw light on the thought from the outside was, paradoxically, the long-drawn monologue of the Marquis de Sade. In the age of Kant and Hegel, at a time when the interiorization of the law of history and the world was being imperiously demanded by Western consciousness as never before, Sade gives voice to the nakedness of desire as the lawless law of the world. In the same period Hölderlin's poetry manifested the shimmering absence of the gods and pronounced the new law of the obligation to wait, infinitely long no doubt, for the enigmatic succor of "God's failing." Can it be said without stretching things that Sade and Hölderlin simultaneously introduced into our thinking, for the coming century, but in some way cryptically, the experience of the outside – the former by laying desire bare in the infinite murmur of discourse, the latter by discovering that the gods had wandered off through a rift in language as it was in the process of losing its bearings? That experience was afterward to remain not exactly hidden, because it had not penetrated the thickness of our culture, but afloat, foreign, exterior to our interiority, for the entire time the demand was being formulated, most imperiously, to interiorize the world, to erase alienation, to move beyond the false moment of the *Entaüsserung*, to humanize nature, to naturalize

man, and to recover on earth the treasures that had been spent in heaven.

The same experience resurfaced in the second half of the nineteenth century at the very core of language, which had become – even though our culture was still seeking to mirror itself in it as if it held the secret of its interiority – the sparkle of the outside. It resurfaces in Nietzsche's discovery that all of Western metaphysics is tied not only to its grammar (that had been largely suspected since Schlegel), but to those who in holding discourse have a hold over the right to speak; and in Mallarmé when language appears as a leave-taking from that which it names, but especially – beginning with *Igitur* and continuing through the aleatory and autonomous theatricality of the *Book* – as the movement of the speaker's disappearance; and in Artaud, when all of discursive language is constrained to come undone in the violence of the body and the cry, and when thought, forsaking the wordy interiority of consciousness, becomes a material energy, the suffering of the flesh, the persecution and rending of the subject itself; and in Bataille, when thought ceases to be the discourse of contradiction or the unconscious, becoming the discourse of the limit, of ruptured subjectivity, transgression; and in Klossowski, with the experience of the double, of the exteriority of simu-

lacra, of the insane theatrical multiplication of the Self.

Blanchot is perhaps more than just another witness to this thought. So far has he withdrawn into the manifestation of his work, so completely is he, not hidden by his texts, but absent from their existence and absent by virtue of the marvelous force of their existence, that for us he is that thought itself – its real, absolutely distant, shimmering, invisible presence, its inevitable law, its calm, infinite, measured strength.

Reflection, Fiction

It is extremely difficult to find a language faithful to this thought. Any purely reflexive discourse runs the risk of leading the experience of the outside back to the dimension of interiority; reflection tends irresistibly to repatriate it to the side of consciousness and to develop it into a description of living that depicts the "outside" as the experience of the body, space, the limits of the will, and the ineffaceable presence of the other. The vocabulary of fiction is equally perilous: due to the thickness of its images, sometimes merely by virtue of the transparency of the most neutral or hastiest figures, it risks setting down ready-made meanings that stitch the old fabric of interiority back together in the form of an imagined outside.

Hence the necessity of converting reflexive language. It must be directed not toward any inner confirmation – not toward a kind of central, unshakable

certitude – but toward an outer bound where it must continually contest itself. When language arrives at its own edge, what it finds is not a positivity that contradicts it, but the void that will efface it. Into that void it must go, consenting to come undone in the rumbling, in the immediate negation of what it says, in a silence that is not the intimacy of a secret but a pure outside where words endlessly unravel. That is why Blanchot's language does not use negation dialectically. To negate dialectically brings what one negates into the troubled interiority of the mind. To negate one's own discourse, as Blanchot does, is to cast it ceaselessly outside of itself, to deprive it at every moment not only of what it has just said, but of the very ability to speak. It is to leave it where it lies, far behind one, in order to be free for a new beginning – a beginning that is a pure origin because its only principles are itself and the void, but that is also a rebeginning because what freed that void was the language of the past in the act of hollowing itself out. Not reflection, but forgetting; not contradiction, but a contestation that effaces; not reconciliation, but droning on and on; not mind in laborious conquest of its unity, but the endless erosion of the outside; not truth finally shedding light on itself, but the streaming and distress of a language that has always already begun. "Not speech, barely a murmur, barely a

tremor, less than silence, less than the abyss of the void; the fullness of the void, something one cannot silence, occupying all of space, the uninterrupted, the incessant, a tremor and already a murmur, not a murmur but speech, and not just any speech, distinct speech, precise speech, within my reach."[1]

This kind of symmetrical conversion is required of the language of fiction. It must no longer be a power that tirelessly produces images and makes them shine, but rather a power that undoes them, that lessens their overload, that infuses them with an inner transparency that illuminates them little by little until they burst and scatter in the lightness of the unimaginable. Blanchot's fictions are, rather than the images themselves, their transformation, displacement, and neutral interstices. They are precise; the only figures they outline are in the gray tones of everyday life and the anonymous. And when wonder overtakes them, it is never in themselves but in the void surrounding them, in the space in which they are set, rootless and without foundation. The fictitious is never in things or in people, but in the impossible verisimilitude of what lies between them: encounters, the proximity of what is most distant, the

1. Maurice Blanchot, *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 125.

absolute dissimulation in our very midst. Therefore, fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible. Thus, it bears a profound relation to space; understood in this way, space is to fiction what the negative is to reflection (whereas dialectical negation is tied to the fable of time). No doubt this is the role that houses, hallways, doors, and rooms play in almost all of Blanchot's narratives: placeless places, beckoning thresholds, closed, forbidden spaces that are nevertheless exposed to the winds, hallways fanned by doors that open rooms for unbearable encounters and create gulfs between them across which voices cannot carry and that even muffle cries; corridors leading to more corridors where the night resounds, beyond sleep, with the smothered voices of those who speak, with the cough of the sick, with the wails of the dying, with the suspended breath of those who ceaselessly cease living; a long and narrow room, like a tunnel, in which approach and distance – the approach of forgetting, the distance of the wait – draw near to one another and unendingly move apart.

Thus patient reflection, always directed outside itself, and a fiction that cancels itself out in the void where it undoes its forms intersect to form a discourse appearing with no conclusion and no image, with no truth

and no theater, with no proof, no mask, no affirmation, free of any center, unfettered to any native soil; a discourse that constitutes its own space as the outside toward which, and outside of which, it speaks. This discourse, as speech from outside whose words welcome the outside it addresses, has the openness of a commentary: the repetition of what continually murmurs outside. But this discourse, as a speech that is always outside what it says, is an incessant advance toward that whose absolutely finespun light has never received language. This singular mode of being of discourse – a return to the ambiguous hollowness of undoing and origin – no doubt defines the common ground of Blanchot's "novels" and "narratives" and of his "criticism." From the moment discourse ceases to follow the slope of self-interiorizing thought and, addressing the very being of language, returns thought to the outside; from that moment, in a single stroke, it becomes a meticulous narration of experiences, encounters, and improbable signs – language about the outside of all language, speech about the invisible side of words. And it becomes attentiveness to what in language already exists, has already been said, imprinted, manifested – a listening less to what is articulated in language than to the void circulating between its words, to the murmur that is forever taking it apart; a discourse on the

non-discourse of all language; the fiction of the invisible space in which it appears. That is why the distinction between "novels," "narratives," and "criticism" is progressively weakened in Blanchot until, in *L'attente l'oubli*, language alone is allowed to speak – what is no one's, is neither fiction nor reflection, neither already said nor never yet said, but is instead "between them, this place with its fixed open expanse, the retention of things in their latent state."[2]

2. Maurice Blanchot, *L'attente l'oubli*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 162.

Being Attracted and Negligent

Attraction is no doubt for Blanchot what desire is for Sade, force for Nietzsche, the materiality of thought for Artaud, and transgression for Bataille: the pure, most naked, experience of the outside. It is necessary to be clear about what the word designates: attraction, as Blanchot means it, does not depend on any charm. Nor does it break one's solitude, or found any positive communication. To be attracted is not to be beckoned by the allure of the outside; rather, it is to experience in emptiness and destitution the presence of the outside and, tied to that presence, the fact that one is irremediably outside the outside. Far from calling on one interiority to draw close to another, attraction makes it imperiously manifest that the outside is there, open, without intimacy, without protection or retention (how could it have any when it has no interiority, and, instead, infinitely unfolds outside any enclosure?), but that one

cannot gain access to that opening because the outside never yields its essence. The outside cannot offer itself as a positive presence – as something inwardly illuminated by the certainty of its own existence – but only as an absence that pulls as far away from itself as possible, receding into the sign it makes to draw one toward it (as though it were possible to reach it). Attraction, the marvelous simplicity of opening, has nothing to offer but the infinite void that opens beneath the feet of the person it attracts, the indifference that greets him as if he were not there, a silence too insistent to be resisted and too ambiguous to be deciphered and definitively interpreted – nothing to offer but a woman's gesture in a window, a door left ajar, the smile of a guard before a forbidden threshold, a gaze condemned to death.

Negligence is the necessary correlate of attraction. The relations between them are complex. To be susceptible to attraction a person must be negligent – essentially negligent with total disregard for what one is doing (in *Aminadab*, Thomas enters the fabulous boardinghouse only because he neglects to enter the house across the street) and with the attitude that one's past and kin and whole other life is non-existent, thus relegating them to the outside (neither in the boardinghouse in *Aminadab* nor in the city in *Le Très-Haut*,

nor in the "sanatorium" of *Le dernier homme*, nor in the apartment in *Le moment voulu* does one know what is going on outside, or care to know: one is outside the outside, which is never figured, only incessantly hinted at by the whiteness of its absence, the pallor of an abstract memory, or at most by the glint of snow through a window). This kind of negligence is in fact the flip side of a zealousness – a mute, unjustified, obstinate diligence in surrendering oneself, against all odds, to being attracted by attraction, or more precisely (since attraction has no positivity) to being, in the void, the aimless movement without a moving body of attraction itself. Klossowski was so right to emphasize that in *Le Très-Haut* Henri's last name is "Sorge" (Solicitude), although it is mentioned only once or twice in the text.

But is this zeal always alert? Does it not commit an oversight that may seem trifling but is in fact more crucial than that massive forgetting of an entire life, of all prior attachments and relations? Is not the stride that tirelessly carries the attracted person forward precisely distraction and error? Was it not necessary to "hold back, stay put," as is suggested several times in *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas* and in *Le moment voulu*? Is it not in the nature of zeal to weigh itself down with its own solicitude, to take it too far, to multiply steps, to grow dizzy with stubbornness, to advance toward the

attraction, when attraction speaks imperiously from the depths of its withdrawal only to what is itself withdrawn? It is of the essence of zeal to be negligent, to believe that what is concealed lies elsewhere, that the past will repeat itself, that the law applies to it, that it is awaited, watched over, spied upon. Who will ever know if Thomas – perhaps "Doubting Thomas" should come to mind – had more faith than the others in his questioning of his own belief and in his demands to see and touch? And is what he touched on a body of flesh really what he was after when he asked for a resurrected presence? And was not the illumination suffusing him as much shadow as light? Perhaps Lucie was not who he was looking for; perhaps he should have questioned the person who was thrust on him for a companion; perhaps, instead of trying to get to the upper stories to find the implausible woman who had smiled at him, he should have followed the simple path, taken the gentlest slope, and abandoned himself to the vegetal powers below. Perhaps it was not he who had been called, perhaps someone else was awaited.

All this uncertainty, which makes zeal and negligence two indefinitely reversible figures, undoubtedly has as its principle "the carelessness ruling the house."[3] This

3. Maurice Blanchot, *Aminadab*, Paris, Gallimard, 1942, p. 235.

negligence is more visible, more concealed, more ambiguous yet more fundamental than any other. Everything in it can be deciphered as an intentional sign, as secret diligence, as spying or entrapment: perhaps the lazy servants are hidden powers; perhaps the wheel of fortune dispenses fates recorded long ago in books. But now zeal does not envelop negligence as its necessary allotment of shadow; rather, negligence remains so indifferent to what can manifest or conceal it that any gesture pertaining to it takes on the value of a sign. It was out of negligence that Thomas was called: the opening of attraction and the negligence welcoming the person who is attracted are one and the same. The constraint it creates is not simply blind (which is why it is absolute, and absolutely non-reciprocal). It is illusory; it binds no one because it itself is bound to that bond and can no longer be pure and open attraction. How could attraction not be essentially negligent – leaving things what they are, letting time pass and repeat, letting people advance toward it? For it is the infinite outside, for it is nothing that does not fall outside it, for it undoes every figure of interiority in pure dispersion.

One is attracted precisely to the extent that one is neglected. This is why zeal can only consist in neglecting that negligence, in oneself becoming a courageously negligent solicitude, in going toward the light in neg-

ligence of shadow, until it is discovered that the light itself is only negligence, a pure outside equivalent to a darkness that disperses, like a blown-out candle, the negligent zeal it had attracted.

Where Is the Law, And What Does It Do?

Being negligent, being attracted, is a way of manifesting and concealing the law – of manifesting the withdrawal with which it conceals itself, of consequently attracting it in a light that hides it.

If it were self-evident and in the heart, the law would no longer be the law, but the sweet interiority of consciousness. If, on the other hand, it were present in a text, if it were possible to decipher it between the lines of a book, if it were in a register that could be consulted, then it would have the solidity of external things: it would be possible to follow or disobey it. Where then would its power reside, by what force or prestige would it command respect? In fact, the presence of the law is its concealment. Sovereignly, the law haunts cities, institutions, conduct, and gestures; whatever one does, however great the disorder and carelessness, it has already applied its might: "The house is always,

at every instant, in proper order."[4] Taking liberties is not enough to interrupt it; you might think that you have detached yourself from it and can observe its exercise from without. The moment you believe that you can read its decrees from afar and that they apply only to other people is the moment you are closest to the law; you make it circulate, you "contribute to the enforcement of a public decree."[5] Yet this perpetual manifestation never illuminates what the law says or wants: the law is not the principle or inner rule of conduct. It is the outside that envelops conduct, thereby removing it from all interiority; it is the darkness beyond its borders; it is the void that surrounds it, converting, unknown to anyone, its singularity into the gray monotony of the universal and opening around it a space of uneasiness, of dissatisfaction, of multiplied zeal.

And of transgression. How could one know the law and truly experience it, how could one force it to come into view, to exercise its powers clearly, to speak, without provoking it, without pursuing it into its recesses, without resolutely going ever farther into the outside into which it is always receding? How can one see its invisibility unless it has been turned into its opposite,

4. Ibid., p. 122.

5. Maurice Blanchot, *Le Très-Haut*, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 81.

punishment, which, after all, is only the law overstepped, irritated, beside itself? But if punishment could be provoked merely by the arbitrary actions of those who violate the law, then the law would be in their control: they would be able to touch it and make it appear at will; they would be masters of its shadow and light. That is why transgression endeavors to overstep prohibition in an attempt to attract the law to itself; it always surrenders to the attraction of the essential withdrawal of the law; it obstinately advances into the opening of an invisibility over which it will never triumph; insanely, it endeavors to make the law appear in order to be able to venerate it and dazzle it with its own luminous face; all it ends up doing is reinforcing the law in its weakness – the lightness of the night that is its invincible, impalpable substance. The law is the shadow toward which every gesture necessarily advances; it is itself the shadow of the advancing gesture.

Aminadab and *Le Très-Haut* form a diptych, one on each side of the invisibility of the law. In the first novel, the strange boardinghouse Thomas enters (attracted, called, perhaps elected, although not without being constrained to cross many forbidden thresholds) seems subject to an unknown law: its nearness and absence are continually recalled by doors open and prohibited, by the great wheel handing out blank or undecipher-

able fates, by the overhang of an upper storey from which the appeal originates, from which anonymous orders fall, but to which no one can gain access; the day some people decide to track the law into its lair is the day they encounter the monotony of the place where they are already, as well as violence, blood, death, and collapse, and finally resignation, despair, and a voluntary, fatal disappearance into the outside: for the outside of the law is so inaccessible that anyone who tries to conquer and penetrate it is consigned, not to punishment, which would be the law finally placed under restraint, but to the outside of that outside – to the profoundest forgetting of all. What it is that is served by the "domestics" – those *guards* and *servants* who, unlike the "boarders," "belong to the house" and must represent the law, enforcing it and submitting silently to it – is known to no one, not even to themselves (do they serve the house or the will of the guests?). As far as anyone knows they could even be former boarders who became servants. They are simultaneously zeal and indifference, drunkenness and attentiveness, slumber and tireless activity, the twin figures of wickedness and solicitude: what conceals concealment and what makes it manifest.

In *Le Très-Haut* the law itself (somewhat like the upper story in *Aminadab*, in its monotonous resemblance and exact identity with every other law) is manifested in

its essential concealment. Sorge ("solicitude" for and of the law: the solicitude one feels for the law, and the solicitude of the law for those to whom it is applied, even, especially, if they wish to escape it), Henri Sorge, is a bureaucrat: he works at city hall, in the office of vital statistics; he is only a tiny cog in a strange machine that turns individual existences into an institution; he is the primary form of the law, because he transforms every birth into an archive. But then he abandons his duty (but is it really an abandonment? He takes a vacation and extends it, unofficially it is true but with the complicity of the administration, which tacitly arranges this essential idleness). This quasi-retirement – is it a cause or an effect? – is enough to throw everyone's existence into disarray, and for death to inaugurate a reign that is no longer the classifying reign of the municipal register but the disordered, contagious, anonymous reign of the epidemic; not the real death of decease and its certification, but a hazy charnel house where no one knows who is a patient and who is a doctor, who is a guard and who is a victim, whether it is a prison or a hospital, a safe-house or a fortress of evil. All dams have burst, everything overflows its bounds: the dynasty of rising waters, the kingdom of dubious dampness, oozing, abscesses, and vomiting: individualities dissolve; sweating bodies melt into the walls;

endless screams blare between the fingers that muffle them. Yet when Sorge leaves state service, where he was responsible for ordering other people's existence, he does not go outside the law. Quite the opposite, he forces it to manifest itself at the empty place he just abandoned. The movement by which he effaces his singular existence and removes it from the universality of the law in fact exalts the law; through that movement he serves the law, shows its perfection, "obliges" it, while at the same time linking it to its own disappearance (which is, in a sense, the opposite of transgressive existence exemplified by Bouxx and Dorte); he has become one with the law.

The law can only respond to this provocation by withdrawing: not by retreating into a still deeper silence, but by remaining immobile in its identity. One can, of course, plunge into the open void: plots can hatch, rumors of sabotage can spread, arson and murder can replace the most ceremonious order; the order of the law was never so sovereign than at this moment, when it envelops precisely what had tried to overturn it. Anyone who attempts to oppose the law in order to found a new order, to organize a second police force, to institute a new state, will only encounter the silent and infinitely accommodating welcome of the law. The law does not change: it subsided into the grave once and

for all, and each of its forms is only a metamorphosis of that never-ending death. Sorge wears a mask from Greek tragedy – he has a threatening and pitiful mother like Clytemnestra, a dead father, a sister relentless in her mourning, an all-powerful and insidious father-in-law. He is Orestes in submission, an Orestes whose concern is to escape the law in order to fall farther into submission to it. In that he insists on living in the plague quarter, he is also a god who consents to die among humans, but who cannot succeed in dying and therefore leaves the promise of the law empty, creating a silence rent by the profoundest of screams: where is the law, what does the law do? And when, by virtue of a new metamorphosis or a new sinking into his own identity, he is recognized, named, denounced, venerated, ridiculed by a woman bearing a strange resemblance to his sister, at that moment, he, the possessor of every name, is transformed into something unnameable, an absent absence, the amorphous presence of the void and the mute horror of that presence. But perhaps this death of God is the opposite of death (the ignominy of a limp and slimy thing twitching for all eternity); and the gesture with which he kills her finally liberates his language – a language that has nothing more to say than the "I speak, I am speaking now" of the law, indefinitely prolonged by the

simple fact of that language's proclamation in the outside of its muteness.

Eurydice and the Sirens

The law averts its face and returns to the shadows the instant one looks at it; when one tries to hear its words, what one catches is a song that is no more than the fatal promise of a future song.

The Sirens are the elusive and forbidden form of the alluring voice. They are nothing but song. Only a silvery wake in the sea, the hollow of a wave, a cave in the rocks, the whiteness of the beach – what are they in their very being if not a pure appeal, if not the mirthful void of listening, if not attentiveness, if not an invitation to pause? Their music is the opposite of a hymn: no presence shimmers in their immortal words; only the promise of a future song accompanies their melody. What makes them seductive is less what they make it possible to hear than what sparkles in the remoteness of their words, the future of what they say. Their fascination is due not to their current song, but to what it

promises to be. What the Sirens promise to sing to Ulysses is his own past exploits, transformed into a poem for the future: "We recognize all the suffering, all the suffering inflicted by the gods on the people of Argos and Troy on the fields of Troad." Presented as though in negative outline, the song is but the attraction of song; but what it promises the hero is nothing other than a duplicate of what he has lived through, known, and suffered, precisely what he himself is. A promise at once deceptive and truthful. It lies because all those who surrender to seduction and steer their ships toward the beach will only meet death. But it speaks the truth in that it is death that enables the song to sound and endlessly recount the heroes' adventure. Yet one must refuse to hear this song so pure – so pure that it says nothing more than its own devouring withdrawal – that one must plug one's ears, pass by it as if one were deaf, in order to live and thus begin to sing. Or, rather, in order for the narrative that will never die to be born, one must listen but remain at the mast, wrists and ankles tied; one must vanquish all desire by a trick that does violence to itself; one must experience all suffering by remaining at the threshold of the alluring abyss; one must finally find oneself beyond song, as if one had crossed death while still alive only to restore it in a second language.

Then there is the figure of Eurydice. She would seem to be the exact opposite, since she must be summoned back from the shadows by the melody of a song capable of seducing and lulling death, and since the hero is unable to resist Eurydice's power of enchantment, of which she herself is the saddest victim. Yet she is a close relative of the Sirens: just as they only sing the future of a song, she only shows the promise of a face. Orpheus may have succeeded in quieting barking dogs and outmaneuvering sinister forces, but on the return trip he should have been chained like Ulysses or as unperceiving as his sailors; in fact, he was the hero and his crew combined in a single character: he was seized by the forbidden desire and untied himself with his own hands, letting the invisible face disappear into the shadows, just as Ulysses let the song he did not hear vanish in the waves. Each of their voices is then freed: Ulysses' with his salvation and the possibility of telling the tale of his marvelous adventure; Orpheus's with his absolute loss and never-ending lament. But it is possible that behind Ulysses' triumphant narrative there prevails the inaudible lament of not having listened better and longer, of not having ventured as close as possible to the wondrous voice that might have finished the song. And that behind Orpheus's laments shines the glory of having seen, however fleetingly, the unattainable face

at the very instant it turned away and returned to darkness: a nameless, placeless hymn to the light.

These two figures are profoundly interwoven in Blanchot's work.[6] Some of his narratives, for example *L'arrêt de mort*, are dedicated to the gaze of Orpheus: the gaze that at the wavering threshold of death goes in search of the submerged presence and tries to bring its image back to the light of day, but only secures the nothingness in which the poem can subsequently appear. In Blanchot, however, Orpheus does not see Eurydice's face in a movement that conceals it and makes it visible: he is able to contemplate it face to face; he sees with his own eyes the open gaze of death, "the most terrible gaze a living thing can encounter." It is that gaze, or rather the narrator's gaze into that gaze, that exerts an extraordinary power of attraction; it is what makes a second woman appear in the middle of the night in an already captive state of stupefaction, and forces her to wear the plaster mask allowing one to contemplate "face to face that which lives eternally." The gaze of Orpheus acquires the fatal power that sang in the voice of the Sirens. Similarly, the narrator of *Au*

6. See "The Gaze of Orpheus" and "The Song of the Sirens," in Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, trans. Lydia Davis, Barrytown, N.Y., Station Hill, 1981, pp. 99–104 and 105–13.

moment voulu goes in search of Judith in the forbidden place where she is imprisoned; against all expectations, he easily finds her, like an overly close Eurydice who offers herself in an impossible, happy return. But the figure lurking in the background who guards her, and from which Orpheus comes to wrest her, is less a dark and inflexible goddess than a pure voice: "Indifferent and neutral, withdrawn into a vocal realm where she is so completely stripped of superfluous perfections that she seems deprived of herself: just, but in a way reminiscent of justice ruled by every negative destiny."[7] Is not this voice – which "sings blankly" and offers so little to be heard – the voice of the Sirens, whose seductiveness resides in the void they open, in the fascinated immobility seizing all who listen?

7. Maurice Blanchot, *Au moment voulu*, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, pp. 68–69.

The Companion

At the first signs of attraction, when the withdrawal of the desired face remains sketchy, when the firmness of the solitary voice is just beginning to stand out against the blur of the murmur, something like a sweet and violent movement intrudes on interiority, drawing it out of itself, turning it around, bringing forth next to it – or rather right behind it – the background figure of a companion who always remains hidden but always makes it patently obvious that he is there; a double that keeps his distance, an accosting resemblance. The instant interiority is lured out of itself, an outside empties the place into which interiority customarily retreats and deprives it of the possibility of retreat: a form arises – less than a form, a kind of stubborn, amorphous anonymity – that divests interiority of its identity, hollows it out, divides it into non-coincident twin figures, divests it of its unmediated right to say *I*, and pits against

its discourse a speech that is indissociably echo and denial. To lend an ear to the silvery voice of the Sirens, to turn toward the forbidden face that has already concealed itself, is not simply to abandon the world and the distraction of appearance; it is suddenly to feel grow within oneself a desert at the other end of which (but this immeasurable distance is also as thin as a line) gleams a language without an assignable subject, a godless law, a personal pronoun without a person, an eyeless and expressionless face, an other that is the same. Does the principle of attraction secretly reside in this tear and this bond? When one thought that one was being drawn out of oneself by an inaccessible remoteness, was it not simply that this mute presence was bearing down in the shadows with all its inevitable weight? The empty outside of attraction is perhaps identical to the nearby outside of the double. That would make the companion attraction at the height of its dissimulation: it is dissimulated because it presents itself as a pure, close, stubborn, redundant presence, as one figure too many; and because it repels more than it attracts, because one must keep it at a distance, because there is always the danger that one will be absorbed by it and compromised by it in boundless confusion. This means that the companion acts both as a demand to which one is never equal and a weight of which one

would like to rid oneself. One is irretrievably bound to the companion with a familiarity that is hard to bear; yet one must draw still closer to him and create a bond with him different from the absence of ties that attaches one to him through the faceless form of absence.

This figure is infinitely reversible. Is the companion an unacknowledged guide? Is he a law that is manifest but is not visible as law? Or does he constitute a heavy mass, an encumbering inertia, a slumber threatening to engulf all vigilance? No sooner does Thomas enter the house to which he has been attracted by a half-made gesture and an ambiguous smile than he receives a strange double (is this what, according to the meaning of the title, is "God-given"?): the double's apparently wounded face is only the outline of a face tattooed over his, and in spite of hideous flaws, he retains something like "a reflection of former beauty." Does he know the secrets of the house better than anyone else, as he will boast at the end of the novel? Is not his apparent fatuousness but a silent awaiting of the question? Is he a guard or a prisoner? Does he count among the inaccessible powers that dominate the house, or is he only a domestic? His name is *Dom*. He is invisible and falls silent whenever Thomas addresses a third party, and soon disappears entirely; but when Thomas seems to have finally gained entry to the house, when

he thinks he has found the face and voice he was seeking, when he is being treated as a domestic, Dom reappears in possession of, or pretending to be in possession of, the law and speech: Thomas had been wrong to have had so little faith, to have failed to question he who was there to respond, to have squandered his zeal on his wish to gain access to the upper stories, when it would have been enough for him to allow himself to go down. The more choked Thomas's voice becomes, the more Dom speaks, claiming the right to speak and to speak for him. All of language totters; when Dom uses the first person it is actually Thomas's language that is speaking, without him, in the void that the wake of his visible absence leaves in a darkness connected to dazzling light.

The companion is also indissociably what is closest and farthest away. In *Le Très-Haut* he is represented by Dorte, the man from "down there"; he is a stranger to the law and stands outside the order of the city; he is illness in its raw state, disseminated death infusing life; by contrast to the "Most High" of the title he is "Most Low"; and he is obsessively close; he is unreservedly familiar; he freely confides; he is inexhaustibly and multiply present; he is the eternal neighbor; the sound of his cough carries across doors and walls; his death throes resound through the house; and in this world oozing moisture,

water rising on all sides, Dorte's flesh itself, his fever and sweat, cross the partition to stain Sorge's room next door. When he finally dies, howling in one last transgression that he is not dead, his scream goes out into the hand that muffles it, forever vibrating in Sorge's fingers. Sorge's flesh and bones, his body, will long remain that death, and the cry that contests and confirms it.

It is in this movement that is the pivot of language that the essence of the stubborn companion is most clearly manifested. The companion is not a privileged interlocutor, some other speaking subject; he is the nameless limit language reaches. That limit, however, is in no way positive; it is instead the deep into which language is forever disappearing only to return identical to itself, the echo of a different discourse that says the same thing, of the same discourse saying something else. "Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas" ("he who did not accompany me") has no name (and wishes to remain cloaked in that essential anonymity); he is a faceless, gazeless *he* who can only see through the language of another whom he submits to the order of his own night; he edges as close as can be to the *I* that speaks in the first person, and whose words and phrases he repeats in an infinite void. Yet there is no bond between them; an immeasurable distance separates them. That is why he who says *I* must continually approach him in order

finally to meet the companion who does not accompany him and who forms no bond with him that is positive enough to be manifested by being untied. There is no pact to tie them to each other; yet they are powerfully linked by a constant questioning (describe what you see? are you writing now?) and by the uninterrupted discourse manifesting the impossibility of responding. It is as if this withdrawal, this hollowness that is perhaps nothing more than the inexorable erosion of the person who speaks, cleared a neutral space of language. The narrative plunges into the space between the narrator and the inseparable companion who does not accompany him; it runs the full length of the straight line separating the speaking *I* from the *he* he is in his spoken being; it unfolds a placeless place that is outside all speech and writing, that brings them forth and dispossesses them, that imposes its law on them, that manifests through its infinite unraveling their momentary gleaming and sparkling disappearance.

Neither One Nor The Other

Despite several confluences, we are quite far from the experience through which some are wont to lose themselves in order to find themselves. The characteristic movement of mysticism is to attempt to join – even if it means crossing the night – the positivity of an existence by opening a difficult line of communication with it. Even when that existence contests itself, hollows itself out in the labor of its own negativity, infinitely withdrawing into a lightless day, a shadowless night, a visibility devoid of shape, it is still a shelter in which experience can rest. The shelter is created as much by the law of a Word as by the open expanse of silence. For in the form of the experience, silence is the immeasurable, inaudible, primal breath from which all manifest discourse issues; or, speech is a reign with the power to hold itself in silent suspense.

The experience of the outside has nothing to do with

that. The movement of attraction and the withdrawal of the companion lay bare what precedes all speech, what underlies all silence: the continuous streaming of language. A language spoken by no one: any subject it may have is no more than a grammatical fold. A language not resolved by any silence: any interruption is only a white stain on its seamless sheet. It opens a neutral space in which no existence can take root. Mallarmé taught us that the word is the manifest non-existence of what it designates; we now know that the being of language is the visible effacement of the one who speaks: "Saying that I hear these words would not explain for me the dangerous strangeness of my relations with them.... They do not speak, they are not inside; on the contrary, they lack all intimacy and lie entirely outside. What they designate consigns me to this outside of all speech, seemingly more secret and more inward than the inner voice of conscience. But that outside is empty, the secret has no depth, what is repeated is the emptiness of repetition, it does not speak and yet has always been said."[8] The experiences Blanchot narrates lead to this anonymity of language liberated and opened to its own boundlessness. What they find in that murmuring space is less an end point than the

8. Maurice Blanchot, *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, pp. 136–37.

site without geography of their possible rebeginning: hence the direct and luminous, at last serene, question Thomas asks at the end of *Aminadab* when all speech seems to be denied him; and the pure flash of the empty promise – "now I am speaking" – in *Le Très-Haut*; and the appearance in the final pages of *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas* of a smile that has no face but is worn at last by a silent name; or the first contact with the words of the subsequent rebeginning at the end of *Le Dernier Homme*.

Language is then freed from all of the old myths by which our awareness of words, discourse, and literature has been shaped. For a long time it was thought that language had mastery over time, that it acted both as the future bond of the promise and as memory and narrative; it was thought to be prophecy and history; it was also thought that in its sovereignty it could bring to light the eternal and visible body of truth; it was thought that its essence resided in the form of words or in the breath that made them vibrate. In fact, it is only a formless rumbling, a streaming; its power resides in its dissimulation. That is why it is one with the erosion of time; it is depthless forgetting and the transparent emptiness of waiting.

Language, its every word, is indeed directed at contents that preexist it; but in its own being, provided

that it holds as close to its being as possible, it only unfolds in the pureness of the wait. Waiting is directed at nothing: any object that could gratify it would only efface it. Still, it is not confined to one place, it is not a resigned immobility; it has the endurance of a movement that will never end and would never promise itself the reward of rest; it does not wrap itself in interiority; all of it falls irremediably outside. Waiting cannot wait for itself at the end of its own past, nor rejoice in its own patience, nor steel itself once and for all, for it was never lacking in courage. What takes it up is not memory but forgetting. This forgetting, however, should not be confused with the scatteredness of distraction or the slumber of vigilance; it is a wakefulness so alert, so lucid, so new that it is a good-bye to night and a pure opening onto a day to come. In this respect forgetting is extreme attentiveness – so extreme that it effaces any singular face that might present itself to it. Once defined, a form is simultaneously too old and too new, too strange and too familiar, not to be instantly rejected by the purity of the wait, and thereby condemned to the immediacy of forgetting. It is in forgetting that the wait remains a waiting: an acute attention to what is radically new, with no bond of resemblance or continuity with anything else (the newness of the wait drawn outside of itself and freed from any past);

attention to what is most profoundly old (for deep down the wait has never stopped waiting).

Language, in its attentive and forgetful being, with its power of dissimulation that effaces every determinate meaning and even the existence of the speaker, in the gray neutrality that constitutes the essential hiding place of all being and thereby frees the space of the image – is neither truth nor time, neither eternity nor man; it is instead the always undone form of the outside. It places the origin in contact with death, or rather brings them both to light in the flash of their infinite oscillation – a momentary contact in a boundless space. The pure outside of the origin, if that is indeed what language is eager to greet, never solidifies into a penetrable and immobile positivity; and the perpetually rebegun outside of death, although carried toward the light by the essential forgetting of language, never sets the limit at which truth would finally begin to take shape. They immediately flip sides. The origin takes on the transparency of the endless; death opens interminably onto the repetition of the beginning. And what language *is* (not what it means, not the form in which it says what it means), what language is in its being, is that softest of voices, that nearly imperceptible retreat, that weakness deep inside and surrounding every thing and every face – what bathes the belated effort of the

origin and the dawnlike erosion of death in the same neutral light, at once day and night. Orpheus's murderous forgetting, Ulysses' wait in chains, are the very being of language.

At a time when language was defined as the place of truth and the bond of time, it was placed in absolute peril by the Cretan Epimenides' assertion that all Cretans were liars: the way in which that discourse was bound to itself undid any possibility of truth. On the other hand, when language is revealed to be the shared transparency of the origin and death, every single existence receives, through the simple assertion "I speak," the threatening promise of its own disappearance, its future appearance.

Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him

Maurice Blanchot

||

A few personal words. Let me say first of all that I had no personal relations with Michel Foucault. I never met him, except one time, in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, during the events of May '68, perhaps in June or July (but I was later told he wåsn't there), when I addressed a few words to him, he himself unaware of who was speaking to him ... (Whatever the detractors of May might say, it was a splendid moment, when anyone could speak to anyone else, anonymously, impersonally, welcomed with no other justification than that of being another person.) It's true that during those extraordinary events I often asked: but why isn't Foucault here? thus granting him his power of attraction and underscoring the empty place he should have been occupying. But I received replies that didn't satisfy me: "he's somewhat reserved," or "he's abroad." But, in fact, there were many foreigners, and even the

far off Japanese were there. Perhaps we may simply have missed each other.

His first book, which brought him fame, had been given to me when the text was still virtually an untitled manuscript. Roger Caillois had it and recommended it to several of us. I recall Caillois's role, because it seems to have gone unacknowledged. Caillois himself was not always appreciated by the specialists. He was interested in too many things. A curator, an innovator, always a bit out of the mainstream, he didn't fit into the company of those dispensing the official mode of knowledge. And, then, he had forged for himself a style that was quite beautiful, sometimes to the point of excess, so that he felt destined to watch over – and a fierce watchman he was – the proprieties of the French language. Foucault's style, in its splendor and precision, two apparently contradictory qualities, perplexed him. He was not sure whether this grand baroque style didn't ultimately ruin the singular knowledge whose multiple facets – philosophical, sociological, and historical – irritated and exalted him. Perhaps he saw in Foucault an alter ego who would have made off with his heritage. No one likes to recognize himself as a stranger in a mirror where what he sees is not his own double but someone whom he would have liked to have been.

Foucault's first book (or let's say it was his first one)

highlighted certain relations with literature that he would be obliged to modify later on. The word "madness" was a source of a number of confusions. While he dealt only indirectly with madness, he examined above all that power of exclusion which, one fine or awful day, was implemented in a simple administrative decree, a decision that divided society not into the good and the evil, but the reasonable and the unreasonable. This decree disclosed the impurities of reason and the ambiguous relations that power (in this case, a sovereign power) was to entertain with what is most widely distributed, and made it clear that power would not have an easy time of reigning absolutely. Important is the act of exclusion itself and not what is excluded, the division and not what is divided. And, then, what a strange thing history is, if a simple decree can make it swing in one direction or another and not major battles or dynastic disputes. Rather than being simply an act of maliciousness aimed at punishing dangerous asocial individuals (the idle, the poor, the debauched, the sacrilegious, the mad), this division was intended, by an even more formidable ambiguity, to take account of all of them by dispensing care, nourishment, and blessings. Preventing the sick from dying in the street, the poor from becoming criminals, the debauched from perverting the pious is not at all reprehensible, but is a

sign of progress, the point of departure for changes that "responsible authorities" would approve of.

Thus, with his first book, Foucault tackled problems which have always belonged to philosophy (reason, unreason), but he treated them from the angle of history and sociology, even as he gave particular importance within history to a certain discontinuity (a small event changing a lot), without making of that discontinuity a break (because before the mad, there were the lepers, and it was in the sites, simultaneously physical and spiritual, left empty by the lepers, who had disappeared, that shelters for the newly excluded were set up, even as that imperative to exclude persisted behind the amazing forms that would alternately reveal and conceal it).

A Man in Danger

It is worth pondering why the word "madness," even in Foucault, had retained such interrogatory force. On at least two occasions, Foucault reproached himself for having been seduced by the idea that there is a depth to madness, that it constitutes a fundamental experience situated outside history and to which poets (artists) can serve as witnesses, victims, or heroes. If it was an error, it was a beneficent one for him, to the extent that through it (and through Nietzsche) he became aware of how distasteful he found the notion of depth, even as, in discourse, he would track down the hidden meanings, fascinating secrets, or, in other words, the double and triple floors of meaning that one can finish with only by disqualifying meaning itself, as – in the case of words – the signified and even the signifier.

At this point, I would say that Foucault, who once

defiantly declared himself a "happy optimist," was a man in danger, who, without making a display of it, had an acute sense of the perils to which we are exposed, and sought to know which ones are the most threatening and with which it is possible to compromise. Thus, the importance for him of the notion of strategy, and, thus, also his toying with the thought that he might have been, had fate so decided, a statesman (a political advisor) as well as a writer – a term he always rejected with more or less vehemence and sincerity – or a pure philosopher.

In any event, Foucault is a man always on the move, alone, secretive, and who, because of that, distrusts the marvels of interiority, refuses the traps of subjectivity, asking where and how there emerges a discourse entirely surface and shimmering, but bereft of mirages – a discourse not alien to the search for truth, as was believed, but one that finally reveals the perils of that search and its ambiguous relations with the myriad configurations of power.

The Farewell to Structuralism

There are at least two books, one of which seems esoteric, the other brilliant, simple, and engaging, both of them programmatic in appearance, that seem to open the future to a new form of knowledge. They are, in fact, like testaments registering promises that would not be kept, not out of negligence or impotence, but because there is perhaps no other fulfillment than their very promise, and because in formulating them Foucault proceeded to the very limit of the interest he bore in them. Thus it was that he settled his scores, then turned toward other horizons, without betraying his imperatives but concealing them beneath an apparent disdain. Foucault, who wrote abundantly, was a silent being: even more, he was compulsive in keeping his silence when benevolent or malevolent questioners asked him to explain himself (there are, nevertheless, exceptions).

The Archaeology of Knowledge, like *The Order of Discourse*, marks the period – the end of the period – in

which Foucault, writer that he was, pretended to unveil discursive practices that were virtually pure, in the sense of referring only to themselves, to the rules of their formation, to their point of insertion (be it without origin), to their emergence (be it without author), to decipherings that would reveal nothing at all that was hidden. They are witnesses that don't confess, because they have nothing to say other than what has been said, writings refractory toward all commentary (ah, Foucault's hatred for commentary), domains that are autonomous, but neither truly independent nor immutable, since they are perpetually in transformation, like atoms at once singular and multiple, if one is prepared to admit the existence of multiplicities referring to no unity.

But, it will be said, in that venture in which linguistics plays its role, Foucault was doing nothing other, with his own private motives, than pursuing the aspirations of a structuralism then in its death throes. It would be worthwhile to find out (but I am poorly placed for such an inquiry, since I realize that until now I have never pronounced, either in approval or disapproval, the name of that ephemeral discipline, despite the friendship I bore certain of its adherents) why Foucault, who was always so far above his own passions, grew truly angry when efforts were made to enlist him on that particular ship, which was already being navigated by a number

of illustrious captains. The reasons are multiple. The simplest (if it may be so called) is that he could sense in structuralism a residual whiff of transcendentalism: for what might be the status of those *formal* laws alleged to govern every science, while at the same time remaining alien to the vicissitudes of history on which, nevertheless, their appearance and disappearance depended? A very impure alloy of an historical a priori and a formal a priori. Let us recall the vengeful sentence in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; it's worth the effort:

> Nothing, therefore, would be more pleasant, or more inexact, than to conceive of this historical a priori as a formal a priori that is also endowed with a history: a great, unmoving, empty figure that irrupted one day on the surface of time, that exercised over men's thought a tyranny that none could escape, and which then suddenly disappeared in a totally unexpected, totally unprecedented eclipse: a transcendental syncopation, a play of intermittent forms. The formal a priori and the historical a priori neither belong to the same level nor share the same nature: if they intersect, it is because they occupy two different dimensions.[1]

1. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, Pantheon, 1972, p.128.

And recall, as well, the final dialogue of the same book in which the two Michels face off in a murderous duel where it is not clear which one will receive the fatal blow: "Throughout this book," says one, "you have been at great pains to dissociate yourself from 'structuralism.' . . ." The other's response, which is important: "I did not deny history [whereas structuralism has as an essential feature an unawareness of it] but held in suspense the general, empty category of change in order to reveal transformations at different levels; I reject a uniform model of temporalization."[2]

Why this very bitter and perhaps very useless dispute (at least for those who don't see what is at stake)? Because the archivist that Foucault wanted to be and the structuralist that he didn't want to be each (temporarily) allowed himself to appear as if laboring for language (or discourse) alone – from which philosophers, linguists, anthropologists, and literary critics have pretended to draw formal (and thus ahistorical) laws – even while allowing it to incarnate a flawed transcendentalism that Heidegger would recall for us in two excessively simple propositions: language does not need to be founded, for *it* is what founds.

2. Ibid., pp. 199–200.

The Imperative of Discontinuity

Now Foucault, when concerning himself with discourse, does not reject history but distinguishes within it discontinuities, discrete – local rather than universal – divisions, which do not presuppose subsisting beneath them a vast, silent narrative, a continuous, immense, and unlimited murmur which would need to be suppressed (or repressed), in the manner of something enigmatically unspoken or unthought that would not only await its revenge, but would obscurely gnaw at thought, rendering it forever dubious. In other words, Foucault, who was never fascinated by psychoanalysis, is even less prepared to take into account a collective unconscious, bedrock of all discourse and all history, a kind of "prediscursive providence" whose sovereign instances, whether creative or destructive, we have but to transform into personal meanings.

In attempting to distance himself from interpreta-

tion ("the hidden meaning"), originality (the bringing to light of a unique beginning, the Heideggerian *Ursprung*), and, finally, what he himself calls "the sovereignty of the signifier" (the imperialism of the phoneme, of sound, tone, and even rhythm), Foucault, nevertheless, works on discourse in order to isolate within it a form to which he would give the unprestigious name *statement (énoncé)*: a term easier to designate by what it excludes than by what it affirms (or states) in its quasi-heroic tautology. Read and reread *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (a title that is dangerous in itself since it evokes what should be turned away from, the logos of the *arche*, or the speech of the origin), and you will be surprised to rediscover in it many a formula from negative theology. Foucault invests all his talent in describing with sublime phrases what it is he rejects: "It's not . . . , nor is it . . . , nor is it for that matter . . . ," so that there remained almost nothing for him to say in order to valorize what is precisely a refusal of the notion of "value": the statement, which is rare, singular, asking only to be described or merely rewritten, in relation to its strictly *external* conditions of possibility (the outside, exteriority), and thus giving way to random series which from time to time constitute an *event*.

How far we are from the proliferation of sentences in ordinary discourse, sentences that never stop being

generated, in an accumulation unimpeded by contradiction but, on the contrary, provoked to a point of a vertiginous beyond. The sparseness of the statement is a function of the fact that it can be nothing other than positive, without a cogito to which it might refer, without a unique author to authenticate it, free from every context that might help to situate it in an organized set (from which it might derive its single or various meanings). The enigmatic statement is already multiple in itself, or, more precisely, it is a non-unitary multiplicity: it is serial because the series is its way of grouping, having repeatability as its essential property (that, according to Sartre, is the relation most shorn of meaning), even as it constitutes, along with other series, a tangle or reversal of singularities that at times, when stationary, form a tableau, and, at others, by dint of their successive relations of simultaneity, are inscribed as fragments at once random and necessary, seemingly comparable to the perverse efforts (as Thomas Mann put it) of serial music.

In *The Order of Discourse*, his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (in which, at least in theory, one says what one will do in subsequent lectures, but, in actuality, dispenses with doing it, since it has just been said, and such an utterance does not tolerate being developed), Foucault enumerated more clearly and perhaps

less strictly (it would be worthwhile to inquire whether that loss in rigor is merely due to the demands of a magisterial discourse, or rather to an incipient lack of interest in archaeology itself) notions intended to serve in a new analysis. Thus, Foucault proposed *event, series, regularity*, and *condition of possibility* as the notions he would use to oppose, term by term, those principles he thought had dominated the traditional history of ideas; event was opposed to creation, series to unit, regularity to originality, and condition of possibility to meaning, that buried treasure of concealed meanings. All of which is quite clear. But in so doing, was not Foucault giving himself somewhat outdated adversaries? And were not his own principles more complex than his official discourse, with its striking formulations, led one to think? For example, it is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering in this to a certain conception of literary production, got rid of, purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more author, no more creative unity. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather its excessively determined unity is put in question. What arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance (that is, the new manner of being which disappearance is), or rather its dispersal, which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plu-

rality of positions and a discontinuity of functions (and here we reencounter the *system of discontinuities*, which, rightly or wrongly, seemed at one time to be a characteristic of serial music).

Similarly, when one ascribes to Foucault a quasi-nihilistic distrust of what he calls the will to truth (or the will to serious knowledge), or, additionally, a suspicious rejection of the idea of reason (possessing universal value), I think one is underestimating the complexity of his concerns. The will to truth, to be sure, but at what cost? What are its guises? What political imperatives are concealed beneath that highly honorable quest? And those questions impose themselves all the more in that Foucault, less out of any diabolical instinct than because of the fate of modern times (which was also his fate), felt himself condemned to attend solely to those dubious sciences which he disliked and which were already suspect because of their extravagant name: the "human sciences." (He was thinking of the human sciences when he announced with a kind of playful malevolence the imminent or probable disappearance

of man, who so preoccupies us, even as we do everything to render him, from this day, posthumous through our curiosity, reducing him to no more than an *object* of inquiry, of statistics, or even of polls). There is a high price to pay for truth. We need not recall Nietzsche in order to convince ourselves of it. Thus, already in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where we seem to indulge in the illusion of an autonomous discourse (an illusion with which literature and art perhaps bewitch themselves), there are announced the multiple connections between knowledge and power, and the obligation to recognize the political effects that are produced, at any given moment in history, by the ancient desire to disentangle the true from the false. Knowledge, power, truth? Reason, exclusion, repression? One would have to have a very poor knowledge of Foucault to believe that he would be satisfied with concepts so simple or with connections so facile. If we say that truth itself is a power, we will have scarcely moved forward since power, while a convenient term for polemics, is nonetheless almost useless until analysis frees it of its jack-of-all-trades status. As for reason, it ought not to yield its place to "unreason." What threatens us, as well as what serves us, is less reason than the various forms of rationality, an accelerated accumulation of rational apparatuses, a logical vertigo of rationalizations which

are at work and in use as much in the penal system as in the medical system or even the school system. And Foucault engraves in our memories, the oracular sentence: "The rationality of the abominable is a fact of contemporary history. The irrational, however, does not, because of that, acquire any indefeasible rights."

From Subjection to the Subject

Discipline and Punish, as is well known, marks the transition from the study of isolated discursive practices to the study of the social practices that constitute their underpinning. It is the emergence of the political in the work and life of Foucault. In a certain sense, his preoccupations remain the same. From the great confinement to the various forms of an impossible prison is but a step. But the concatenation (the word is fitting) is not the same. The confinement was the archaeological principle of medical science (never, moreover, would Foucault lose sight of that imperfect knowledge which obsessed him, which he would rediscover in the Greeks, and which would end up avenging itself on him by abandoning him, impotent, to his fate). The penal system, which goes from the secrecy of torture and the spectacle of executions to the refined use of "model-prisons" in which some may acquire advanced

university degrees, while others resort to a contented life of tranquilizers, brings us back to the ambiguous demands and perverse constraints of a progressivism that is, however, unavoidable and even beneficent. Anyone who learns to know whence he comes may marvel at being what he is, or remembering the distortions he has undergone, surrender to a disenchantment that will immobilize him, unless, like Nietzsche, he resorts to the humor of genealogy and the play of criticism.

How did we learn how to fight the plague? Not only through the isolation of those stricken, but through a strict parceling out of the contaminated space, through the invention of a technology for imposing order that would later affect the administration of cities, and, finally, through meticulous inquests which, once the plague had disappeared, would serve to prevent vagrancy (the right to come and go enjoyed by "men of little means") and even to forbid the right to disappear, which is still denied us today, in one form or another. If the plague of Thebes originated in Oedipus's incest, genealogically the glory of psychoanalysis is but a distant effect of the ravages of the plague. Whence the famous remark ascribed to Freud upon his arrival in America – but we may wonder whether he meant by it that the plague and psychoanalysis were originally and nosologically linked and, for that reason, might be symbolically

exchanged. In any event, Foucault was tempted to go further. He recognized, or thought he recognized, the origin of "structuralism" in the necessity, once the plague had spread, of mapping out (physical and intellectual) space in order to determine, in accordance with the rules of a rigorous survey, the menacing regions of the sickness – an obligation to which, on the field of military maneuvers as well as subsequently in schools and hospitals, human bodies learned to submit in order to become docile and function as interchangeable units: "In a discipline, the elements are interchangeable, since each one is defined by the place it occupies in a series and by the gap that separates it from the others."[3]

The rigorous partitioning of space, which requires the body to submit to being delved into, disassembled, and, if need be, reconstituted, would find its fulfillment in Bentham's utopia, the exemplary Panopticon, which reveals the absolute power of total visibility. (This is also Orwell's fiction.) Such visibility (to which Hugo subjected Cain even in his grave) has the tragic advantage of rendering superfluous the physical violence to which a body would otherwise be obliged to submit. Surveillance, the fact of being under surveillance –

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Pantheon, 1977, p. 145.

which is not merely that exercised by watchful prison guards but that coincident with any efforts to render the human condition obedient (conforming to rules) and productive (and thus useful) – will lead to all the forms of observation, inquiry, and experimentation without which there would be no true science. Nor any power either? That is less certain, since sovereignty has obscure origins which are located on the side of expenditure rather than utility, not to mention still more nefarious organizing principles, when they perpetuate the symbolics of blood to which racism in our own time makes reference.

Having observed and denounced all that, one suspects somehow that Foucault would prefer the openly barbarous times when torture hid nothing of its horror. These were the eras when crime, having violated the integrity of the sovereign, established singular relations between the High and the Low, so that the criminal, while atoning in spectacular fashion for his transgression of prohibitions, retained the splendor of acts that set him apart from humanity. (As in the case of Gilles de Rais; or the accused in Kafka's *The Trial*.) The proof is that capital executions were not only the occasion of celebrations in which the people rejoiced, since they symbolized the suspension of laws and customs (one was amid the exceptional), but that they also at

times provoked the populace to rebellion, by giving it the idea that it too had the right to shatter with its revolts the constraints imposed by a king, who was momentarily weakened. It is, thus, not out of beneficence that the fate of the condemned is handled with greater discretion, any more than that it is out of kindness that the bodies of the condemned are left intact and "souls and minds" bear the brunt of the assault to correct or rehabilitate them. Anything that improves the prison condition is surely not odious, but it risks deceiving us as to the reasons that rendered those ameliorations desirable or auspicious. The eighteenth century seemed to give us a taste for new freedoms – that is all to the good. Nevertheless, the foundation of those freedoms, their "subsoil" (as Foucault calls it), did not change, since it may still be found in a disciplinary society whose powers of mastery dissimulate even as they proliferate.[4] We are ever more subjected. From that *subjection*, which is no longer crude but subtle, we draw the glorious consequences of being *subjects* and free sub-

4. "The Enlightenment, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines." *Discipline and Punish*, p. 222. This is perhaps exaggerated: the disciplines go back to prehistoric times when, for example, a bear was transformed, through successful training, into what would later be a watchdog or courageous policeman.

jects capable of transforming the most diverse modes of a lying power into knowledge. We do this to the extent that we are constrained to forget its transcendence while at the same time we replace a law of divine origin with the various rules and reasonable procedures that, once we have tired of them, will seem to us to have come from a human – but monstrous – bureaucracy. (Let us not forget that Kafka, who appears to describe ingeniously the cruelest forms of bureaucracy, also bows before them, beholding in them the strangeness of an only slightly vitiated mystical force.)

Inner Conviction

If one wants to see how much our justice needs an archaic subsoil, it is enough to recall the role still played in it by the almost incomprehensible notion of "inner conviction." Our interiority not only remains sacred but continues to make of us the descendants of Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar. Even Heidegger's analytic of moral consciousness (*das Gewissen*) is still sustained by that aristocratic heritage: within us there is a word that turns into a sentence, an absolute affirmation. Such and such is said, and that primordial utterance, extricated from every dialogue, is a word of justice that no one has the right to contest.

What should one conclude? Concerning the prison, Foucault comes to affirm that it is of recent origin (but the *ergastulum* does not date from yesterday). Or, and this is more important to him, he notes that prison reform is as old as prisons themselves. In some corner

of his mind, this signifies the impossible necessity of reforming what is unreformable. And then (I ask) does not the organization of the monastery demonstrate the excellence of isolation, the marvel of intimate communion with oneself (or with God), the superior benefit that comes from silence, the favorable environment in which the greatest saints are formed and the most hardened criminals forged? Objection: the former consent; the latter submit. But is the difference that great, and aren't there even more rules in convents than in the world of prison cells? And, finally, aren't the only prisoners for life those who have taken *perpetual* vows? Between heaven and hell the distance is either infinitesimal or infinite. What is certain, at least, is that Foucault is not calling into question reason itself, but rather the danger of certain rationalities or rationalizations; nor is he interested in the concept of power in general, but rather in relations of power, their formation, specificity, and activation. When there is force of violence all is clear but when there is voluntary adherence, there is perhaps no more than an effect of inner violence concealed amid the most unshakable consent. (How Foucault was reproached with neglecting, in his analysis of power, the importance of a fundamental central power! And from this was deduced his so-called apoliticism, his refusal of a battle [a final struggle] that

might one day be decisive, his neglect of any project of universal reform. But there is silence on the subject not only of his immediate and local struggles but also his refusal to enter the fray with "grand designs" which would be but an alibi in the service of daily servitude.)

Who Is Me Today?

What seems to me to be the difficult – and privileged – position of Foucault might be the following: do we know who he is, since he doesn't call himself (he is on a perpetual slalom course between traditional philosophy and the abandonment of any pretension to seriousness) either a sociologist or a historian or a structuralist or a thinker or a metaphysician? When he engages in minute analyses dealing with medical science, modern punishment, the multiple uses of micropowers, the disciplinary investment of bodies, or, finally, the immense field extending from the testimony of the guilty to the confessions of the just and the endless monologues of psychoanalysis, one wonders whether he is selecting certain facts accorded the status of *paradigms*, or retracing historical continuities from which might be evolved the diverse forms of human knowledge, or, finally (some accuse him of it), whether he is

merely strolling at random in the field of known – or deliberately unknown – events, and choosing them skillfully in order to remind us that all objective knowledge remains doubtful, and that the pretensions of subjectivity are illusory. Did he not confide to Lucette Finas: "I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions"? In other words, I am a fabulist composing fables whose morals one would be unwise to wait for. But Foucault would not be Foucault if he did not immediately supply the emendation or nuance: "But I believe it is possible to make fictions function within truth."[5] Thus the notion of truth is not at all dismissed, any more than the idea of the subject or the inquiry into the constitution of man as a subject are lost from sight.[6]

5. Michel Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, New York, Pantheon, 1980, p. 193.

6. I am certain that Claude Morali's remarkable book *Qui est moi aujourd'hui* (Paris, Fayard, 1984) would not have left Foucault indifferent.

Society of Blood, Society of Knowledge

And yet Foucault's return to certain traditional questions (even if his answers remained genealogical) was precipitated by circumstances that I do not pretend to elucidate because they seem to me to be of a private nature, and there would be no use in knowing them. He himself delivered an explanation, one which was not quite convincing, of the long silence that followed the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, which is one of his most attractive books in its brilliance, its sharp-edgedness, its affirmations, and its overthrow of prevailing opinion. It is a book descending directly from *Discipline and Punish*. Never did Foucault explain his thought so clearly on the subject of a power which is not exercised from a sovereign, solitary site, but comes from below, from the depths of the social body, deriving from local, mobile, passing – and occasionally minute – forces arranging themselves into powerful homo-

geneities whose convergence grants them hegemony. But why this return to a meditation on power when what was newly at stake in his reflection was unveiling the configurations of sexuality? For many reasons, of which, a bit arbitrarily, I shall retain but two. Because while confirming his analyses of power, Foucault was intent on rejecting the pretensions of the *Law*, which, while it kept watch over and even prohibited various expressions of sexuality, continued to be essentially constitutive of Desire. In addition, because sexuality, as he understood it, or at least the quibbling importance attributed to it today (a today that goes back quite far), marks the transition from a society of blood, or characterized by the symbolics of blood, to a society of knowledge, norm, and discipline. A society of blood means the glorification of war, the sovereignty of death, the apology for torture, and, finally, the greatness and honor of crime. Power then speaks essentially through the idiom of blood – whence the value of lineages (having noble or pure blood, not fearing to shed it, along with a taboo on random mixings of blood, giving rise to the arrangements of the incest law, or even the appeal of incest by virtue of its very horror and interdiction). But when power renounces its alliance with the sole prestige of blood and bloodlines (under the influence also of the Church, which would profit from it by over-

throwing the rules of kinship – by suppressing the levirate, for example), sexuality takes on a preponderance that no longer associates it with the Law but with the norm, no longer with the rights of masters, but with the future of the species – life – under the control of a knowledge laying claim to determine and regulate everything.

It is a transition from "sanguinity" to "sexuality." Sade is its ambiguous witness and fabulous practitioner. What counts for him is solely pleasure, only the order of frenetic enjoyment and the unlimited right to sensual delight. Sex is the only Good, and the Good refuses every rule, every norm, except (and this is important) that which quickens pleasure through the satisfaction of violating it, be it at the cost of the death of others or the exalting death of the self – a supremely happy death, without remorse and without concern. Foucault then says: "Blood has reabsorbed sex." It is a conclusion that I, nevertheless, find astonishing, since Sade, the aristocrat, who even more in his work than in his life, acknowledged the aristocracy only to take pleasure in scorning it, established to an unsurpassable degree the sovereignty of sex. If, in his dreams and fantasies, he took pleasure in killing and accumulating victims in order to resist the constraints that society, and even nature, might impose on his desires, if he took

delight in blood (but less delight than in sperm or, as he says, *foutre*), he was not at all concerned with maintaining a cast of pure or superior blood. On the contrary, the Society of the Friends of Crime is not bound by any ludicrous enterprise of eugenics; breaking free from official laws and joining together through secret rules – this is the icy passion which endows sex, and not blood, with primacy. It is thus a morality that revokes or believes it revokes the phantasms of the past. So one is tempted to say that with Sade sex takes power, and that thereafter power and political power would be exercised insidiously through use of the configurations and agencies of sexuality.

Murderous Racism

It was while inquiring into the passage from a society of blood to a society in which sex imposes its law and the law makes use of sex in order to impose itself that Foucault once again found himself confronting what remains in our memory the greatest catastrophe and horror of modern times. "Nazism," he says, "was doubtless the most cunning and the most naive (and the former because of the latter) combination of the fantasies of blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power."[7] Nazism was founded on blood, to be sure, on superiority through exaltation of blood free of all impurity (a biological phantasm concealing the right to mastery claimed by a hypothetical Indo-European society whose highest manifestation would be Germanic society), on

7. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon, 1980, p. 149.

the consequent obligation to save that pure society by suppressing the rest of humanity, and, in particular, the indestructible heritage of the people of the Bible. The implementation of genocide needed power in all its forms, including the new forms of a bio-power whose strategies imposed an ideal of regularity, method, and cold determination. Men are weak. They accomplish the worst only by remaining unaware of it until they grow accustomed to it and find themselves justified by the "greatness" of a rigorous discipline and the orders of an irresistible leader. But in Hitlerian history, sexual extravagances played a minor role and were soon repressed. Homosexuality, the expression of wartime companionship, merely furnished Hitler with a pretext for destroying refractory groups, which, although loyal to him, were undisciplined and still found traces of the bourgeois ideal in ascetic obedience, even if it was to a regime claiming to be above all law since it was the law itself.

Foucault thought that Freud intuited the necessity of taking a step backward in order to prevent the spread of power mechanisms that a murderous racism would abuse monstrously (by controlling even daily sexual life). Freud was led, by a sure instinct that made of him a privileged adversary of fascism, to restore the ancient law of alliance, that of "prohibited consanguinity, of the Father-Sovereign." In a word, Freud restored to the Law, at the expense of the norm, its prior rights, without, for all that, sacralizing the taboo, namely, the repressive statute; his concern was solely with dismantling the Law's mechanism and revealing its origin (censorship, repression, the superego, etc.). This is the ambiguous character of psychoanalysis: on the one hand, it allows us to discover the importance of sexuality and its "anomalies"; on the other, it summons to Desire – not only to explain it but to ground it – the entire former order of kinship. Thus psychoanalysis does not move in the direction of modernity, and even constitutes a formidable anachronism – what Foucault would call a "historical reversion," a term whose danger he understood, since it seems to make him sympathetic to a historical progressivism and even to a historicism from which he is remote.

The Insistence on Speaking About Sex

It should perhaps be said at this point that in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault was not directing against psychoanalysis an attack that was in any way derisory. But he did not hide his inclination to see in it the end point of a process that was intimately linked to the history of Christianity. Confessions, examinations of conscience, meditations on the follies of the flesh situate sexuality at the center of existence, and ultimately develop the strangest temptations of a sexuality diffused over the entirety of the human body. One ends up inciting what one sought to discourage. One gives voice to what until then had remained silent. Unique value is accorded to what one wants to suppress, even as it becomes obsessional. From the confessional to the couch there is a span of centuries (since time is needed to advance a few steps), but within this long passage from sin to delight, and then from the secret

murmur to the endless chatter, one encounters the same insistence on speaking about sex, both to free oneself from it and to perpetuate it, as though the only occupation – with the aim of mastering one's most precious truth – consisted in consulting oneself while consulting others concerning the accursed and blessed domain of sexuality alone. I have marked a few sentences in which Foucault expresses his truth and his mood: "We are, after all, the only civilization in which there are individuals officially licensed to receive payment for listening to people confide their sex.... They have rented out their ears." And, above all, this ironic judgment on the considerable time spent and perhaps wasted in couching sex in discourse:

> Perhaps one day people will wonder at this. They will not be able to understand how a civilization so intent on developing enormous instruments of production and destruction found the time and the infinite patience to inquire so anxiously concerning the actual state of sex; people will smile perhaps when they recall that here were men – meaning ourselves – who believed that therein resided a truth every bit as precious as the one they had already demanded from the earth, the stars, and the pure forms of their thought; people will be surprised at the eagerness with which

> we went about pretending to rouse from its slumber a sexuality which everything – our discourses, our customs, our institutions, our regulations, our knowledges – was busy producing in the light of day and broadcasting to noisy accompaniment.[8]

A brief fragment from a reverse panegyric in which it seems that Foucault, already in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, wanted to put an end to vain preoccupations to which he nevertheless proposed to devote a considerable number of volumes that he would never write.

8. Ibid., pp. 157–58.

Oh My Friends

He would seek and find a way out (that was ultimately his way of remaining a genealogist if not an archaeologist) by distancing himself from modern times and inquiring into antiquity (above all Greek antiquity – the temptation we all entertain of returning to sources; why not ancient Judaism in which sexuality plays a great role and in which the Law has its origin?). To what end? Apparently, in order to move from the torments of sexuality to the simplicity of pleasures and to illuminate with a new light the problems they nevertheless pose, even though they occupy the attention of free men much less and escape the felicity and scandal of prohibitions. But I can't help thinking that with the vehement criticism aroused by *The History of Sexuality*, a kind of mind-hunt (or even manhunt) which followed its publication, and perhaps a personal experience I can only guess at, by which I believe Foucault was struck

without then fully knowing what it meant (a strong body that stops being so, a serious illness that he barely anticipated, ultimately the approach of death that opened him up not to anguish but to a new and surprising serenity), his relation to time and writing was profoundly modified. The books he was to compose on subjects so intimate to him are ostensibly books of a studious historian rather than works of personal inquiry. Even the style is different: calm, at peace, without the passion that gives so many of his other texts their fire. Conversing with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, and asked about his projects, he suddenly exclaimed: "Oh! First I'm going to concern myself with myself!"[9] His comment is not easy to elucidate, even if one considers a bit hastily that, like Nietzsche, he was inclined to seek in the Greeks less a civic morality than an individual ethic permitting him to make of his life – what remained of it for him to live – a work of art. And it was thus he would be tempted to call on the ancients for a revalorization of the practices of friendship, which, although never lost, have not again recaptured, except for a few of us, their exalted virtue. *Philia*, which, for the Greeks and even Romans, remains the model of what is excellent in human relations (with the enigmatic character it receives from opposite imperatives, at once pure reciprocity and unrequited generosity), can be received as a heritage always capable of being enriched. Friendship was perhaps promised to Foucault as a posthumous gift, beyond passions, beyond problems of thought, beyond the dangers of life that he experienced more for others than for himself. In bearing witness to a work demanding study (unprejudiced reading) rather than praise, I believe I am remaining faithful, however awkwardly, to the intellectual friendship that his death, so painful for me, today allows me to declare to him, as I recall the words attributed by Diogenes Laertes to Aristotle: "Oh my friends, there is no friend."

9. See Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983. I am quite indebted to this study.