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MICHEL FOUCAULT: HISTORIAN OR PHILOSOPHER?

THE DEBATE IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH

by

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A thesis submitted in December 1986
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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SUMMARY

In the last few years, the ideas of the French thinker Michel Foucault have become the subject of much discussion in both French and English. Foucault's first book appeared in 1954 and his last in 1984, and during this time his writings covered a broad range of subjects and disciplines. When examining and comparing writings in French and English on Foucault, two things become immediately apparent: first of all, the marked differences between the two bodies of writings, and secondly, the recurrence of certain questions, which using Foucault's work as a central point of reference, can be summed up generally in the opposition between a world view based on the belief that we are discontinuous historical beings, and a world view which posits certain eternal essences and general principles true for all time and every society.

These questions emerge in the discussions over whether Foucault can be labelled a historian or a philosopher, and whether Foucault is creating his own philosophical system or working for the downfall of philosophical systems in general. The difference between the French and English language discussions can be seen in the interest of the latter for empirical classifications: which label describes Foucault best? Philosopher, historian, structuralist? His attacks on "totality" have also, in some cases, been used to support the validity of the empirical approach. French discussions, however, very quickly turn to broad philosophical, epistemological and indeed metaphysical issues, with each author

being ultimately less concerned with finding a category for Foucault than with stating the originality (however slight) of his own position and views.

Foucault's own work can be seen as a "thought of the limits", the attempt to analyse that philosophical and social edge between the Same and the Other, between history and that which is beyond or outside its order. His approach to this project changed, and during the 1960s, he proposed a number of different limits which each time he thought finally explained the relation of the Same and the Other. During the 1970s, perhaps disappointed with his failure to find the final limit, he proposed a system in which the Same and the Other were mutually coextensive, locked in an endless power struggle. This vision changed again in 1982, when power disappeared from his analysis to be replaced by the idea that as "free beings" living in history, we must continue to work on the limits and ourselves.

Is Foucault a historian or a philosopher, a creator or a destroyer of systems? These questions continue to be asked and generate many useful ideas in a number of disciplines besides history and philosophy. The conclusion here, is that Foucault became a historian in order to remain a philosopher, and that his works represent a coherent philosophical attitude towards the world. Rather than positing any essential explanation, he suggests that people should constantly search for the limits of existing systems and ideas and seek to go beyond them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A number of abbreviations have been used in this thesis to refer to frequently cited works by Foucault. They are listed here in chronological order. Full references are included in the list of works cited at the end of this study.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| MMP | <u>Maladie mentale et psychologie</u> |
| FD | <u>Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</u> , 10/18, 1961, abbreviated edition. |
| HF (1972) | <u>Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</u> , edition including two annexes. |
| HF | <u>Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</u> , 1976, edition without annexes. |
| M&C | <u>Madness and Civilization</u> |
| NC | <u>Naissance de la clinique</u> |
| BC | <u>Birth of the Clinic</u> |
| MC | <u>Les mots et les choses</u> |
| OT | <u>The Order of Things</u> |
| AS | <u>L'archéologie du savoir</u> |
| AK | <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge</u> |
| OD | <u>L'ordre du discours</u> |
| SP | <u>Surveiller et punir</u> |
| VS | <u>La volonté de savoir</u> |
| UP | <u>L'usage des plaisirs</u> |
| PK | <u>Power/Knowledge</u> , ed. Colin Gordon. |

When references to these texts have been made (with the exception of Power/Knowledge) the abbreviation has been included in the main text in brackets. For example (AS:32) refers to L'archéologie du savoir, p.32.

All translations are my own except where otherwise stated. Except in a few cases, I have generally consulted only the original French versions of Foucault's work.

INTRODUCTION

Why write about Foucault? Just a few years ago, an English speaking writer might have felt obliged to provide a detailed answer to this question in terms of Michel Foucault's prestige in France and the intrinsic historical and philosophical interest of his work. Nowadays, this same writer could dispense with these lengthy introductions and reply quite simply that it is because everybody else is writing about Foucault. It is this state of affairs which forms the basis of the present study: why are so many writers so interested in Foucault's work?

In the vast literature these writers have produced, certain questions appear again and again in one form or another: Unity or Fragmentation? Eternity or History? System or Difference? Philosophy or History? Jacques d'Hondt unwittingly sums up this discussion in a rather alarmist article about structuralism : "Certain ages ruminate with a gloomy delectation over the question, to be or not to be. Times have changed! Our contemporaries pose quite another alternative: to break or not to break".¹ It is this alternative, that in the present study is posed in terms of an opposition between history and philosophy. If "history" is defined for present purposes as the study of change, of discrete and concrete always different "events", and "philosophy" as the study of "eternity" or a small number of

1. Jacques d'Hondt, "L'idéologie de la rupture", Revue de théologie et de philosophie 21, no. 4 (1971), p.253. D'Hondt rejects the new alternative out of hand as a form of bourgeois mystification.

general principles valid for all times and places, then we are faced with two differing views of the world and its reality.

The question is then which view or which combination of these views most accurately describes the reality of existence?

Foucault's own solution to this problem was to write a history of the limits, that edge between the orderly and historical systems societies impose upon the world, and that which is outside, or beyond that order. He often changed his mind about how this project should be carried out, and one of the aims of this study is to show the constancy of a certain philosophical quest and a certain philosophical vision which led Foucault to make these constant changes, shifts in emphasis, and reinterpretations of his work.

Such is the volume and the sheer diversity of the writing on Foucault, not to mention the fact that it spans several cultures, that its analysis poses quite a problem.² Hence the examination of this literature will be limited in a number of

2. Foucault remarks with a certain ill-disguised glee concerning his political classification: "I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard... as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc... None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, it means something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean. It's true that I prefer not to identify myself and that I'm amused by the diversity of the ways I've been judged and classified". "Polemics, Politics and Problemization. An Interview with Michel Foucault", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p.384.

ways. First of all, only French and English speaking literature, which forms the main body of writings on Foucault, will be examined. This will also provide the opportunity to examine some of the similarities and differences between the French and Anglo-Saxon intellectual mentalities.³ Secondly, questions of empirical and specialised application will be left aside and a series of recurrent and important issues relating to philosophy and history will be addressed. In addition, the treatment of literature produced before Foucault's death in 1984, will be more comprehensive than the treatment of the literature after that date.⁴ To remain entirely up to date with every element of this massive and ever more rapidly growing industry would be a task that would fully occupy the most willing of writers, to the exclusion of their own contribution to the industry.

However, this study is not simply restricted to the analysis of the "industry" surrounding Foucault's name, it also deals with his own work. Again, it is essential to clearly define the scope of the analysis: Foucault's work will be dealt with in philosophical terms as a historical, philosophical and ethical reflection on the "limits" of history, society and culture.

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3. The term "Anglo-Saxon" includes all English language writings. For practical reasons, we will not distinguish between the products of England, America or other English language countries. Such differences as do exist are not of overwhelming significance for the purposes of the present study.
 4. Most of the books on Foucault produced since then, have been looked at however.

In this context, although most of Foucault's work will be referred to in this study, two writings in particular will act as a focal point. The first of these is Histoire de la folie, written at the beginning of Foucault's career and the second is "What is Enlightenment?", written right at the end.⁵ The empirical details of Foucault's historical interpretations will not be discussed as this has been done elsewhere by a host of specialists. Neither will "power" and related notions form as important a part of this study as they do in most other current English language studies of Foucault's work. At the same time, two works will not be discussed in any detail, these being his last two books, L'usage des plaisirs and Le souci de soi, published two weeks before Foucault's death. There are a number of reasons for this exclusion: first of all, these works represent a considerable change in emphasis, style, philosophical attitude as well as in historical subject matter. To discuss them in detail would not only add prohibitively to the length of this study, but would take it into areas relating to individual ethics which are not the immediate concern of a study which is generally addressed to discussions concerning collective historical and philosophical experience (even if collectivities are made up of individuals). The second reason for this exclusion is that this study is as much about the writing generated by Foucault's work, as about his own work. It was earlier specified that literature produced after 1984 would not

5. "What is Enlightenment?", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, pp. 32-50.

be examined in great detail, and a cursory examination of these writings also indicates that these last books by Foucault have not as yet been fully assimilated into discussions of his work. Nevertheless, these last two works of Foucault have not been totally ignored, and references to them occur throughout the text.

A few final remarks about what is not being done in this study: it is not a "survey", or a "general overview" of what has been said about Foucault, neither is it a defence of Foucault's work from misappropriation by his critics, or alternately a refutation of his work based on the arguments of these same critics.⁶ It is, in fact, the analysis of certain recurring debates in a body of French and Anglo-Saxon literature which focuses on or departs from Foucault's work. Neither is the treatment of Foucault's work intended to be totally exhaustive. The problem of the limits and a certain relation between the Same and the Other remains the focal point of the discussion and in some places is extrapolated beyond Foucault's own treatment. Finally, in the context of a literature which is not, in the English speaking world, particularly noted for its clarity or simplicity, there has been a consistent attempt to avoid certain types of jargon popular amongst "foucauldians", except where it is absolutely unavoidable.

6. The latter approach appears to have been taken by one recent commentator on Foucault. As Colin Gordon says in a review of a book by J.G. Merquior, Foucault (London: Collins, Fontana, 1985). "Few writers who have attacked Foucault are denied Merquior's courteous certification of their shrewdness and perspicacity ... to contradict him, it appears, is to refute him". "Attacks on Singularity", Times Literary Supplement, 6 June 1986.

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW GENERATION OF THINKERS

In 1966, the year that Michel Foucault first became a star on the French philosophical scene, he remarked that he and the generation who were under twenty during the War: "very suddenly and apparently without reason ... noticed that we were very very far from the preceding generation; Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's generation".¹

It is well known that structuralism and other related forms of thought popular during the 1960s and early 1970s were a reaction to the forms of "nineteenth century" thought that preceded them.² Much of Foucault's philosophical and historiographical reflection can in fact be seen as an effort to provide an alternative to this "nineteenth century" legacy. However before examining Foucault's own works and period, it might be useful to cast a brief glance over the political, social and intellectual conjuncture which he and others of his generation emerged from and rebelled against. There have already been several excellent articles and books written about the

1. "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", La quinzaine littéraire, 15 May 1966, p.15; see also "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, p.22.

2. "That ill-fated nineteenth century, where you are banished in order to be discredited", wrote Jean-François Revel caustically in 1971. Jean-François Revel, Pourquoi des philosophes? suivi de La cabale des dévots et précédé d'une étude inédite sur la philosophie depuis 1960 (Paris: Julliard, 1971), p.13.

social and political pre-history of "structuralism" in France, so it is not necessary to give more than a "flavour" of the period here.³ If there is a certain emphasis on the Marxist intellectual experience during the 1950s in the following discussion, it is because as François Furet remarks, structuralism developed in the same intellectual circles that had been Marxist after the War.⁴

At the end of World War II, the Right emerged totally discredited by the Vichy experience. Few intellectuals of note were tempted to think within its confines any longer.⁵ On the other hand, the French Communist Party, the "Party of the Resistance", emerged with flying colours, even if these colours had been delicately retouched: it was conveniently forgotten, for example, that the P.C.F. had in fact been pro-German in 1939 and 1940.⁶ However, this worried few people at the time, and a large number of intellectuals found the Communist Party the

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3. One might join with Cousins and Hussain when they remark with ill concealed exasperation at a certain type of earnest socio-political commentary on Foucault: "We assume our readers know where France is, know when 1968 was, etc." Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel Foucault (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1984), p.11.
 4. François Furet, "Les intellectuels français et le structuralisme", Preuves (February 1967), p.10.
 5. "Ideological elaboration became ... a quasi-monopoly of the Left" comments Furet, "Les intellectuels français", p.4.
 6. See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier P.C.-P.S.U. 1945-1963 (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p.95 and Pierre Daix, Le socialisme du silence: de l'histoire de l'URSS comme secret d'Etat (1921-19..) (Paris: Seuil, 1976), Chapter titled: "Un symbole: le cas Nizan", pp.86-97.

answer to their desire to become politically engaged, in a society which seemed to have lost its direction, and its sense of values. Even Jean-Paul Sartre, the dominating intellectual figure of the time, who had made his opposition to Marxism quite clear before the War in his existentialist work L'Être et le Néant, changed his mind. He began to declare his whole hearted, but by no means always appreciated, support for the Communist Party.⁷ This sudden need amongst the intellectuals for political "engagement" after the War can also be explained by a certain sense of guilt about having been born into the bourgeoisie and not the working class. Political activity seemed a suitable act of penance to make up for this and Sartre, perhaps more than any other intellectual, was tortured by this sense of guilt to the point of obsession.⁸ His case is representative of the itinerary of many other intellectuals during this period. Simone de Beauvoir in the third volume of her Mémoires says that it was Sartre's experience in the Resistance and as a prisoner of war that helped him understand the meaning of history and action. As a result of this experience, he became interested in the Communist Party towards the end of the War. She explains that although it was true that until then he had always considered the proletariat as the "universal class", he had thought it possible to reach the

7. Jean Kanapa wrote in 1947: "The beast is dangerous", cited by Christian Descamps, "Les existentialismes", in La philosophie au XX^e siècle, vol.4, ed. François Châtelet (Paris: Marabout, 1979), p.217.

8. See Louis Althusser, Pour Marx (Paris: Maspero, 1966), p.17.

absolute through literary creation and had thus considered his relations with fellow human beings (his "being for others") or politics as secondary. She continues:

"With his historicity, he had discovered his dependence; no more eternity, no more absolute; the universality to which he aspired as an intellectual, could only be conferred by those men who were its incarnation on earth. He already thought what he was to express later: the real point of view is that of the most disinherited ... It was through the eyes of the exploited that Sartre would learn what he was: if they rejected him, he would find himself imprisoned in his petit-bourgeois individuality."⁹

The Cold War was also another factor in contributing towards the increase of the Communist Party's influence. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie mentions that although immediately after the War, Communists were not much in evidence at the famous Ecole Normale Supérieure in the Rue D'Ulm, the new "Post-Resistance" Cold War generation of 1948 to 1949 were much more open to the Stalinist doctrine.¹⁰ During this period we find, for example, Foucault as a card carrying member of the Communist Party, "ghost writing" in the Communist journal La nouvelle critique for authors such as the well known Party prop Jean Kanapa.¹¹ However, Foucault, never an excessively zealous

9. Simone de Beauvoir, Mémoires, vol 3: La force des choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p.17.

10. Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier, p.45.

11. Claude Mauriac, Le temps immobile, vol. 3, Et comme l'espérance est violente (Paris: Grasset, 1976), pp.318-19. For other interesting details of Foucault's early career see Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), pp.11-38. This unusual book, quite different from recent books on Foucault in English, is more of a dialogue between the author and Foucault's work, than a book about Foucault. Its tone fluctuates ambiguously between admiration and bitter criticism.

Stalinist, left the Party in 1950 somewhat earlier than most, when a number of Jewish doctors were tried in Russia for alleged treason.

But, Marxism and Communism were by no means the sole refuges of post War intellectuals, although this school of thought (or dogmatism) was by far the most significant. If Sartre attempted an uneasy marriage between Marxism and existentialism, there were also the important currents of Catholic existentialism and personalism as well as Camus' non-Marxist and atheist version of existentialism. There was also a number of dedicated Gaullists such as the writer François Mauriac (who was to transfer his allegiance to the Left during the Algerian war). In addition, one must not forget the school of phenomenologists inspired by the ontological theses of German philosophers such as Jaspers, Heidegger, and Husserl.

Nonetheless, it was almost impossible to be an intellectual worthy of respect without a political commitment. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writing in 1961 comments: "One thing is certain, that there was a political mania amongst philosophers which produced neither good politics, nor good philosophy." It was from politics that the solutions were supposed to come. "Every political anger became a holy anger, and reading the newspaper every morning ... the philosophical morning prayer."¹²

Althusser makes some similar observations about the "philosophers without works that we were ... turning every work into politics, and slicing the world, arts, literature,

12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signes (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p.10.

philosophy and sciences, with a single blade - the pitiless division of classes."¹³ This reverence for the political could extend to the most banal and everyday level. Le Roy Ladurie recounts that a militant organising a meeting with some young people dealt with a complaint about the lack of chairs by replying: "Comrades, if you want these chairs politically, I am certain that you will succeed in finding them."¹⁴ One of the early opponents of this dogmatism, Claude Lefort, although still a Marxist, describes the "ideological terror" which the Communist Party exercised over the Left and the massive adhesion of progressivist writers to Stalinism.¹⁵ Le Roy Ladurie also mentions that "intellectual terrorism" was not only exercised against anyone who dared criticise Stalinism, but also within the Party itself.¹⁶ Fortunately in 1956 this state of affairs began to change, and indeed the years 1956-1960 were to mark the end of one way of thinking and the beginning of another. With the close links of philosophy, the humanities and even scientific thought with politics, it was in fact a number of political events which precipitated this transformation of ideas, producing a move away from politics and existentialist and humanist philosophies.¹⁷

13. Althusser, Pour Marx, p.12.

14. Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier, p.150.

15. Claude Lefort, Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p.8.

16. Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier, pp.83,109-10.

17. See similar comments to this effect in Robert Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.135.

In January 1956, a Centre-left government was voted into power. In March, this government decided to step up "pacification" measures in the colony of Algeria which had been becoming more and more restless since 1954 under French administration. These measures meant not only increasing the length of military service, but sending 400,000 French soldiers into Algeria at the end of April. Amongst the 455 deputies who voted in favour of this policy were the Communists, and the fact that the Communist Party could pronounce in favour of the suppression of a colony caused enormous moral problems for some Communist intellectuals. Sartre in an indignant article attacked Guy Mollet's government, accusing it of betraying its allies, its electors and in general all French people.¹⁸

In June, Le monde published the translation of the Khrushchev report which had been delivered in February. This report which condemned Stalin's regime produced two distinct reactions; disbelief and shattering disillusion. L'humanité, the official organ of the French Communist Party referred to the report as "attributed" to Khrushchev, and quite a number of Communists simply did not believe the reports of atrocities, although for many others it came as a brutal disillusion. However, this was by no means the first news that had filtered through of the excesses of Stalin's regime. Arthur Koestler had already written on the subject, as had Claude Lefort, Cornelius

18. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le fantôme de Staline", Situations VII (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.151-52.

Castoriadis and other Trotskyists in their journal Socialisme et barbarie. But, on the whole, French Communists simply remained deaf to anything remotely resembling a criticism of Stalin's regime.¹⁹ Le Roy Ladurie reports, for example, that Jacques Le Goff, then a pupil at the E.N.S. in the Rue d'Ulm, after a visit to Prague in 1948 and 1949 returned with stories of police repression in the universities, but "the Communist students ... received his word, and remained deaf to his arguments. 'They have ears and they do not hear'."²⁰ Even if the reports of concentration camps and purges were believed, they were explained away as being necessary for the progress of socialism: reactionary or ignorant elements had to be re-educated for their own good. In any case, all in all, the USSR was definitely in the forefront of the struggle against exploitation. In 1977, Cornelius Castoriadis reports Sartre's rather surprising persistence in his "error", saying that Sartre "wrote recently that Socialisme et barbarie was right at the time but wrong to say so (thus, Sartre was right to be wrong). The walls haven't collapsed, and paper will bear anything."²¹

If the Khrushchev report was not sufficient to disillusion a number of Communists, the suppression of the Hungarian

19. See for example Claude Lefort, "Kravchenko et le problème de l'URSS", Les temps modernes, no.29 (February 1948), republished in Eléments d'une critique. Lefort remarks in the preface to this book that his article criticising the Stalinist regime was received "with suspicion or indignation" by the Left (p.8).

20. Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier, p.45.

21. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Les divertisseurs", Le nouvel observateur, 20 June 1977, reprinted in Le nouvel observateur: témoin de l'histoire, ed. Nicole Muchnik (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1981), p.286.

Revolution in November 1956, produced a further exodus from the Party in France, especially as the leadership of the P.C.F. insisted that this revolution was nothing more than a fascist uprising and not the legitimate struggle of workers against Russian tyranny, as many Communists in France had believed it to be. Probably many felt as did Le Roy Ladurie on hearing the news of the entry of Soviet tanks into Budapest: "I had read and believed the newspapers of the Party with too much faith when they said 'white' to swallow their new lie whole, when without warning, they suddenly decided to say 'black'."²²

Out of the fiasco came a new anti-dogmatic ex P.C.F., but still Marxist journal, Arguments, founded by François Châtelet, Henri Lefebvre, Kostas Axelos, and Pierre Fougereolles. Although the dream of the USSR as the embodiment of socialism was destroyed, it still did not occur to the intellectuals involved in the journals Socialisme et barbarie and Arguments, so critical of the way Marxism was put into practice, to criticise the theory of Marxism; to ask, for example, was Stalinist tyranny made possible by something in Marxism itself?²³ The socialist dream was gradually transferred to the Third World: Cuba (where Fidel Castro arrived to organise the guerilla network in December 1956), China, and Africa.²⁴

22. Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier, p.171.

23. See François Châtelet, "Récit", L'arc: La crise dans la tête 70 (1978), pp.3-15, for useful comments on the activities of these journals.

24. In particular, Frantz Fanon's hymn to violence: Les damnés de la terre (Paris: Maspero, 1961) with its equally inflammatory preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, created a considerable stir. See also Furet, "Les intellectuels français", pp.4-5.

In 1958, the process of destalinisation was given an additional push, as De Gaulle's accession to power contributed further to depoliticising intellectuals. The Communist cell of philosophy students at the Sorbonne was also dissolved as the chiefs of the P.C.F. considered it far too critical of the Party line. As a result, there was a general exodus from politics towards research. Many young intellectuals turned away from literature and the humanities, which had been until then the preferred mediums of philosophical and social reflection with the ascendancy of Sartre and Camus. More "exotic" or abstract subjects, apparently free from ideological overtones, such as epistemology, ethnology, psychoanalysis and the human sciences in general, began to find favour. "The end of dogmatism produced a real liberty of research" remarks Althusser.²⁵ Disenchanted and bored with the endless and increasingly sterile humanist and political litany, intellectuals at the end of the 1950s became interested in "things" and "systems" rather than "Man" and the problems of the "subject". They also abandoned the grand continuities and progress of History for "anti-historical" studies such as ethnology.²⁶

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25. Althusser, Pour Marx, p.21; cf. André Akoun, "Entre l'existentialisme et le marxisme", in Les dieux dans la cuisine, Jean-Jacques Brochier et al (Paris: Aubier, 1978), p.17.
26. François Furet writing in 1967 suggests that this historical disillusionment may have been partially occasioned by the intellectuals' feeling of a France which had lost its historical mission: "This France, expelled from history, found it all the more acceptable to expel history". "Les intellectuels français", p.6. However it was probably more a case of reculer pour mieux sauter.

Another factor contributed to this transfer of interest and that was the tremendous advances being made in the human sciences and in technology. In October 1957 the first Sputnik was sent into space and television began to appear in some households. The first primitive computers had appeared and there seemed to be little that science could not promise, or could not explain. The economy was expanding, as was bureaucracy, the consumer age was just coming into its own. The era of "the end of ideologies", of "structuralism" was ushered in. But let us now abandon this general chronology for a more specific chronology of the works of one of the most famous of the "new generation" of thinkers, Michel Foucault.

Foucault's first book Maladie mentale et personnalité was published in 1954 and appeared in a revised and retitled edition in 1959 as Maladie mentale et psychologie.²⁷ But it was his second book Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique²⁸ that distinguished him, quietly at first, as one of a new generation of thinkers. This book (and Maladie mentale et psychologie which is similar in content) constitutes a philosophical and historical treatment of madness and the

27. For other itineraries of Foucault's work which concentrate more on his analyses of power, see Michael Clark's introduction to his book: Michel Foucault: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland, 1983), pp.xix-xlix; Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1981); and Barry Smart, Michel Foucault (Chichester: Ellis Horwood, London: Tavistock, 1985).

28. All editions of this book will henceforth be referred to as Histoire de la folie in this study.

problem of the "Other" in Western Civilization. There are two versions of Histoire de la folie, the original of almost 600 finely printed pages, and an extensively abridged pocket version of 300 pages. Unfortunately the translation available in English is that of the shorter version with a few additions from the unabridged work. In the second edition of 1972, the original preface is also suppressed and replaced by another shorter and less illuminating preface, consisting mainly of rather abstruse remarks on commentary (indirect references to the reception of the first edition) and ending on a rather flippant note about the shortness of the new preface.²⁹

Although Histoire de la folie is now to be found in the bibliographies of most works on the subject of the history of madness or psychology, when it was first published it did not attract much widespread attention.³⁰ There were notable exceptions however: Georges Canguilhem, the historian of science, helped in its presentation for a doctorat d'état; Philippe Ariès, whose own brand of history was considered

29. In 1981, Foucault said that he had deleted the first preface during the structuralist era when its style embarrassed him. But once the debate had died down in 1982 he declared himself ready to reinstate this preface, particularly as he had taken up many of his earlier perspectives once again.

30. In later years Foucault complained about and even exaggerated this lack of interest. See "Vérité et pouvoir", L'arc 70 (1977), interview with A. Fontana and P. Pasquino, pp.16-17; "Entretien avec Jean-Louis Ezine", Les nouvelles littéraires, 17 March 1975, p.3; Jean-Pierre Barou, "Il aurait pu aussi bien m'arriver tout autre chose", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.4; Otto Friedrich and Sandra Burton, "France's Philosopher of Power", Time, 16 November 1981, p.94.

marginal at the time, managed against considerable opposition to get Foucault's text published in the collection which he was directing at Plon.³¹ Michel Serres, the historian and philosopher of science, Roland Barthes and the novelist Maurice Blanchot gave it enthusiastic reviews and Fernand Braudel praised it in Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations.³² Across the Channel, a sympathetic review appeared in The Times Literary Supplement by Richard Howard, the future translator of the book.³³ But it was not until after the enormous success of Les mots et les choses in 1966 that it began to sell well. Indeed, such was the subsequent increase in sales after five years of initial obscurity that the editor of Payot editions, Jean-Luc Pidoux, uses the example of the career of this book to condemn current trends in France which obstruct the publication of young unknown authors.³⁴

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31. Philippe Ariès, Un historien du dimanche (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.145; see also Ariès, "La singulière histoire de Philippe Ariès", Le nouvel observateur, 20 February 1978, interview with André Burguière, p.88
32. Michel Serres, "Géométrie de la folie", Mercure de France, Part 1: 1188 (August 1962), pp.683-696, Part 2: 1189 (September 1962), pp.63-81; Roland Barthes, "Savoir et folie", Critique 17 (1961), pp.915-22; Maurice Blanchot, "L'oubli, la déraison", Nouvelle revue française (October 1961), pp.676-86. (Foucault was particularly pleased about this review); Fernand Braudel, note to Robert Mandrou, "Trois clefs pour comprendre la folie à l'époque classique", Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations (1962), pp. 771-772. To save space, Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations will henceforth be referred to as Annales: E.S.C.
33. Richard Howard, "The Story of Unreason", Times Literary Supplement, 6 October 1961, pp.653-54. See also Sheridan, Michel Foucault, for an account of the reception of Histoire de la folie based on Foucault's own comments. In addition, the book was awarded the prestigious medal of the Centre de Recherche Scientifique.
34. Mathieu Lindon (interviewer), "Les éditeurs malades de leurs livres", Le nouvel observateur, Special: Littérature, May 1981, p.23.

However it was not only the success of Les mots et les choses that contributed to the interest in Foucault's earlier work, but the growth of the anti-psychiatric movement, which particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, fastened onto (and distorted) some of Foucault's theses to provide support for its cause. The English translation, Madness and Civilization, was published in Britain in a collection edited by the noted anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing, with a controversial and somewhat inaccurate preface by David Cooper that annexed Foucault's book to the anti-psychiatry movement. In actual fact, Foucault's critique of the science of psychiatry was undertaken from an angle that diverged widely from that of the anti-psychiatrists, even if he did identify himself with their activities during his "political" phase in the 1970s.³⁵ In France his work also attracted a tremendous amount of attention from the psychiatrists. In 1969, much to Foucault's dismay, a group of eminent psychiatrists met to discuss and criticise his work.³⁶ Another psychiatrist seems to have taken Foucault's remarks on the nineteenth century reformer Pinel as a personal insult and after a disagreement with Foucault on the radio on the occasion of Pinel's centenary, launched a series of attacks

35. See for example Foucault, Victor Fainberg, David Cooper, Jean-Pierre Faye (debate), "De la psychiatrie comme moyen d'invalider toute pensée libre", La quinzaine littéraire, 16 October 1977, pp.17-20. In 1984 Foucault says that he had "no community" with Laing, Cooper, and Basaglia when he wrote Histoire de la folie even if all their work was to later form the basis of a "community of action". "Polemics, Politics and Problemizations: An Interview", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p.385.

36. These discussions were published in Evolution, psychiatrique: cahiers de psychopathologie générale 36, no.2 (1971), La conception idéologique de "L'histoire de la folie" de Michel Foucault: Journées annuelles de "L'évolution psychiatrique" 6 et 7 décembre 1969.

on Foucault as the "incompetent" "father of ... anti-psychiatry in France".³⁷ But there was yet another reason for the sudden increase in popularity of Histoire de la folie, and that was the growth of a tremendous and widespread interest in all kinds of social "margins" after 1968. The subject of Foucault's book, its historical analysis of the origins of the division between the normal and the pathological, made it of eminent topicality. So much so, that Foucault was to complain in 1977 that he was embarrassed and even distressed by the fact that after all those years of difficult and lonely work carried out by himself and a few others, notions such as madness, delinquency, children and sex were nothing more for some people than "a sign of belonging", being on the "good side", the side of madness and so on - a cheap way of buying a social conscience.³⁸ Quite apart from all this, Histoire de la folie is a quite fascinating blend of history, philosophy, social comment and indignation at the plight of madmen, written in a beautiful, often difficult and idiosyncratic poetic style. It reads like a subtle and gripping Gothic drama, mazed with intricate subplots and arcane details.

37. Henri Baruk, "La condition du malade mentale en France de Pinel à nos jours", Annales medico-psychologiques 134, no.1 (June 1976), pp.72,67; see also Baruk, La psychiatrie sociale, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p.8; Baruk, "Réflexions sur l'antipsychiatrie", Revue internationale de philosophie 32, no.123, fasc. 1 (1978), pp.29-32. Not all psychiatrists were equally condemnatory however: A.F. Zoila remarks "It is genealogical research, ... far from being anti-psychiatric ... on the contrary, bestows the first letters of recognition on our young science." A.F. Zoila, "Michel Foucault anti-psychiatre?" Revue internationale de philosophie 123, no.1 (1978), p.60.

38. "Non au sexe roi", Le nouvel observateur, 12 March 1977, interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy, p.113.

Small wonder its readers have been alternatively fascinated, bewildered, frustrated and even enraged by it.

Foucault's next book Naissance de la clinique published in 1963, was a historical and epistemological study of the foundations of French clinical medicine at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1972, at about the same time that Foucault deleted the first preface of Histoire de la folie, he revised Naissance de la clinique, a revision which consisted of the elimination of some of its "structuralist" terminology. The word "discourse" was substituted for "language" in some places, and phrases such as the "structural analysis of the signified" were rewritten as "the analysis of a type of discourse".³⁹ In spite of this, "language" and "structure" remain frequently used words in the text, leading many critics to describe it as Foucault's most "structuralist" book. Although the history of medicine has not acquired the public appeal that questions relating to madness have acquired in the past twenty years, Naissance de la clinique has become something of a classic in its own right. In a recent collection on the history of medicine, for example, most articles include references to Foucault.⁴⁰

39. Clark, Michel Foucault, p.xxvii; and Sheridan, Michel Foucault, p.37.

40. Peter Wright and Andrew Treacher, eds., The Problem of Medical Knowledge: Examining the Social Construction of Medicine (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1982). For extensive comments on the usefulness and the problems of Foucault's analyses for the history of medicine, see also Henri Ey, Naissance de la medecine (Paris: Masson, 1981), pp.10,210-13.

In the same year, 1963, Foucault published a rather obscure book on the even more obscure French surrealist writer Raymond Roussel. An anonymous reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement remarked that the book "seems addressed to an audience of cognoscenti, which must be exceedingly small in France and can hardly number more than two or three here".⁴¹ However the book did not go unnoticed by the new novelists in France, and Alain Robbe-Grillet saw Foucault's "fascinating essay" as one of the signs of a growing interest in Roussel, but it remained an interest that was not widely spread beyond certain circles.⁴² In the period between 1960 to 1965, Foucault also published a number of articles of literary criticism, essays on language and prefaces to an assortment of books, and translated texts from German. Much of this work, like Raymond Roussel, is poetic and obscure and not always easy to understand on a first reading.

In 1966, Foucault published the book that was to become an instant best-seller: Les mots et les choses. This was a "history" of the origins of the human sciences: economics, linguistics and biology, and became notorious for its declarations concerning the death of Man and the end of humanism. With this book Foucault was dubbed one of the "gang

41. "Old New Novelist", Times Literary Supplement, 12 July 1963, p.511.

42. Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Enigmes et transparence chez Raymond Roussel", Critique 19 (1963), p.1029.

of four" of the new "structuralist" movement.⁴³ A tremendous amount has been written about structuralism, both for and against. In the final analysis perhaps, "structuralism" is simply a convenient label which describes a diverse series of researches often performed quite independantly, but having a certain number of traits in common. Leaving aside these complex debates for the moment, let us characterise the so called "structuralists" as representing the antithesis of the post-War philosophies. First of all, they espoused a rigorous anti-humanism and anti-"subjectivism". In ethnology, Claude Lévi-Strauss, often seen as the "father" of the structuralist movement, argued that "in a certain way myths think amongst themselves" without being consciously formulated by individual subjects.⁴⁴ The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan decentred the subject in the unconscious ("ça parle").⁴⁵ Louis Althusser

43. A famous cartoon drawn by Maurice Henry in the 1960s depicts Foucault, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes sitting in a jungle dressed in grass skirts. Although titled "The structuralists' Lunch", it is often referred to as depicting "the gang of four of structuralism". See for example Claude Gutman, "L'avant-mai des philosophes", in Les dieux dans la cuisine, Brochier, p.28. The cartoon is reproduced on p.253 of the same book. Elsewhere Jean-Marie Domenach refers to the "three musketeers of structuralism who are four, as convention dictates", only he replaces Barthes with Althusser. "Le système et la personne", Esprit 5 (1967), p.771.

44. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mythologiques: Le cru et le cuit (Paris: Plon, 1964), p.20.

45. See Jacques Lacan, Ecrits (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p.3. Concerning Foucault's work, Lacan remarked in characteristically self centred style: "As for Foucault, he follows what I am doing, and I like his work, but I don't see that he is very interested in Freud". Figaro littéraire, 29 December 1966, cited in Brochier, Les dieux dans la cuisine, p.223.

renovated Marxist epistemology declaring that history was "a process without a subject ... a process which has no real subject or goal(s)" and that Marx was definitely an antihumanist.⁴⁶ Roland Barthes declared the death of the author in literary criticism.⁴⁵ "It is language that speaks not the author".⁴⁷ At the same time the new novelists such as Nathalie Sarraute, Philippe Sollers and Alain Robbe-Grillet, dissolved the subject and the narrative form in literature.⁴⁷

It was also a style of thought which emphasised every form of "break" and discontinuity. Structural linguistics provided the methodological model, and epistemology, the history of sciences and the human sciences, were the preferred areas of enquiry and of course, the words "structure" and "system" appeared everywhere with monotonous regularity. It was a mode of thought which, to use the linguistic terminology of the time, favoured synchrony over diachrony. Anti-historicism was the order of the day, which many mistakenly saw as an attempt to "kill history".

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46. Louis Althusser, Reply to John Lewis, trans. Grahame Locke (London: NLB, 1976), p.57; see also section titled "Marxisme et humanisme" in Pour Marx, pp.225-258.
47. Roland Barthes, Critique et vérité (Paris: Seuil, 1966).
48. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo 1977), p.143. This article was originally published as "La mort de l'auteur", Mantéia V, 1968.
49. See Clare O'Farrell, "The War of the Words", Quadrant, April 1982, pp.89-91.

This was the intellectual climate in which Foucault's book appeared. As the synthesis of many of these themes and with its provocative and stylish statements on humanism, Marx, the human sciences and epistemes, it created a tremendous stir. In the first week after its publication 3,000 copies were sold and more than 50,000 were sold in the months that followed.⁵⁰ A copy of Les Mots et les choses on the coffee table, as Michel de Certeau commented in 1967,⁵¹ had a certain snob value, even if, like Jean-Luc Godard - who poured scorn on the fashion for this book in his film La Chinoise - the owner had only read the first chapter.⁵² The amount of discussion around this book was tremendous as can be seen by glancing at Michael Clark's annotated bibliography of Foucault.⁵³

Indeed, three distinct groups of French writing on Foucault began to emerge in the late 1960s after the success of Les mots et les choses. The first group consisted of the writings of 'star' intellectuals such as Sartre, Raymond Aron, and Roland Barthes, or leading university intellectuals such as Michel Serres, Georges Canguilhem, or François Châtelet and leading journalists. The second group of writings consisted of

50. "Foucault comme des petits pains", Le nouvel observateur, 10 August 1966, p.29.

51. Michel de Certeau, "Les sciences de l'homme et la mort de l'homme", Etudes 326 (1967), p.344.

52. Se Jean-Luc Godard, "Lutter sur deux fronts", Cahiers du cinéma, 194 (October 1967), interview, p.21; see also Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, who comments: "When Les mots et les choses invaded the coffee tables, it was quite common to hear people say that it was hard, but marvellously written". "Une ascèse de l'égarement", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10.

53. Clark, Michel Foucault, pp.504-506.

violently polemical reactions to Foucault's work: this group included the writings of many Marxists, an important voice in French intellectual life, the existentialists (both atheist and christian), and establishment psychiatrists. The third group was made up of the writings of those "secondary" intellectuals, including journalists, who enthusiastically seize upon and follow whatever the latest Parisian fashion happens to be. This last group included what could only be described as intellectual "gossip columnists" who keep the reader up to date with all the latest fads and scandals amongst the Parisian intelligentsia.

In all three groups, writers used Foucault as a starting point for their own discussion and reflections, in such a way that it is difficult to know where Foucault ends and the commentary begins.⁵⁴ This practice of using other writers work as a forum for one's own opinions is a common one in French writing, as opposed to the usual Anglo-Saxon practice of a "neutral" exposition followed by the author's comments.⁵⁵ There are numerous and complex reasons for this state of affairs. Some of them relate to the smallness of the Parisian intellectual "village" and the role of the media in diffusing their works. The Parisian intellectual is expected to have read the most recent works of his colleagues in his own field as well

54. Foucault himself is particularly adept at this mode of "commentary"/philosophy as can be seen in his literary articles of the 1960s: see in particular "Préface à la transgression", Critique 15, no. 195-6 (1963), pp.751-69; "Le langage à l'infini", Tel quel 15 (1963), pp.44-53; "La bibliothèque fantastique", Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.59 (1967), pp.7-30.

55. There are some signs that this division is not as rigorous as it used to be (see The New York Times Book Review for example).

as in other fields. And since everybody knows everybody else in the Parisian intellectual milieu, this is good public relations if nothing else. The newspapers, journals, radio and television provide a forum for discussion of these works as well as diffusing information about the latest publications and fashions (which they also help to create). The tendency is to carve out one's own domain in reference to all this. Hence the wealth of what appears to the English speaking reader to be obscure allusions and excessive polemicising in French intellectual work.⁵⁶ Not only does the writer assume his readers are aware of what he is talking about, but he may not wish to offend an opponent he will be seeing on the Parisian circuit by naming him too directly. In addition, he wants to make sure that his own individual position is quite clearly distinguished (even if only infinitesimally) from the rest of the field.⁵⁷ This system has its drawbacks, mainly the creation of intellectual "tyrannies". "One does not reflect on an interpretation one rallies to an argument", remarks Jean-François Revel.⁵⁸ The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu also comments at length on the "terrorism" of fashion in Paris, which reduces people who do not conform in the

56. For complaints about "obscure" and "cryptic" allusions in English see for example Michael Peters, "Extended Review of Madness and Civilisation and Structuralism by Jean Piaget", Sociological Review 19 (1971), p.636; Raymond A. Sokolov, "Inside Mind", Newsweek, 25 January 1971, p.48.

57. For valuable comments on this French practice of "reading", see Charles C. Lemert, "Reading French Sociology", in French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal since 1968, ed. Charles C. Lemert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp.3-32.

58. Revel, Pourquoi des philosophes? p.417

eyes of their judges to the right way of being and doing things, "to ridicule, indignity, shame and silence".⁵⁹ The dogmatic hold of Stalinism in the 1950s is perhaps an extreme example of this kind of intellectual tyranny.⁶⁰ Similarly, older systems are condemned to oblivion by the philosophy of the moment: "Structuralism wrenches the limelight away from existentialism, Lévi-Strauss banishes Sartre to the museum, because the bad habit has caught on, one does not discuss, one occupies the whole stage. 'To think is to terrorise'".⁶¹

Another consequence of the close involvement of the media with the intelligentsia, as well as of the celebrity status of intellectuals (much envied by their Anglo-Saxon counterparts),

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59. Pierre Bourdieu, La distinction, critique sociale du jugement (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p.597. Bourdieu further outraged certain journalists and intellectuals by declaring that Le nouvel observateur, that well known weekly arbiter of the latest intellectual fashion in Paris, was the "Club Méditerranée of culture". See also Roger Kaplan, "France's New Philosophers", Commentary 65, no.2 (1978), p.75. Kaplan remarks on André Glucksman's views on this kind of "purely Gallic" intellectual "totalitarianism".
60. For other scathing attacks on the way intellectual life functions in France see: Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, Les intellocrates: expédition en haute intelligentsia (Paris: Ramsay, 1981); Régis Debray, Le pouvoir intellectuel en France (Paris: Ramsay, 1979). For a more "academic", although no less critical approach, see the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).
61. Jean-Marie Domenach, Enquête sur les idées contemporaines (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 20; see also Revel who remarks: "To entirely renew the basic themes of thought, to be the author of an intellectual revolution ... these are fundamental philosophical necessities, at least in the presentation. No philosopher could present himself as a candidate for historical existence simply as a continuer". Pourquoi des philosophes?, pp.44-45.

is the frequency with which intellectuals are interviewed in the written, spoken and visual media. In particular, the written interview is a form far more commonly found in France than in English speaking countries.⁶² These interviews serve a useful purpose in encouraging intellectuals such as Foucault, whose works are often quite difficult, to clarify their ideas and make them more accessible to readers of widely circulated journals such as Le nouvel observateur and La quinzaine littéraire.⁶³ They also provide a forum for public discussion between the author and his readers. In the months that followed the publication of Les mots et les choses, Foucault was interviewed in several magazines and journals. As in subsequent interviews, he explained quite clearly what could only be read between the lines in his books. Foucault also used interviews to state his current position: "my problem is ...", "the task of philosophy today ..." are two phrases that constantly recur in these interviews.

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62. Foucault himself comments on the "mania" of French intellectuals for giving interviews and their "taste for journalism". "Le piège de Vincennes", Le nouvel observateur, 9 February 1970, pp.33-35.
63. An anglophile French historian, Emmanuel Todd, remarks on this contrast between "the complexity of the written texts of Foucault, Althusser, Sartre, Barthes, Bourdieu ... and the evangelical simplicity of their oral communications, a contrast that is not generally found amongst English intellectuals". Emmanuel Todd, Le fou et le prolétaire (Paris: Laffont, 1979), p.140. For an interesting analysis of the relationship between the celebrity status of an intellectual and the number of his or her appearances in Le nouvel observateur, see Hamon and Rotman, Les intellocrates, pp.236-42.

In 1969, in response to numerous enquiries about his method, Foucault published L'archéologie du savoir.⁶⁴ This book set out a historiographical methodology which claimed to do away with some of the disadvantages of the traditional discipline of the history of ideas. It did not entirely explain what had been done in previous books, although it had much to say on what Foucault was not doing and what he thought he ought to have done. So much so, in fact, that Jean-François Revel suggested that L'archéologie could be described as the negative of Kierkegaard's book Either ... or and would have been more suitably titled Neither ... nor.⁶⁵ Other critics found it excessively arid or difficult to read.⁶⁶ However for those who appreciate intricate formal geometric structures in thought and method, it is a compelling book. It offers many useful methodological hints to the historian who wants to avoid historicism and has in fact been extensively used to this end. Nonetheless, the rarified abstraction of this work did not lend itself to a place on the bestseller lists.

Foucault's next book was L'ordre du discours, the text of his inauguration speech delivered at the Collège de France in 1970. It introduced the concepts of "truth" and "power" which

64. Michael Clark remarks that most of this book was written before the end of 1967 (that is before May 1968), Clark, Michel Foucault, p.xxxiii.

65. Revel, Pourquoi des philosophes, p.44.

66. See Annie Guédez, Foucault (Paris: Editions Universitaires, Psychothèque, 1972), pp.64,77.

he was to develop and discuss at length in his work until 1982. At the same time his analysis of these notions during this period created an exponential growth industry in the secondary literature, particularly in America.

The beginnings of this industry can be seen in the early 1970s, when a small but growing number of English speaking critics and intellectuals began to become aware of Foucault's work. Les mots et les choses was published in translation in 1970 and L'archéologie du savoir and Naissance de la clinique in 1972 and 1973, at about the same time that some of the more radical francophiles were beginning to abandon "existentialism" for "structuralism". English language writing on Foucault at this time (and in the 1960s) was fairly evenly divided between a popular journalism, aimed at explaining a "French phenomenon", and serious essays in specialised reviews. These critics could be divided into camps for and against. Those against, were usually advocating sound Anglo-Saxon empiricism against airy French nonsense, whereas those in favour often as not completely misunderstood the content and context of Foucault's ideas and praised them for quite the wrong reasons, although there were, of course, exceptions to this general rule.⁶⁷ But for most, whether for or against, Foucault's works taken out of context and judged by the standards of a different intellectual tradition were mysterious and bizarre objects indeed.

67. Notably Hayden White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground", History and Theory 12, no.1 (1973), pp.23-54.

During the early 1970s, Foucault went into a temporary alliance with the Maoists, adopting a rather extreme form of "revolutionary" rhetoric in some interviews and articles.⁶⁸ At the same time he actively participated in committees with other intellectuals against racism (le Comité Djellali), and for the rights of patients and new forms of institutional relations in the area of health (le Groupe Information Santé). The best known of the committees in which Foucault participated as a founding member, was the famous Groupe d'Information sur les prisons (G.I.P.), whose aim was to provide a forum for prisoners to speak and act at a time of great unrest in the prisons. According to some, Foucault and the G.I.P. played a major role in engineering the prison riots at Toul in 1972.⁶⁹

Also in 1972, a discussion between Foucault and Deleuze on intellectuals and power which has since attracted much comment was published. Foucault also produced two small books on the artists Magritte (1973) and Fromanger (1975). The former is a most amusing text, although it is difficult to judge whether

68. See for example, "A conversation with M. Foucault", Partisan Review 38, no.2 (1971), interview with John K. Simon, pp.192-201; "Revolutionary Action 'Until Now'", in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp.218-234.

69. See Claude Mauriac, Et comme l'espérance ..., pp.509-11. For his fascinating accounts of the day to day events and conversations involving Foucault and other intellectuals from 1971-1975, see the section in his book titled "La Goutte d'Or", see also Philippe Nemo, "D'une prison à l'autre", Le nouvel observateur, 10 January 1972, p.40; Marc Kravetz, "Qu'est-ce que le GIP?", Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.13. Also on the G.I.P. see Paul Patton, "Departures", in Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy, eds: Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral, 1979), pp.109-10.

this is intentional or not. In 1973, Foucault, in collaboration with Blandine Barret-Kriegel and others, published the confessions of a nineteenth century parricide, Pierre Rivière, a text which attracted the attention of many historians and sociologists. A film was made of this book in which Foucault played a small part as a judge.⁷⁰ At the same time, Foucault continued to deliver his well attended courses at the Collège de France from January to March every year.⁷¹ These lectures dealt with power and prisons.

In 1975, Foucault published Surveiller et punir, a history of the prison and punishment and the growth of the "disciplinary society", covering the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. In this book, the notions of "power", and "discipline" came to occupy a central position in Foucault's thought. It was a book that immediately created great interest amongst criminologists,⁷² an interest that

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70. For a copy of the script of this film, a number of stills, as well as some comments by the director René Allio and press reactions, see L'Avant-Scène: Cinéma, 1 March 1977. Most of the issue is devoted to the film. A film was also made of the memoirs of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, dite Alexina B., ed. with note by Foucault (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). The directors of the film were Feret and Gruault.
71. For an excellent description of the atmosphere at these courses at which attendance was de rigueur amongst the "intellectual-mondain" set, see Gérard Lefort, "Au collège de France: un judoka de l'intellect", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.6; see also Robert Scholes, "A Discourse on Sex and Power", Washington Post Book World, 7 January 1979, p.E1.
72. See Jean Paul Brodeur, "McDonnell on Foucault, supplementary remarks", Canadian Journal of Philosophy 7, no.3 (September 1977), p.566; and Jacques Léonard, "L'historien et le philosophe. A propos de Surveiller et punir: la naissance de la prison", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle et débat avec Michel Foucault, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris, Seuil, 1980), p.51.

quickly spread to sociologists and historians. La volonté de savoir, the first volume in a Histoire de la sexualité, appeared the following year in 1976. In this methodological introduction to a proposed six volume study, Foucault discussed the links between power and sexuality since the Reformation, concentrating on the 18th and 19th centuries. The critical reception of this book was less enthusiastic than for Surveiller et punir, as not only was the book slight in volume and empirical content, but lacked on the whole those brilliant and unusual insights that distinguished his earlier books.

In 1977, France and the world suddenly became aware of the "new philosophers".⁷³ Time magazine gave them front page coverage with the slogan "Marx is dead",⁷⁴ and in Russia the literary journal Litteraturnaia Gazieta condemned this "lost generation of 1968". Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan were the "maîtres à penser" or the "gurus" of this new movement. Maurice Clavel, dubbed the "uncle of the new philosophers", in prophetic tones heralded Foucault as the "new Kant", and based his somewhat apocalyptic Christian philosophy on Foucault's formulation of the "death of man".⁷⁵ Clavel's

73. For a useful description of the works of the new philosophers and the relevant aspects of the work of Foucault, Lacan and Barthes see Günther Schiwy, Les nouveaux philosophes, trans. Jeanne Etoré (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1978).

74. Frederick Painton and Sandra Burton, "France's New Thinkers", Time, 5 September 1977, pp.18-23.

75. See Maurice Clavel, Ce que je crois (Paris: Grasset, 1975), pp.137,141 and most of the articles and books he wrote after this date (see bibliography for a selection). Clavel had a seemingly endless capacity for repetition and self quotation, as well as "prophetic" exaggeration. Foucault notes not unsympathetically "the verbal inflation of our friend Clavel", in Mauriac, Et comme l'espérance..., p.552.

books (especially Ce que je crois) were immensely popular and introduced Foucault to an audience who might not otherwise have become familiar with his ideas. When Clavel died in 1979, Foucault, a friend with whom he had engaged in many militant activities since the 1960s, wrote an obituary of him in Le nouvel observateur.⁷⁶ The younger "new philosophers", the ex-Maoists André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy adapted Foucault's theories on power to fit their pessimistic conceptions of a modern all powerful repressive Gulag-State.⁷⁷ Although initially Foucault supported the efforts of André Glucksmann,⁷⁸ he did not pursue this line as it became increasingly apparent that the intellectual quality and the political implications of the works of the so called "new philosophers" left much to be desired. Their work stirred up a tremendous amount of controversy and was almost universally condemned by the intellectual establishment, who claimed that it did not even satisfy the minimum standards of intellectual scholarship and led to a right wing, if not "fascist", politics.⁷⁹

76. "Notre ami Maurice Clavel: Vivre autrement le temps", Le nouvel observateur, 30 April 1979, p.88.

77. See for example: André Glucksmann, Les maîtres penseurs (Paris: Grasset 1977); Bernard-Henri Lévy, La barbarie à visage humaine (Paris: Grasset, 1977).

78. Foucault, "La grande colère des faits", Le nouvel observateur, 9 May 1977, pp.84-86.

79. See for example: François Aubral and Xavier Delcourt, Contre la nouvelle philosophie (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); issue titled, "Le comble du vide", Critique 34, no.369 (February 1978) and; Sylvie Bouscasse and Denis Bourgeois, ed., Faut-il brûler les nouveaux philosophes? Le dossier du 'procès' (Paris: Nouvelles éditions Oswald, 1978).

At about the same time, the Anglo-Saxon intellectual world began to take more notice of the work of Foucault. Up until 1977, Foucault had remained the property of a fairly exclusive coterie, but with the translation of Surveiller et punir in 1977 and La volonté de savoir in 1978, the steady trickle of writings turned into a flood. These books appeared at a time when a number of problems had become apparent in American prisons and when an interest in margins and relations of power within bureaucratic societies obsessed many people. Two more groups of writings on Foucault came into evidence in English speaking criticism. The first was ardently francophile: either structuralist - or when this ceased to be respectable - interested in power or "tool boxes".⁸⁰ For this school, Foucault could do no wrong, and every word that flowed from his pen was treated as though from an oracle.⁸¹ As we shall see, in their enthusiasm these writers erected what they saw as Foucault's lack of theory into a full blown theory. Writers in this group vied with each other to be more imposingly obscure

80. During the 1970s, Foucault insisted on describing his work as "fragmentary" and "anti-systematic". Instead of providing an all explaining system he wanted to offer merely a few tools of analysis. These ideas will be dealt with at length in Chapter Five.

81. In 1974 George Huppert noted the danger of some of Foucault's theses, "more or less vaguely understood ... becoming articles of faith among intellectuals". He is referring to Les mots et les choses but his concern would appear more than justified in the light of subsequent developments. "Divinatio et eruditio: Thoughts on Foucault", History and Theory 13 (1974), p.191; cf. also White, "Foucault Decoded", p.53. In French, Proust remarks that "the danger will come mainly from 'foucauldians' if ever there are any". J. Proust, dir. "Entretiens sur Foucault", La Pensée, no.137 (February 1968), p.24.

than the next, and direct transliterations from the French, and enormous sentences following French stylistic practice, were a feature of their style.⁸² In addition, nothing was ever explained, and only those "in the know" and with a good knowledge of French language and culture could hope to decipher these daunting texts. The second new group of writings, although these were already beginning to come into evidence in the 1960s, particularly in relation to the anti-psychiatric movement, were scholarly articles of academic research which had either used Foucault's methodology, one of two of his ideas and concepts, or alternately used it as a historical source. Of course, the earlier camps continued their activity, but their self-confidence was seriously undermined and some critics previously outraged by Foucault became quite favourably disposed towards his writing. The amount of clear, useful and accurate writing on Foucault began to increase as well. Translated collections of Foucault's shorter writings began to appear in the late 1970s to cater for this growing audience.⁸³

It is interesting to note one very marked difference (amongst many) between Foucault's French and English language critics in the second half of the 1970s. Whereas in France the

82. "A pretentious (the French would say rechauffé, reheated) cosmopolitanism can give you essays written in an English that only the French could understand". George Alexander "Introduction: On Editorial Strategies", in Language, Sexuality and Subversion, eds. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (Sydney: Feral, 1978), pp.25-26. Alexander's own essay manifests a style of "radical" discourse more common in French than in English although admittedly with the recent popularity of French thinkers in the Anglo-Saxon world, it has become more widely practiced and accepted.

83. Bouchard, ed., Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, Morris and Patton, eds., Michel Foucault, and PK.

all consuming interest in power did not far outlive the brief fortune of the "new philosophers"; in the English speaking world the notion of "power" had an immense impact, particularly on sociologists. This discussion on power has continued well after his death. In France however, it was the historians who took up Foucault's ideas with the most enduring intellectual effect. Rather than being particularly interested in his notion of power, they focussed on his historiographical method, questioning him on it in interviews and during round table discussions and referring to his work either as a historical source or a point of methodological discussion in the journal Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations.⁸⁴

Greatly affected, however, by the poor reception of La volonté de savoir, Foucault took a year of sabbatical leave from the Collège de France to travel to America.⁸⁵ He then lapsed into a prolonged "silence", although interviews, articles, comments on political events and edited collections of obscure documents continued to appear. The quality of this work is variable. It includes endless divagations on the themes of truth and power and much highly rhetorical writing on intellectual and political events, many of which have long since faded from public memory. As a new book still did not appear,

84. This is not to say by any means that English language historians have been silent about Foucault's work, as we shall see later.

85. Robert Maggiori, "Le démineur des lendemains", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.5.

references to Foucault's "silence" and apparent unwillingness to commit himself to new theories, began to appear in the literature.⁸⁶

However in 1981 and 1982 a noticeable change began to take place in his thought. His course at the Collège de France in early 1982 was titled L'hermeneutique du sujet and abandoned Foucault's favourite Classical Age for the Ancient Greek and the early Christian period. The word "power" all but disappeared, and it became a question of Socrates' "concern for self" and "philosophies of spirituality", then "subjectivity". At last in June 1984, just before the final silence of death overtook Michel Foucault, two new volumes of his Histoire de la sexualité appeared: L'usage des plaisirs (vol. 2) and Le souci de soi (vol. 3). In the introduction to L'usage des plaisirs, Foucault explains both his long silence and why he had abandoned the original project outlined in La volonté de savoir, saying he had been forced to change his whole way of thinking. These two new volumes, which constitute a radical change in the style, content and form of Foucault's thought, examine the history of sexuality in Antiquity and during the early Christian period. Foucault after reassessing his past work asks why sexual behaviour has become the object of moral preoccupation in history, and at the same time examines the development of "arts of existence" or theories of how to live a happy and useful life.

86. Pariscope comments: "Each year now for the past seven years, it has been announced that he is going to break his historic silence. Does he have anything to say?" Georges-Marc Benamou, Gilles Pudlowski, "Où sont les intellos d'aujourd'hui?", Parispoche-Pariscope, 31 August 1983, p.X; see also Hamon and Rotman, Les intellocrates, p.292 and; Maggiori, "Le démineur des lendemains", p.5.

It is a testimony to the remarkable extent of Foucault's influence that his death was reported in newspapers around the world. In France itself, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Culture expressed their regret at his passing. His death was front page news in Le monde and Le Figaro which also devoted several short articles to him by well known intellectuals. The now prestigious left wing newspaper, Libération, which counted Foucault as one of its founding members in 1972, devoted 10 pages to him.⁸⁷ Since his death, his influence has not ceased to grow, particularly in the English speaking world, as the impact of his most recent writings begins to be felt.

87. For a not entirely impartial history of this newspaper, which also refers to Foucault's contribution see F.M. Samuelson, Il était une fois 'Libération'. Reportage historique (Paris: Seuil, 1979).

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORIAN OR PHILOSOPHER?

In the last chapter Foucault's works were treated in their broad social and intellectual setting. In this chapter we will look at his works as objects in a debate over disciplinary territories and classifications. Alan Sheridan at the beginning of his book spells out the kind of puzzlement a great many readers feel when they open Foucault's books. He also spells out the reply of a certain kind of commentary: they ask

"'Is he some kind of philosopher?' 'Well yes in a way', one answers. 'Then why does he write not about Plato, Descartes and Kant, but about the history of madness and medicine, prisons and sexuality?' 'Well he is more of a historian than a philosopher, though his approach to his material is very different from that of a historian'. 'Ah a historian of ideas!' 'Well no ... In fact it was to distinguish what he was doing from the history of ideas that he coined the term 'archaeology of knowledge'."1

Although some critics, English speaking ones in particular, may now scoff that this question is irrelevant or demonstrative of the worst excesses of Anglo-Saxon empiricist small

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1. Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1981), p.2. This book has now been translated into French: Discours, sexualité et pouvoir, translated and presented by Philip Miller (Paris: Mandaga, 1986). Also translated into French is Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Afterword by Michel Foucault (Brighton: Harvester, 1982). The French edition is titled Michel Foucault, trans. Fabienne Durant-Bogaert (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). At least one French critic describes this book as "a classic!". Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), p.76.

mindedness, they do not solve the problem by saying that it is archaeology or genealogy because that is what Foucault says it is. One is simply led to ask what archaeology or genealogy is. The issue of how Foucault's work should be described is a very important one, for it addresses a wide range of questions, questions that not only relate to the very heart of what Foucault is actually doing in his books, but to the most general effects they have had and to important general philosophical, historiographical and epistemological issues. They also show up important differences between the French and Anglo-Saxon intellectual mentalities. For example, do Foucault's works provide interesting new insights for the historian in his continuing struggle to understand the past, or are they philosophical speculations on man's place in the cosmos and his destiny? Or again, are they anarchist tracts inviting us to overthrow a corrupt society?² Foucault's works are in fact, all of these things (and others as well), and what puzzles some critics is how these elements can co-exist in a single work and indeed whether they should. Another source of irritation and surprise is the sheer diversity of the subject matter: medicine, literature, art, economics, linguistics, biology to name only a few of the areas Foucault looks at. One might even ask, as has been asked many times by English speaking readers,

2. "Is his discourse prophetic, cynical, chimerical, or simply academic?" asks one radical English speaking critic ironically. Karlis Racevskis, Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.116.

whether Foucault's works are not just in fact the idiosyncratic product of a different intellectual tradition and as such are unclassifiable, indeed incomprehensible, outside of it.³

Claude Lévi-Strauss makes some interesting observations on this subject in the Introduction to Anthropologie structurale:

"Several of my articles had been written directly in English, so I had to translate them. Now, while I was working on them, I was struck by the difference in tone and composition between texts conceived in one or the other language ... This difference can probably be partially explained by sociological causes: you do not think or argue in the same way when you are addressing a French or an Anglo-Saxon audience".⁴

But let us begin by looking at some of the comments on Foucault's classification. It is the English speaking critics who have the most to say on Foucault's interdisciplinarity and the difficulty of fitting him into any one discipline.

D.E. Leary notes complaints about Foucault's "extraneous"

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3. One writer goes so far as to suggest that Foucault's following "must consist largely of masochists and those who can admire while they do not understand, for Foucault though ultimately intelligible is flamboyantly difficult. He is the soul of panache and perversity". M. Howe, "Open Up a Few Corpses", Nation, 26 January 1974, p.118.
 4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Anthropologie structurale I (Paris: Plon, 1958), pp.10-11; see also a remark by an English speaking critic: "Michel Foucault is one of France's most imposing intellectual stars, but contemporary French thought generally is so distant from that of America, and Foucault so distinctive even there, that his work can seem thoroughly alien to most of us here." Robert Hoffman, "Review of Discipline and Punish", Historian 41 (1979), p.332; see also Karl Figlio, [Review of the Birth of the Clinic], British Journal for the History of Science 10 (1977), p.167 and; Colin Lucas, "Power and the Panopticon", Times Literary Supplement, 26 September, p.1090.

excursions into other disciplines. He also comments that "Foucault's works are a complex of philosophical, linguistic, historic and structural analysis".⁵ Other English speaking critics comment variously that Foucault's work "defies classification",⁶ is "difficult to categorise",⁷ is outside "the conventional grids of disciplinary classification",⁸ or that it is difficult to "decide what kind of books" Foucault is writing.⁹ Jonathan Culler begins a review of The Order of Things in the Cambridge Review wondering what Cambridge department could set this book as required reading, and decides that none of them could.¹⁰ Another critic remarks that:

"Within the spectrum of university curricula and specialized disciplines, Foucault's position is shifting and complex ... he straddles areas normally associated with history, philosophy, politics, sociology or the history of science, yet his work cannot be located with confidence in any of these."¹¹

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5. D.E. Leary, "Michel Foucault, an Historian of the Sciences humaines," Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences 12, no.3 (1976), pp.291,286.
 6. G.S. Rousseau, "Review of The Birth of the Clinic", Philological Quarterly (Fall 1975), p.793.
 7. Robert D'Amico, "Introduction to the Foucault-Deleuze discussion", Telos (Summer 1973), p.101.
 8. Peter Barham, "Sanctuaries of the Text", Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association 13, no.1 (January 1979), p.111.
 9. Maurice Cranston, "Michel Foucault", Encounter 30 (June 1968), p.39.
 10. Jonathan Culler, "Words and Things: Michel Foucault", Cambridge Review, 29 January 1971, p.104.
 11. Leslie Hill, "Shades of the Prison House", Times Education Supplement, 2 January 1981, p.7.

Ronald Hayman, trying to decide how to describe Foucault's books, asks:

"Is he just an over-ambitious and dangerously articulate polymath or is his challenge to our categorisations so formidable that the difficulty of categorising his work is only a trivial sample of the intellectual readjustment it calls for ...?"¹²

David Rothman does not think that Surveiller et punir can be made to fit into any "academic discipline" either. Foucault is not really a historian for all his interest in origins, perhaps he is an anthropologist. What is more, Rothman adds, "a philosophical radicalism permeates his writings".¹³ According to Edward Said, Foucault (and Derrida's) work "is generally hybrid: quasi-philosophical, quasi-literary, quasi-scientific, quasi-historical".¹⁴ In a book on the history of medicine, it is remarked that "archaeology cuts across the usual disciplinary fields, institutions and cognitive boundaries implicitly adopted by historians and sociologists of medicine".¹⁵

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12. Ronald Hayman, "Cartography of Discourse? On Foucault", Encounter 47 (December 1975), p.72.
13. David J. Rothman, "Society and its Prisons", New York Times Book Review, 19 February 1978, p.1.
14. Edward Said, "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions", Critical Inquiry 4, no.4 (1978), p.676.
15. Peter Wright and Andrew Treacher, eds., "Introduction", in The Problem of Medical Knowledge: Examining the Social Construction of Medicine (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), p.22; cf. Richard Howard, "Our Sense of Where We Are", Nation, 5 July 1971, p.22.

It is interesting to note that French writers do not complain that Foucault is difficult to categorise. They may have a range of suggestions as to what he is doing. He might be questioned on why he chose particular disciplines, or even criticised for making mistakes in different specialised areas.¹⁶ Philippe Ariès also praises Foucault's work as a "remarkable example" of the "fortunate indecision of boundaries" which has recently come into its own after "fifty years of an interdisciplinarity that has been preached but never practiced."¹⁷ Jean Lacroix, reviewing Les mots et les choses, is impressed by Foucault's wide knowledge "from economics, to literature, from philosophy to linguistics".¹⁸ But there are few complaints about the difficulty of classifying his work. Even in the debates that have raged over whether Foucault is a historian or a philosopher, the difficulties that have been discussed all relate to the epistemological, methodological and ontological questions raised by Foucault's work and not to whether he should make up his mind and join either a history or a philosophy department.¹⁹ This difference between the two

16. J. Proust, director, "Entretiens sur Foucault", La Pensée 137 (February 1968), p.13.

17. Philippe Ariès, "L'histoire des mentalités", in La nouvelle histoire, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne (Paris; CEPL, 1978), p.411.

18. Jean Lacroix, "Fin de l'humanisme?", Le monde, 9 June 1966, p.13.

19. Roland Barthes is particularly scathing about the latter type of discussion. He says: "Proclaiming loudly that the Novel should be the novel, Poetry poetry and the Theatre theatre, is the same kind of sterile tautology as the denominative laws which govern Property in Civil Law. It all contributes to that great bourgeois work which aims at finally reducing being to possession and the object to a thing". Roland Barthes, Mythologies (Paris: Seuil, 1957), p.160.

different debates over classification is a difficult one to define, and raises complex problems. In addition, with the acceptance and dissemination of Foucault's work in recent years in the English speaking world as commentators have become more used to his style of thought, the problems over classification have diminished.

At the risk of massive generalisation, one could say that in general, the tendency on the Continent is towards a unified approach to knowledge, towards formulating a satisfactory abstract and all-explaining theory which encompasses science, history, and metaphysics, whereas the empirical Anglo-Saxons prefer "facts", and in general more fragmentary, more patiently empirical, approaches to knowledge, each discipline and science being content with its own area. In French thought, disciplinary divisions tend to be subordinated to this overriding interest in general principles.²⁰ As Jean-Marie Domenach remarks perceptively, "In France, science and politics always turn into metaphysics. This is our privilege - and sometimes our ridicule".²¹ No form of knowledge is exempt from critical enquiry. Even debates on doing away with metaphysics eventually turn into metaphysics, something which most Anglo-Saxon

20. A French historian remarks on this rigid thematic division into disciplines in Anglo-Saxon universities, saying it leads to a proliferation of specialities at the expense of distinctions by what he calls "natural or cultural" zones. Jean-Pierre Raison, "Géographie historique", in La nouvelle histoire, ed. Le Goff, p.183.

21. Jean-Marie Domenach, Enquête sur les idées contemporaines (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p.48.

commentators generally fail to take into account, as it is so foreign to their own practice. It has long been the prerogative of the French "intellectual" or philosopher to address himself to a vast range of issues in the sciences, humanities and socio-political arenas, and to engage in a certain type of "journalism".²²

This difference is also apparent in attitudes towards science. Modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy regards itself as secondary in relation to the sciences; it is the sciences that are considered to have privileged access to reality. Therefore it makes sense that all other disciplines should follow the methods of science. This style of thought tends to assume that the world and reality can ultimately be described by the painstaking collection and categorisation of "neutral" and "true" "facts". In the final analysis perhaps, all this knowledge could be pieced together to form a true picture of reality, but unfortunately this is showing no signs of happening. Instead a specialisation and fragmentation of knowledge as the only means of dealing with and organising an enormous and increasing number of "facts", has become more and more apparent. The "secondary" position of philosophy is

22. For a brief historical account of the reasons for this French philosophical journalism see Foucault, "Le piège de Vincennes", Le nouvel observateur, 9 February 1970, pp.33-35; Jacques Bouveresse writing at the time of the "new philosophers" controversy remarks that "the problem of the relationship of philosophy with the medias ... has been a recurring problem for a long time, especially in France". "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", Critique 34, no.369 (February 1978), p.97. There is an endless stream of writing on this subject.

demonstrated by a citation from Bertrand Russell which many Anglo-Saxon philosophers and commentators would still make their own:

"It is science that is beginning to make us understand ourselves ... It is science that has taught us the way to substitute tentative truth for cocksure error. The scientific spirit, the scientific method, the framework of the scientific world, must be absorbed by any one who wishes to have a philosophic outlook belonging to our time, not a literary antiquarian philosophy fetched out of old books ... An hour with Galileo or Newton will give you more help towards a sound philosophy than a year with Aristotle."²³

This "scientism" extends to literary style as well. Any efforts to write in an interesting or "poetic" style are immediately condemned as "unscientific" or "unphilosophical". For example, G.S. Rousseau writing about Les mots et les choses says:

"those who respond to poetic talent diffused over a vast panoramic verbal spate will regard this book as gospel truth heralding a "breakthrough"; they will consider him the new seer in a long line of high priests extending from Blake and Nietzsche to Camus and Sartre. But the others who appeal for less verbiage and greater proof, who prefer to look for truth to Harvey and Newton, Russell and Wittgenstein, Namier and Godel, Quine and the logicians, will be sorely disappointed at this necromatic performance".²⁴

Continental philosophy is not prepared to accept this secondary position and sees itself as being just as concerned with reality as the sciences; indeed would go so far as to say

23. Bertrand Russell, The Art of Philosophizing and Other Essays (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1968), p.10.

24. G.S. Rousseau, "Whose Enlightenment? Not Man's: The Case of Michel Foucault", Eighteenth Century Studies 6 (1972-73), p.256, cf. p.196. Jean-Paul Brodeur comments: "As one would expect, he has been reproached for being too great a writer to be a true philosopher". "McDonnell on Foucault, supplementary remarks", Canadian Journal of Philosophy 7, no.3 (1977), p.562.

that it is dealing with an even more fundamental reality.²⁵

The Continental or rationalist mode of thought remains sceptical about the "scientific" neutrality of the observer, and of whether it is ever possible to perceive a "neutral fact" independently of history, culture or subjectivity. As a result, all knowledge, all disciplines and action are based on this uncertainty, with correspondingly less emphasis on the rigidity of disciplinary distinctions.²⁶ French philosophers, therefore, see no reason why they should look to the sciences (natural, human or mathematical) to provide an ultimate verification for their findings (although these sciences might well provide a useful framework of analysis).²⁷

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25. For a most interesting discussion on this difference between the two traditions see G. Hottois, "La secondarité: concept central de la métaphilosophie contemporaine", Etudes philosophiques 3 (July 1978), pp.373-76.
26. This is not to say that certain scientific propositions are not true. They are true in the sense that they work, that they are not false, but the question of whether they describe the true "essence of things" is quite a different one. Georges Canguilhem and Foucault have written at length on this subject, see Georges Canguilhem, On the Normal and the Pathological, trans. by Carolyn R. Fawcett. Introduction to Eng. edition by Michel Foucault, Studies in the History of Modern Science, vol. 3. (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1978); see also Paul Veyne, Comment on écrit l'histoire, suivi de Foucault révolutionne l'histoire (Paris: Seuil, 1978), pp.234-35.
27. There is even some disagreement over the way the word "science" is used in Anglo-Saxon and Continental thought. Although Clarence Smith Howe, the translator of Ernst Cassirer's, The Logic of the Humanities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) is discussing the German word Wissenschaft his comments are equally relevant to the French word "science": "... with Wissenschaft, the English reader is uneasy and usually indignant at the suggestion that there are "sciences" other than the exact natural sciences ... The Germans ... are inclined to classify the American and English social sciences as ... exact sciences of empirical human nature. ... the German concept of science (Wissenschaft) is far broader than its English counterpart, in that it includes
- (Footnote continued on next page)

A magnificent example of the confrontation of these two styles of philosophy is to be found in an article by Jacques Bouveresse, "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?". Bouveresse is a French university philosopher working in the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition. He quotes Wittgenstein, Russell, Popper and Quine, lamenting the overriding interest of contemporary French philosophers in history and politics, their visibility in the media and their literary style. He also condemns their lack of interest in the latest scientific developments and in such elite and unpopular areas as modal logic, intuitionism, linguistics, thermodynamics, information theory and artificial intelligence.²⁸ In voicing these criticisms, he is also voicing the criticisms of many of his Anglo-Saxon colleagues when faced with French philosophy.

From this question of the rigidity or otherwise of disciplinary distinctions, let us move on to various suggestions about what Foucault's work could be. Although by far the greatest number of critics in French and English tend to class Foucault's works amongst the historical disciplines or as philosophy, or as both, there are quite a number of other suggestions as to what it could be. Sociology is a fairly

27. (Continued from previous page)
any systematic ordering of concepts, such as mathematics, jurisprudence or theology", pp.ix,xiii-xiv. See also Georg. G. Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), p.4.

28. Bouveresse, "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", p.121. Bouveresse does not entirely succeed in avoiding a very French style of polemics, but then, as he complains wearily (and ironically) at the end of his article, he was only writing "out of a sense of duty, and not in the hope that this will really be of any use", p.122.

popular choice amongst English speaking critics, although even then, some commentators are not quite sure. Roger Hahn, who opens a review of The Birth of the Clinic by saying that it is a "terrible book", claims that it resembles more a "work of modern art than a sociological treatise."²⁹ David Matza describes Madness and Civilization as a "major contribution to sociological thought" and insists that Foucault's interpretation is "sociological to the core".³⁰ Foucault has also been variously labelled as a "psychiatrist", or "psychologist",³¹ and his work seen as cultural or philosophical "psychoanalysis" or "anthropology".³² Even literature and poetry rate a mention and Foucault becomes a "didactic poet writing in prose", who nonetheless "wants to be treated as a philosopher".³³

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29. Roger Hahn, "Review of The Birth of the Clinic", American Journal of Sociology 80, No.6 (1975), p.1503. David Matza, "Review of Madness and Civilization", American Sociological Review 31, No.4 (1966) p.551.
30. For other comments on Foucault and sociology see: John C. Greene, "Review of Les mots et les choses", Social Science Information 6, No.4 (1967), p.133; F. McConnell, "Review of Discipline and Punish and Violence and the Sacred by René Girard", New Republic 178 (1978), p.33; cf. also Michael Peters, "Extended Review of Madness and Civilization and Structuralism by Jean Piaget", Sociological Review 19 (1971), pp.637-38. In addition, Barry Smart recently published a book on Foucault, titled Michel Foucault in a series, "Key Sociologists" (Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1985).
31. Paul Delaney, "Review of I Pierre Rivière ...", New York Times Book Review, 18 May 1975, p.31; Tristan Stojanovich, French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p.34; cf. also Peter Gay, "Chains and Couches", Commentary 40, no.4 (1965), p.94.
32. Howe, "Open up a few corpses", p.118; D.P. Funt, "The Structuralist Debate", Hudson Review 22, no.4 (1969), p.629; Cranston, "Foucault", p.41; W.D. Wilder, "Review of Madness and Civilization", Man 7, no.1 (1972), p.184.
33. Rousseau, "Whose Enlightenment?", pp.238-39; cf. Rousseau, "Literature and Science: The State of the Field", Isis 69, no.249 (1978), p.589.

In French, references to sociology are almost non-existent, and one remark describing Foucault as the "prophet" of a "new sociology" of which Lévi-Strauss is the "pope",³⁴ would seem to bring Foucault closer to anthropology, which is what Lévi-Strauss is usually described as practicing. Perhaps the rarity of references to sociology in French can be attributed to the fact that this discipline is by no means as well established institutionally in France as in Anglo-Saxon countries.³⁵ In addition, sociology is often subsumed under philosophy or history and only recently have departments of sociology been established in French universities.³⁶

There are quite a number of direct references to ethnology and anthropology - far more numerous than the number of statements found in English on this subject. This can be

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34. R.M. Albérès, "L'homme n'est plus dans l'homme", Nouvelles littéraires, 1 September 1966, p.3.
35. It must be noted that a number of articles and references to Foucault are to be found in French language sociological journals such as Cahiers internationaux de sociologie, Revue de l'institut de sociologie and Revue française de sociologie.
36. For useful comments and readings on the current state of sociology in France see Charles C. Lemert, ed., French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal since 1968 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), and for a brief history of sociology in France since 1960 see also Pierre Renault, "Pourquoi des sociologues", in Les dieux dans la cuisine, Brochier, pp.93-100. Le Roy Ladurie remarks that the work of French sociologists is often of a 'philosophical' calibre". Raymond Bellour and Philippe Venault, dir., "L'histoire, une passion nouvelle: table ronde avec Philippe Ariès, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paul Veyne", Magazine littéraire, no.123 (1977), p.17.

ascribed in large part to the French commentators' familiarity with the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss which was very fashionable in Paris at the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s. As Foucault's work was often seen as "structuralist", or at any rate, not existentialist, some critics associated this with anthropology. After the early 1970s, and the demise of "structuralism", one no longer finds comments of this kind.³⁷

In English and French, Foucault is sometimes described as a historian of ideas. This description is found more frequently in English, where it is often a convenient label for studies that do not easily fall into one specific discipline. One irritated Anglo-Saxon reviewer brands Foucault as "a self-styled presumptuous historian of ideas."³⁸ It is perhaps surprising

37. See for example, Roland Barthes, "Savoir et folie," Critique 174 (November 1961), p.916. Barthes also describes Foucault as a "structuralist historian"; Marcel Fournier, "Reflexions théoriques et méthodologiques à propos de l'ethnoscience", Revue française de sociologie 12 (1971), p.460; Michel Serres, Hermès 1: la communication (Paris: Minuit, 1968), pp.198,200; Jean-Luc Chalumeau, La pensée en France de Sartre à Foucault (Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1974), p.49; Edouard Morot-Sir, La pensée française d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), p.96.

38. "Review of The Archaeology of Knowledge", Psychological Medicine 6, no.1 (1976), p.162; cf. "Review of Discipline and Punish", Psychological Medicine 8, no.4 (1978), p.728; Culler, "Words and Things", p.104; Robert Brown, "The Idea of Imprisonment", Times Literary Supplement, 16 June, 1978, p.658; for examples in French, see Michel Serres, "Géométrie de la folie II", Mercure de France, no.1189 (September 1962), p.81; Morot-Sir, La pensée française, p.96; François Russo, "L'archéologie du savoir de Michel Foucault", Archives de philosophie 36 (1973), p.71.

that there are not a greater number of references to the history of ideas, as Foucault himself discusses it at some length in Naissance de la clinique and L'archéologie du savoir.

There are also remarks to the effect that Foucault's work falls outside all acceptable categories and is in fact something else entirely, although many of these comments can in fact be seen within the context of the historian-philosopher debate. One critic describes "archaeology" as "Foucault's self-invented discourse."³⁹ Another writer would have it that Foucault is offering neither philosophical solutions nor more adequate histories, instead, "his primary concern is to aid the destruction of Western metaphysics, the sciences of man and the political order they sustain."⁴⁰ Others are at pains to point out that Foucault is not writing history but a kind of mythology, hence the description of Foucault's theory on madness as "less history than a fable" and "structuralist pseudo-science".⁴¹ Paul Korshin argues that Foucault is not a medical historian or an "archaeologist" but a "mythographer of the actual".⁴² In French, there are similar comments that the

39. Jacqueline Zinner, "Review of La volonté de savoir", Telos, (Summer 1978), p.220.

40. Mark Philp, "When knowledge becomes power", The Listener, 12 April 1984, p.12.

41. Peter Conrad, "Syntax and Sin", New Statesman, 30 March 1979, pp.451,452.

42. Paul Korshin, "Review of The Birth of the Clinic", Clio Medica 9, no.3 (1974), p.258; cf. Peter Dews, "Regime of Truth", New Statesman, 2 January 1981, pp.20-21.

"novel" rather than the history of Western culture is being written.⁴³ Two French critics argue that although Foucault's "archaeology" may be very useful indeed for historians, it is not quite history,⁴⁴ but another critic argues that it is not quite philosophy either.⁴⁵ Pamela Major-Poetzl claims that it is at the same time both and neither: "archaeology deals with many of the same issues [as] history and philosophy [but it] is based on a different mode of analysis and a different set of concepts".⁴⁶ Roland Barthes suggests that Histoire de la folie is "something other than a book of history", rather it is "kind of a cathartic question asked of knowledge, of all knowledge, and not only of the knowledge that speaks of madness".⁴⁷ However, there are a large number of French and Anglo-Saxon critics too numerous to cite, who are content with Foucault's own labels of "archaeology" and "genealogy". These labels like those of "intellectual", "theorist" and

43. François van Laere, "Les mots et les choses", Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme 14 (1967), p.91.

44. Jacques Revel, "Foucault et les historiens", Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), pp.10 ff; cf. Philippe Venault, "Histoires de ...", Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.14.

45. Bernard Pingaud, "Introduction", L'arc 30 (1966), p.3.

46. Pamela Major-Poetzl, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Culture: Toward a New Science of History (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1983), p.4.

47. Barthes, "Savoir et folie", p.920.

"historian-philosopher", became more common in the late 1970s. An example of a statement which includes most of the groups of comments to be found in Anglo-Saxon criticism is offered by the literary critic Edward Said. To quote him at length:

"There are dangers in too quickly defining Foucault's work as philosophical or even as historical for that matter. One danger lies in failing to acknowledge that his writing can be of overriding interest to literary critics, novelists, psychologists, medical men, biologists and linguists ... Another more interesting danger lies in losing sight of the fact that Foucault writes neither philosophy nor history as they are commonly experienced."

He goes on to suggest that Foucault has in fact invented a "new mental domain" in archaeology. This archaeology bears some resemblance to Nietzschean genealogy and is "a proper way of doing the history of science, consciousness, concepts and ideas and ... a polemical invention for harrassing establishment historians or philosophers".⁴⁸ Said would indeed seem to have a point, judging from the reactions of "harassed" philosophers and historians. Indeed, by far the most interesting and the most discussed issue, and the one that is central to this study, is the question of whether Foucault is a philosopher or a historian, and the implications the answer to this has for both philosophy and history. The differences in the responses to this question reflect the considerable mutations that have occurred in both history and philosophy over the past twenty five years, as well as the many differences between French and

48. Edward W. Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp.288,291,314.

Anglo-Saxon thought. It is often difficult to distinguish how far Foucault has influenced these changes from how far he has been influenced by them himself. Ultimately perhaps this question is unanswerable and indeed irrelevant. It is the interaction of all these texts that is of interest here.

Let us begin by looking at what his French critics have said about his work with respect to his classification as a historian or philosopher. During the 1960s in France, Foucault was generally assumed to be a philosopher, even if it was an anti-humanist philosopher who had broken all the rules and who had "killed history". Following Sartre, a number of critics (particularly Marxist critics) decided to label Foucault as a strange kind of "geologist" who destroyed history, examining buried and superposed strata.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the historians whose writings were less in the public eye during the

49. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre répond", La quinzaine littéraire, 15 October 1966, p.4; cf. Robert Kanters, "Tu causes, tu causes, est-ce tout ce que tu sais faire?", Figaro littéraire, 23 June 1966, p.5; R.M. Albérès, Littérature horizon 2000 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974), p.137; J.M. Palmier, "Le glas de la réflexion historique. La mort du roi", Le monde, 3 May 1969, p.viii; and Jean D'Ormesson, "Passage de l'homme on les avatars du savoir", Nouvelle revue française 15, no.171 (1967), p.478; Michel Amiot, "Le relativisme culturaliste de Michel Foucault", Les temps modernes 22 (1967), p.1272; Sylvie Le Bon, "Un positiviste désespéré: Michel Foucault", Les Temps Modernes 22 (1967), p.1313. Further, one notices that two of these articles appear in Les temps modernes, Sartre's famous journal. Georges Canguilhem, a well known French philosopher and historian of science and an early supporter of Foucault's work, argues against this description of geology in an article entitled: "Mort de l'homme ou épuisement du cogito?", Critique 24 (1967), pp.602-3.

1960s, thought that Foucault had a particularly interesting contribution to make to historical studies. However with the growth of interest in history during the 1970s, this interest of the historians in Foucault's work became more widely publicised. Several interviews with Foucault conducted by noted historians appeared, and a number of articles on his historiographical method were published. In particular, Paul Veyne devoted a long article titled "Foucault révolutionne l'histoire" to the usefulness of Foucault's methods and ideas for historians. A round table conducted in 1977 with some of France's best historians (Philippe Ariès, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Paul Veyne) discussed Foucault's work at some length.⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that all these historians agree that Foucault is a philosopher, but a philosopher who is at the same time a great historian. As Paul Veyne remarks: "Foucault is the complete historian ... This philosopher is one of the very great historians of our time ... Foucault is the historian in the pure state". At the end of his article he asks whether Foucault is still a historian, but concludes there is no true or false answer to this question, as "history" is a constructed object in any case, and will change as it has done in the past, this time to accommodate the philosopher Foucault's work.⁵¹ In

50. Bellour, "Table ronde", pp.20-23.

51. Paul Veyne, Comment on écrit l'histoire, pp.203-4,231,242; cf. Bellour, "Table ronde", p.21. Veyne declares that after reading Foucault he changed his practice of history. Foucault in his turn acknowledges his debt to Paul Veyne and the latter's influence on his two last books. UP p.14. One can compare Veyne's comments with a remark made by Marc Beigbeder: "The new philosopher is the one to whom everything is attributed except being a philosopher". "En suivant le cours de Foucault", Esprit (June 1967), p.1068.

discussing Surveiller et punir, in an article aptly titled "L'historien et le philosophe", Jacques Léonard remarks:

"It is not the first time that this philosopher has projected a new and powerful light on some neglected corner of history ... Since he has begun to intervene in [historians'] affairs, we can no longer deal with certain subjects in the same way".⁵²

Philippe Ariès describes Foucault as "one of our best historians, who is nonetheless a philosopher ... Born a philosopher he has become a historian in order to remain a philosopher".⁵³ Fernand Braudel praises the efforts of "the non-historians, the philosophers (who) first among them the most brilliant and most likeable, Michel Foucault, are the ones who speak out on history with the greatest vehemence".⁵⁴ The discussion continues after his death and Claude Jannoud asks in

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52. Jacques Léonard, "L'historien et le philosophe", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle et débat avec Michel Foucault, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.10.
53. Ariès, "L'histoire des mentalités", pp.411,412. See also Bellour, "Table ronde", p.21; Ariès, "La singulière histoire de Philippe Ariès", Le nouvel observateur, 20 February 1978, interview with André Burguière, p.88; Ariès (in collaboration with M., Winock), Un historien du dimanche (Paris: Seuil 1980), p.144.
54. Fernand Braudel, Preface to French Historical Method, Stoianovich, pp.16-17; for other comments in a similar vein see: Jacques Revel, "Foucault et les historiens", pp.11,12; Jacques Solé, "Un exemple d'archéologie des sciences humaines: l'étude de l'Egyptomanie du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle", Annales: E.S.C. 27, no.1 (January 1972), p.473; Jacques Le Goff, "Une science en marche", in La nouvelle histoire, ed., Le Goff, p.15; Claude Quézel, "Une histoire de l'internement de Ramsès II à mardi en huit", Magazine littéraire, July 1981, p.17; Robert Misrahi, "Le rêve et l'existence selon M. Binswanger", Revue de métaphysique et de morale 64, no.1 (1959), pp.99,105-6.

an obituary, "But, was he in fact a historian or a philosopher?", concluding that he was a philosopher who wrote history.⁵⁵

There are other remarks to the effect that Foucault is writing a new type of history. Jambet asserts that Foucault was understood best by a new type of historian: "He went to their school to learn how to analyse the archive. In their turn they learnt from him how to expand and even to profoundly change their area of study".⁵⁶ Jean Starobinski describes Naissance de la clinique as "a new way of writing the history of science, a testing ground for a radically redefined historical epistemology and methodology"⁵⁷ and Roland Barthes suggests that Histoire de la folie opens up a "new historical dimension".⁵⁸ A Renaissance historian comments:

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55. Claude Jannoud, "Loin des synthèses totalisatrices", Le Figaro, 26 June 1984, p.33; cf. Roger Pol Droit, "Un relativisme absolu", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10; see also Vincent Descombes, Le même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978) (Paris: Minuit, 1979), pp.137-38.
56. Christian Jambet, "L'unité d'une pensée: une interrogation sur les pouvoirs", Le monde, 21 February 1975, p.17.
57. Jean Starobinski, "Review of The Birth of the Clinic", New York Review of Books, 22 January 1976, p.18; cf. also Annie Guédez, Foucault (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1972), p.65.
58. Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?", in The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p.149.

"It is one of the numerous paradoxes of the thought of M. Foucault that it presents itself as non-historical and structuralist while at the same time continuing to make a valuable contribution to the history of sciences and socio-cultural history."⁵⁹

Foucault in his turn acknowledges his debt to the historians in his books. He rarely cites contemporary scholars and when he does, it is generally the historians he refers to. Hence in Surveiller et punir he refers to Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (pp.30,78,79), Pierre Chaunu (pp.77,80), Robert Mandrou (p.71), and Pierre Nora (p.29). In his last two books which are perhaps the closest to other products of the Annales school, he refers to the help he received from a number of historians over the years (UP pp.13-14).

On the philosophical front, however, a number of philosophers, particularly the more positivistic university philosophers were markedly less enthusiastic about the historicisation of philosophy.⁶⁰ French intellectual life has long been marked by a rift between "positivistic university" historians and philosophers and "avant-garde" historians and

59. Jean-Claude Margolin, "Tribut d'un antihumaniste aux études d'humanisme et de renaissance. Note sur l'oeuvre de Michel Foucault", Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance 29 (1967), p.702; for similar comments see Georges Canguilhem, "Mort de l'homme", p.607; Blandine Barret-Kriegel, "Histoire et politique ou l'histoire, science des effets", Annales: E.S.C. 28, no.6 (1973), pp.1439-40; Dominique Lecourt, Pour une critique de l'épistémologie: Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault (Paris: Maspéro, 1974), p.101.

60. Bouveresse, "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", pp.118-20.

philosophers.⁶¹ The university intellectuals accuse the avant-garde of catering too much to public fashion and airing their wares in public in the media, a sure sign their work cannot be of serious intellectual quality. On the other hand, the avant-garde intellectuals accuse university intellectuals of being excessively dry and positivistic and generally impervious to new ideas.⁶² This debate became particularly intense with the media "marketing" of the new philosophers in 1977 and 1978. It was also the subject of much discussion in the late 1960s with the interest in structuralism and the well publicised "events of May". University philosophers such as Jacques Bouveresse, influenced by Anglo-Saxon ideas, frowned on the historical "inflation" in philosophy. Bouveresse also expressed his exasperation at a widespread fashion amongst philosophers and intellectuals of denying they were philosophers or even intellectuals for that matter.⁶³

61. Bouveresse, for example, declares he is a "university philosopher" and "sees no reason to be either ashamed or proud of it", *ibid.*, p.101.

62. See the various comments of the "new historians" on "popular" history versus "specialist" history, and the exposure of history in the medias, as well as the dryness of "positivist university history". Bellour, "Table ronde", pp.10-23.

63. Bouveresse, "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", pp.118-120. A cartoon in the literary magazine *Lire* illustrates this attitude: A man is shown knocking at the door of an "Intellectuals' Club". The bouncer asks whether he is an intellectual to which the first man replies: "Well, it depends on your definition of the word 'intellectual'" an answer which gains him immediate entry. Cartoon by Martin Veyron in *Lire*, February 1983; see also in this same issue, François Châtelet's excellent article, "Suis-je un intellectuel?", pp.32-33.

This anxiety about the status of the intellectual which was the subject of so much furious intellectual debate in France during the 1970s was due to a number of factors. Firstly Marxism: Marxists were continually denigrating philosophy which Marx was alleged to have surpassed and rendered impossible with his science of historical materialism. After 1960, Althusser's structuralist attempt to reinstate philosophy fell into disfavour and a violently nihilist and anti-intellectualist Maoism was adopted by avant-garde intellectuals. In a return to the Sartrean self abnegation of the 1950s, intellectuals cursed themselves for being born bourgeois and not proletarian. Politics had come back into fashion, and as inhabitants of the world of ideas and not of the world of "action" or the "real" and material world of the oppressed and the marginal, intellectuals felt obliged to justify their activities somehow.

The second current that helped promote the fashion for intellectual anti-intellectualism was a leftist anti-establishment movement. Institutions of every sort, including the university, were attacked as the embodiment of repressive power, and professors were servants of the state imposing their sinister learning on unsuspecting young people, in order to train them to serve the system, while at the same time maintaining the illusion that they were subverting it. A rather extreme example of this attitude, one which is founded on a certain type of Marxism is to be found in the text of an uncharacteristic address by Foucault:

"Gentlemen,

I cannot call you comrades, being myself worthless ... The merchandise we professors produce is an erudite lie. It is what THE STATE PAYS US FOR ... We are thinkers authorised by the State, but I must say that our most worthwhile voluntary action over the past fifty years has been to hide the real history of the workers' movement from the young generations".⁶⁴

Thus Marxist and post 1968 ideologies combined to promote a fashion for disassociating oneself from the accusation of being a philosopher or an intellectual, Hence the decrease, especially amongst radical commentators, in the use of the word "philosophy" to describe Foucault's activities, during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Instead Foucault became a "genealogist". However in recent years, now that the political and identity crises of intellectuals have burned themselves out in futile arguments, many commentators in both French and English are quite content to describe Foucault as a philosopher once more.

But let us now turn to the debate in English over philosophy and history. It is one that bears only a remote resemblance to French discussions. The philosopher Richard Rorty suggests that Foucault offers what most people want of a philosopher, that is, he provides both a way of assessing the value of modern knowledge and suggestions about how to go about

64. Distributed as a tract at a meeting of the C.N.T. (Confederation Nationale du Travail) and the F.A.I. (Fédération Abolitioniste Internationale) to support the struggle of the Spanish people against Francoism, held at the Mutualité on the 20th April 1969. Cited in Gérard Mendel, La crise des générations. Etude sociopsychanalytique (Paris: Payot, 1969), p.191; cf. "A conversation with M. Foucault", Partisan Review 38, no.2 (1971), interview with John K. Simon, pp.194-96.

changing the world.⁶⁵ However most writers who conclude that Foucault is a philosopher also insist on denying that he is something else, just to make sure that boundaries are clearly defined. For example, Peter Kemp argues that Foucault is not a "politician" as some other critics would claim, but a "philosopher as much as Sartre and Lévinas",⁶⁶ and Peter Dews holds that:

"Foucault is not a historian in the conventional sense but a spinner of philosophical allegories; much of the fascination of his work derives from the tension between its density of historical reference and an underlying philosophical purpose".⁶⁷

G.S. Rousseau argues that since Foucault does not want to be thought of as a medical historian or as a structural linguist, then one has no choice but to call him a philosopher.⁶⁸ In another article, the same reviewer writes that Foucault considers The Birth of the Clinic to be "anything but historical. It is a philosophical and epistemological

65. Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", London Review of Books, 19 February, 1981, p.5; cf. also Wilfried Ver Eecke, "Review of L'ordre du discours", Review of Metaphysics 26 (March 1973), p.534; Thomas A. Russman, "Review of Marxism and Epistemology by Dominique Lecourt", Review of Metaphysics 30, no.2 (1976), p.349; J. Barnouw, "Review of Language, Counter-Memory, Practice", Review of Metaphysics 32, no.4 (1979), p.750; The assumption that Foucault is a pure philosopher seems to be largely restricted to the Review of Metaphysics.

66. Peter Kemp, "Review of Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics by H.L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow", History and Theory 23, no.1 (1984), p.103.

67. Peter Dews, "Regime of Truth", p.21.

68. Rousseau, "Whose Enlightenment?", p.239.

statement about space and language in the period".⁶⁹ An anonymous reviewer of the same book complains that Foucault "behaves more like a philosopher than a historian of science".⁷⁰ Yet another writer argues that there is a strong case for seeing Foucault's work as "less a sophisticated and innovative way of writing history books than a most efficient way of doing philosophy".⁷¹ The author bases his claim on the observation that Foucault's books have had the kind of impact which is more to be expected from works of contemporary philosophy than of history. In addition he says, Foucault is not really writing about "The Past" which is remote and dead, but of a past which when revealed, can expose and discredit modern institutions and systems of knowledge. Thus English speaking critics feel that they have to prove that Foucault is a philosopher rather than something else. The French, who as mentioned earlier, have a broader conception of what constitutes suitable material for philosophy, do not put themselves to all this trouble, and those who describe him as a philosopher do not consider it is necessary to prove this classification. On the other hand, English speaking critics are more willing to describe him as a historian - even if a somewhat unorthodox one. Kaplan describes Foucault as a "rigorous and shrewd historian"⁷² and Mark Poster writes that "Foucault's work is

69. Rousseau, "Review of BC", p.790.

70. "The new medicine of organs", Times Literary Supplement, 1 February 1974, p.108.

71. Brodeur, "McDonnell on Foucault", p.526.

72. Roger Kaplan, "Jail and Society", Commentary 65, no.5 (1978), p.84.

the most noteworthy effort at a theory of history of the past fifty years".⁷³ On the whole, these descriptions of Foucault as a historian occur mainly after 1975, the date of the publication of what was regarded as Foucault's most historical work to that date, Surveiller et punir.⁷⁴ There are also many writers who are not altogether sure whether Foucault is a historian or not, and if he is, think that it is certainly a very new type of history he is practicing. Alan Megill argues that although Foucault claims to be a historian and that on the surface his work does indeed resemble history, Foucault should not be taken seriously as a historian, but rather should be seen "as an indication of where history now stands".⁷⁵ Another writer comments that although Foucault's books "take the form of histories ... they are far indeed from conventionally professional history writing", and Colin Gordon distinguishes

73. Mark Poster, "Review of The Archaeology of Knowledge", Library Journal 97 (1972), p.2736; cf. Poster, Foucault, p.73.

74. For similar descriptions see: Anne Marcovich, "Concerning the Continuity Between the Image of Society and the Image of the Human Body - An Examination of the Work of the English Physician, J.C. Lettson (1746-1815)", in Medical Knowledge, eds. Wright and Treacher, p.69; S.R. Duncan Baretta and J. Markoff, "Civilization and Barbarism: Cattle Frontiers in Latin America", Comparative Studies in Society and History 20, no.4 (1978), p.590; Iggers, European Historiography, p.4; Delaney, "Review of I, Pierre Rivière ...", p.31; Perry Meisel, "What Foucault Knows", Salmagundi 44-45 (1979), pp.235,239,240; "Review of The History of Sexuality", New York Times Book Review, 27 January 1980, p.35; Alfred Lars Aronson, "Medicine, History and Theory", The Yale Review 22 (1967), p.476.

75. Allan Megill, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History", Journal of Modern History 51 (September 1979), p.503.

Foucault from "more 'orthodox' social historians".⁷⁶ Les mots et les choses seen as "a new sort of historical performance" by Ian Hacking.⁷⁷ Another critic remarks that "Foucault's work radically transcends the familiar lines of inquiry that have determined so much philosophy and historical interpretation".⁷⁸ But there are a number of English speaking critics who compromise and label Foucault as a historian philosopher.⁷⁹ Most of these comments occur after 1977 coinciding with changes in attitudes towards history and philosophy. Edward Said describes Foucault as a "philosophic historian".⁸⁰ Caws describes Foucault as "a cultural historian-philosopher of major importance"⁸¹ and Colin Gordon remarks that "Foucault poses a philosophical challenge to history".⁸² One early anonymous critic comments:

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76. Michael Donnelly, "Foucault's Genealogy of the Human Sciences", Economy and Society 11, no.4 (November 1982), p.363; Colin Gordon, "Birth of the Subject", Radical Philosophy 17 (Summer 1977), pp.19-20.
76. Ian Hacking, "The Archaeology of Foucault", New York Review of Books, 14 May 1981, p.33.
77. J. Harkness, "Review of The History of Sexuality", Society 16, no.6 (1979), p.85.
78. Richard Howard, "The Story of Unreason", Times Literary Supplement, 6 October 1961, p.654; Richard Poirier, "The Powerful Secret", New York Times Book Review, 14 January 1979, p.1; "Brief notice of Discipline and Punish", New York Times Book Review, 25 February 1979, p.41; A.N. Gilbert, "Review of The History of Sexuality", American Historical Review 84, no.4 (1979), p.1020.
79. Said, "The Problem of Textuality", p.676; see also Donnelly, "Foucault's Genealogy", p.363.
80. Peter Caws, "Medical Change", New Republic, 10 November 1973, p.28.
81. Gordon "Afterword", in PK p.242.

"Foucault came as the answer to many prayers and has relaunched philosophy in France single-handed. This is paradoxical but understandable for the 'archaeology' he propounds though it certainly requires to be handled with philosophical competence is essentially conceived by him as a branch of history".⁸³

There are others who regret that Foucault introduces philosophy into what would have otherwise been perfectly acceptable historical discourse. The historian Peter Gay describes Foucault as a psychologist who has "gone to school to historians" with an unfortunate tendency for indulging in "gratuitous philosophizing".⁸⁴ Elsewhere disappointment is expressed at Foucault's "move from history to philosophy" in the second half of Naissance de la clinique.⁸⁵ He is thought to be at his best in his "historical work when he subordinates philosophy to history".⁸⁶ One historian claims that although Foucault may well have arrived at correct philosophical conclusions, his historical interpretation is wrong - so wrong and so subordinated to philosophy in fact, that he "wonders why so much attention and praise continue to fall his way".⁸⁷

83. "Contented Positivist: Michel Foucault and the Death of Man," Times Literary Supplement, 2 July 1970, p.698.

84. Peter Gay, "Chains and Couches", p.94.

85. Lord Amulree, "Evolution of the Clinic", Books and Bookmen, January 1974, p.53.

86. Leary, "Foucault", p.293.

87. H.C. Erik Midelfort, "Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault", in After the Reformation, Essays in Honor of J.H. Hexter, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Manchester: Manchester Press 1980), pp.249,259. This article also gives an interesting overview of the critical reception of Histoire de la folie and in particular refers to the historian philosopher debate.

In recent years however there appears to be a growing myth about a "lack of interest" or "rejection" of Foucault's work by historians. Wuthnow and his co-authors assert, for example, that Foucault's books are "unacceptable to conventional historians" and have "rarely been reviewed in the historians' professional journals".⁸⁸ Historians (particularly in France) are, in fact, some of the biggest consumers of Foucault's work but as many of the references to his ideas appear in highly specialised articles (notably in the Annales: E.S.C.) or books, rather than in discussions specifically about his work, this interest tends to go unnoticed by the sociologists, philosophers or literary critics who are prone to making such comments. It is certainly true, nonetheless, that in the Anglo-Saxon world it has been sociologists rather than historians who have taken up Foucault's work with the most enthusiasm, which is not to say he has been ignored by English language historians by any means.

What all these debates would seem to indicate, is that in the past fifteen years there has been a certain rapprochement of history and philosophy - a process in which Foucault has played a large part. Philippe Ariès commenting on Foucault's brand of history says:

88. Robert Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.136; see also the remarks of Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp.73-74.

"We are now beginning to guess that man of today is asking from a certain history what he has always asked from metaphysics and only yesterday from the human sciences: a history which takes up philosophical themes and reflection, but situating them in time and in the obstinate rebirth of human endeavour."⁸⁹

Jacques Le Goff in a discussion with his colleagues remarks that the modern consumer of history seems to be asking of history the questions, "where are we, where do we come from, where are we going?" Paul Veyne rejoins, "in my day we asked those questions of Being and Nothingness".⁹⁰ In any case, traditional philosophy or metaphysics (the rational search for knowledge of "absolute being", the causes of the universe and the first principles of knowledge) has more than ever been called into question in a post-Kantian, post-Nietzschian, post-humanist age. The injunctions of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche against philosophy and metaphysics, which they themselves did not take to their logical conclusion, have been more than ever in the forefront of reflection. With the famous crisis of values and systems of belief, traditional philosophy for many people has a tendency to become bogged down in frustrating circularities and infinite regressions, in the rush to eliminate all "unprovable", unempirical and therefore "metaphysical" assumptions.

The human sciences after offering great hopes at first, have been little better at offering rational solutions to the perennial problems of existence, identity and difference, and

89. Ariès, "L'histoire des mentalités", p.412. Ariès' own work on death, childhood and population has contributed to this trend. See also Paul Veyne, "La fin de vingt-cinq siècles de métaphysique", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.11.

90. Bellour, "Table ronde", p.17.

the relation of knowledge to reality. The crisis of humanism and the subject (which in fact the human sciences fostered) undermined their claims to explanation, as the essence of man they originally hoped to discover receded further and further into the mists of the unconscious or into more and more fragmented and finely grained social structures. In recent years, it would seem that the study of history had taken over from philosophy and the human sciences as a popular mode of explanation.⁹¹ There is a certain concrete "reality" about history which is lacking in philosophy, and in the absence of values of our own, we study those adopted in past ages to see how successful they were and in order to study the present constitution of our own society and to see how it differs from the past.⁹² This kind of approach to history far from reinstating the classical empiricist approach as might have been expected,⁹³ has resulted in a blurring of the line between

91. Peter Burke remarks that "over the past fifty years, history has claimed sectors of human activity which were formerly considered to be changeless". "L'histoire sociale des rêves", Annales: E.S.C. 28, no.2 (March 1973), p.329. "There is no other truth than that of successive historical productions", remarks Paul Veyne, in Bellour "Table ronde", p.21.

92. Paul Veyne comments "The people who buy our books want to know who they are. Exactly as the buyers of a psychology journal ... wants to know who they are, and as a consequence, who they are not". Jacques Le Goff also describes this "passion for history" as the "need for identity", Bellour, "Table ronde", p.16.

93. Another historian, François Furet, expresses his surprise that (in France at least) the "dissolution of ideological certainties and the 'meaning' of history has not led to a reinstatement of Anglo-Saxon style empirical research and information. Not that this type of research and information has not been developing ... but it all remains more than ever subordinated ... to the elaboration of a general theory". François Furet, "Les intellectuels français et le structuralisme", Preuves (February 1967), pp.11-12.

fact and interpretation, resulting in what the American historian Oscar Handlin calls "faction - a combination of fact and fiction".⁹⁴

Foucault's work has been situated at the hub of these debates. His work has both crystallised and influenced a new way of looking at history and philosophy. But before we go on to examine how his writings "work" in this context, let us look at what Foucault says about his classification as a historian or a philosopher. It must be emphasised that these statements do not always necessarily reflect what he is actually doing in his work. It cannot be repeated too often that Foucault's own assessments of his past work are often quite inaccurate and usually reflect his current enthusiasms and preoccupations. Depending on his humour, he describes what he is doing in a variety of ways. Early in his career, in a discussion with the Tel quel literary group of nouveaux romanciers in 1964, he styles himself as a "naive man with the heavy boots of the philosopher".⁹⁵ In an interview given in 1976, he says somewhat reluctantly: "Although I might very well insist that I

94. Oscar Handlin, Truth in History (Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 1979), p.409; see also the lengthy discussion on history as "fiction" or the "theatrical" reconstruction of the past and its relation to "reality" in Bellour, "Table ronde", pp.19-21 and; Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978).

95. Foucault, director, "Débat sur le roman", Tel quel 17 (1964), with Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Pierre Faye, Marcelin Pleynet, Philippe Sollers, Jean Thibaudeau et al., p.12.

am not a philosopher, since I am dealing with the truth, I am in spite of everything a philosopher".⁹⁶ In an interview on Dutch television he says that he had never concerned himself with philosophy,⁹⁷ and in another interview describes himself emphatically as an historian in the Annales tradition.⁹⁸ Sometimes Foucault wants to have the best of both worlds and in an interview he declares that "philosophy today is entirely political and entirely historical. It is the politics immanent in history, it is the history indispensable to politics".⁹⁹ In other words, it is the task of the philosopher to be a historian and a "politician", but he is not entirely happy with this either, and in a discussion with a historian, Foucault claims modestly: "My books are neither philosophical treatises nor historical studies; at the very most they are philosophical fragments in historical workshops".¹⁰⁰

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96. Foucault, "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", Hérodote 1 (January 1976), p.73. It will be noted that this interview took place at the height of the fashion for intellectual self abnegation.
97. Foucault and Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power", in Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind, ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), p.167.
98. "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault" (1967), in Le livre des autres, Raymond Bellour (Paris: Union Générale des Editions, 1976), p.190.
99. Foucault, "Non au sexe roi", Le nouvel observateur, 12 March 1977, interview with B-H Lévy, p.50; cf. Otto Friedrich and Sandra Burton, "France's Philosopher of Power", Time, 16 November 1981, p.94.
100. "Débat avec Michel Foucault: "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot, p.41.

On other occasions he explains that he is doing something else entirely. In the preface to the first edition of Histoire de la folie Foucault says that he is not writing a history of psychiatry but rather an "archaeology" of madness silenced and excluded by Reason (FD:9). Further, in describing his project in the Preface to Les mots et les choses Foucault says that "Rather than a history in the traditional sense of the word, I am writing an archaeology" (MC:13). Again, in L'archéologie du savoir he says that what he is doing is neither philosophy nor history but an "archaeology" of texts (AS:268). However, in an interview conducted a month before his death, Foucault redefines the work carried out in Les mots et les choses, Histoire de la folie and Surveiller et punir as a "form of philosophy" which for some, he says, was a "radical non-philosophy".¹⁰¹ But he only offers this definition in order to disassociate himself from this "period". By far the most useful and most accurate self-description occurs in Foucault's recently published book: L'usage des plaisirs where he describes all his books as being "historical" studies by virtue of their subject matter and references. He is at pains to point out, however, that they are not the works of a "historian", as they were embarked on as a "philosophical exercise". The object of this exercise was to see how far the examination of history could expose some of the

101. Foucault, "Le retour de la morale", Les nouvelles, 28 June 1984, interview with Gilles Barbedette and André Scala, pp.37-38.

unspoken assumptions and foundations of thought, and enable people to think in some other manner.¹⁰²

After having discussed the appearance of Foucault's books as objects at the centre of a disciplinary debate, it is now time to open them, to examine their internal mechanism and structure, to argue that Foucault is "a philosopher who has become a historian in order to remain a philosopher", to examine his contribution to a history that has changed to fulfill a new function from the old - a philosophical function.

102. UP p.15; for further examples of Foucault's attitudes see: "Entretien sur la prison: le livre et sa méthode", Magazine littéraire 101 (June 1975), interview with Jean-Jacques Brochier, pp.27-33; "La naissance d'un monde", Le monde, 3 May 1969, interview, p.VIII, Foucault speaks as an historian in this interview; "Le piège de Vincennes", pp.33-35; "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, pp.20-22; In these last two articles, Foucault identifies himself with the philosophers.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SAME, THE OTHER AND THE LIMIT

In this chapter we will describe the general framework and foundations of Foucault's research. It is interesting to note that it was not until the last two years of his life that Foucault began to make explicit a number of elements that had only been implicit in his previous work. In reply to a comment to this effect by an interviewer, Foucault says this is because of the way he "formulated problems" in his earlier books, not taking into account "individual behaviour".¹ By this, Foucault means the way the individual subject exercises his freedom, through spiritual, ethical or moral choices. However, even if none of these notions are explicit in his earlier work, they are always there implicitly, particularly in the form of a certain confrontation between the Same and the Other in history, a confrontation which can also be found at the level of individual subjectivity. So, as Foucault explains in L'usage des plaisirs, in his later work it is a question of rethinking what he had already thought but in a different way, "from a different angle and in a clearer light" (UP:17). Even so, Foucault never entirely "exposed" certain undercurrents or themes in his work,

1. Foucault, "Le retour de la morale", Les nouvelles, 28 June 1984, interview with Gilles Barbedette and André Scala, p.38.

and in characteristic fashion, even in his last writings, he continued to define his past work in terms of his current enthusiasm.

As we saw in the last chapter, many critics have devoted much time and attention to the question of whether Foucault's work constitutes history or philosophy. Let us now ask what it is about his work that has given rise to so much discussion. The most obvious answer that comes immediately to mind, is the existence of reflections of a philosophical nature in books which purport to be histories, or conversely the use of history to prove philosophical points. For example, in Naissance de la clinique Foucault relates the medical discoveries, political events, and laws that led to the institution of clinical medicine in France, using the dates, proper names and documents that usually characterise historical writing. But he opens his work by saying that "In this book it is a question of space, language and death", and then goes on to discuss the problem of language and its relation to things, and the problem of the subject of knowledge (NC:V). He concludes his work with a discussion of the attitudes formed towards death and man's finiteness in the new Clinical Medicine, and the role they played in the formation of the modern individual and his relation to knowledge and truth.

But, the presence of philosophy in Foucault's work is not simply restricted to the occasional appearance of the odd philosophical reflection on his historical material. In fact, his very choice of history is philosophical and is used as a

means of approaching perennial problems in Western thought, such as the relation between the Same and the Other, or Identity and Difference, the relation between words and things and the nature and the value of human knowledge and experience.

Foucault in his work, particularly that of the 1960s, attempts to describe and bridge the gap between the "Same" and the "Other", and to provide concrete content to these two categories. The "Same" and the "Other" are concepts more commonly found in European than in Anglo-Saxon philosophy. It is important to note, first of all, that the French word "Même" can be translated as both "Self" and the "Same". In existentialist, phenomenological and other subjectivist systems of thought "le Même" (the Self) often refers to the individual subject, or subjective experience, whereas in structuralist or post-structuralist thought "le Même" (the Same) often as not refers to systems, concepts, or an accepted mode of institutionalised discourse. Indeed, depending on one's own metaphysical inclinations, one can describe these categories in a number of ways, for example, as Being and Nothingness (Sartre), Man and God (Emmanuel Lévinas) or Man and Woman (Simone de Beauvoir). Perhaps the Same could be simply defined as that which is known, familiar or ordered, and the Other as that mysterious unexplained "something" that lies outside and defines the limits of the known, that which is exterior and foreign.² The

2. On the Same and the Other and on the "horizon of finitude" or the "finitude of the horizon" (limits) and history see also Jacques Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique: essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Lévinas", in L'écriture et la différence (Paris: Seuil, 1967), esp. pp.165-174.

relationship between the Same and the Other is an important one because, as Althusser points out, identity or consciousness, whether it is individual or social, cannot accede to the Real through its own internal development but only "by the radical discovery of what is other than itself".³

Foucault's whole work can be seen as an attempt to define where the lines of demarcation between the Same and the Other lie, as well as seeking to define the nature of the limitations of human knowledge and experience. In other words, what is the nature of the relationship between our conception of the world and its reality? What is the nature of the link between words (our thought) and things (external reality)? In an effort to examine these questions in our present context, Foucault proposes a thought of the "Limit". According to Foucault, it was Kant who originally opened up this possibility before it was closed up once again by his own introduction of an anthropological foundation for critical thought, and by Hegel's introduction of the dialectic of Reason with its successions of totality and

3. Louis Althusser, Pour Marx (Paris: Maspero, 1965), p.144. It is now of course fashionable to treat any reference to Louis Althusser with the highest suspicion, an understandable attitude in the face of some of the more extravagant excesses of his followers during the 1960s and 1970s, not to mention his own confusing recantations and autocritiques, cf. Althusser, Réponse à John Lewis (Paris: Maspero 1973); Althusser, Eléments d'auto critique (Paris: Hachette, 1974). But if one leaves aside his (some would say Stalinist) devotion to the cause of Marxism, a number of very clear and useful observations relating to empiricism, historicism, humanism and the aims of philosophy, emerge in his writings.

contradiction. Together, Foucault says, they contributed to more than 150 years of a "mixed dialectical and anthropological sleep".⁴ And as Raymond Aron remarks in his book on the philosophy of history, "without a historical science whose existence is indisputable, we must substitute the search for limits for the search for foundations".⁵ It is this mode of investigation which Foucault adopts. He says: "thought should not be directed towards establishing a kind of central certitude, but should be directed towards the limits, the exterior - towards the emptiness, the negation of what it says".⁶ The thought of the "Limit", or "margins", only really began to come into its own at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s with the collapse of humanism, and with Foucault (following Heidegger) as one of its most vocal champions. Foucault remarks that if Kant was concerned with defining the limits that knowledge should not cross, today it is a matter of a "practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression".⁷

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4. MC pp.351-354; cf. Foucault, "Préface à la transgression", Critique 15, no.195 (1963), p.758.
 5. Raymond Aron, Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p.10.
 6. Foucault, "La pensée du dehors", Critique 229 (June 1966), p.528. For an excellent analysis of Foucault's "archaeology" as a "theory of frontiers, a marginalism", see Michel Serres, "D'erewhon à l'antre du cyclope," in Hermès ou la communication (Paris: Minuit, 1986), p.195. Pierre Bourdieu also remarks "Foucault's work is a long exploration of transgression, of the crossing of the social limit". "Le plaisir du savoir", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10.
 7. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, Pantheon, 1984), p.45.

What a "thought of the limit" means is this: if instead of looking at totalities, the "edge" (limit) which separates the Same and the Other could be analysed and described, perhaps an insight into the reality or truth of the Same and the Other could be gained. Such a system of thought in which "transgression", that which crosses the Limit, plays a vital role, has both critical and ontological value in Foucault's view. Its critical status lies in the fact that it is able to study the Same (finitude) which lies within the limits of empirical knowledge. As for the ontological requirements, these are met by "transgression" in its lightening movement across the Limit separating the Same and the Other; "transgression" indicates where the limits lie.⁸ This is because transgression can only exist where there is a limit to cross. Likewise we cannot know of the existence of a limit which is not transgressed. A thought of the Limit teeters precariously on the indefinitely thin line between critical and metaphysical thought in its effort to steer out of a repetitious and circular relativism towards a thought which will start moving forward once again, with new foundations and redefined limits. As Foucault says, this kind of thought "is seeking to give a new impetus, as far and wide as possible to the undefined work of freedom".⁹ By exposing the limits of our way

8. Foucault, "Préface à la transgression", pp.755,757; cf. What is Enlightenment?", p.47.

9. "What is Enlightenment?", p.46.

of thinking, Foucault hopes to enable us to see beyond them and lay the foundations for a new way of thinking.¹⁰

But how is one to "think" a thought of the Limit, how can it be given a concrete form and practical expression? The answer for Foucault, is "history": history is both a reality determined in experience and the arena where those two absolute limits, birth and death, beginnings and ends, appear with monotonous regularity. Foucault notes his debt on this score to Jean Hyppolite, saying of his work: "Is not history the privileged place where philosophical finitude can appear?"¹¹ At the same time, he remarks in relation to Histoire de la folie, that "limitations ... are not historical because they are constitutive of all possible history".¹² Limits exist at the very edge of history and are both part of history and beyond history. Limits are also present in history in the form of "events", which although they can sometimes be seen to form part of a universal system, are not totally encompassed within that system, because

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10. See the excellent article by Michael S. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present'", History and Theory 20 (1981), p.44. "The new dawn that illuminates the beginning of a new epoch also illuminates the limits of our own. In defining these limits the archaeologist of the modern period is necessarily critical because he is exposing the finitude of what had seemed to be essential attitudes of humanity ..."
11. Foucault, "Hommage à Jean Hyppolite," Revue de métaphysique et de morale 74, no.2 (March 1969), p.132.
12. Foucault, "Débat sur la poésie", Tel quel, No.17 (Spring 1964), p.76.

they represent a change, even if infinitesimal. A variation and a tension exists between the "regularities" that can be found in history and the constant stream of events. In "events", we see the confrontation between the Same (the system or identity) and the Other (that which is different) on the most miniscule scale.¹³ This precarious situation of the limits, both as part of history and outside of history, leads to a system of thought that balances on a tightrope between the historical and the ahistorical: it is neither a nihilistic historical relativism, nor a study of metaphysical essences. The trick is not to overbalance into either extreme, and Foucault does not always entirely succeed in maintaining the balance, occasionally adopting an almost flippant nihilism, or alternately his own metaphysics of identity.

In choosing history, Foucault departs from the Kantian model. Although like Kant he is interested in defining the conditions of possibility leading to the construction of objects and structures of knowledge, he situates the a priori in history. It is at this point in Foucault's thought that the influence of Nietzsche and his critique of historicism and Hegelianism come into play.¹⁴

13. See Michel de Certeau, "L'opération historique" (1974), in Faire de l'histoire, vol.1: Nouveaux problèmes, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp.32-33. For a further discussion of the dual historical and ahistorical characteristics of events, see Pierre Bertrand, L'oubli: révolution ou mort de l'histoire (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), pp.162-73.

14. For a similar point concerning Foucault's methodology Colin Gordon recalls "that the historicisation of the Kantian problem is a pre-eminently Nietzschean theme". "Afterword", in PK p.236.

As he says in a later interview, he is in a very real sense writing a "historical ontology".¹⁵ In particular, in his choice of history as a way of avoiding "metaphysics" and as a "thought of the limit", Foucault is led to reject all forms of historicism, particularly as they have been inherited from Hegel and other nineteenth century German philosophers of history.¹⁶ In so doing, Foucault goes further in the direction indicated by Nietzsche, and by Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, and joins the general movement of the late 1950s and 1960s which rejected historicist modes of thought.¹⁷ As there is considerable disagreement over the use of the term historicism, it might be useful to provide some preliminary definitions before looking at Foucault's rejection of this approach.¹⁸

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15. "Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in The Foucault Reader, Rabinow, p.351.
16. On history as an anti-metaphysical solution see Foucault, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire", in Hommage à Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp.150,159. It must be emphasised that this does not mean that a "history of the limits" is not devoid of its own kind of metaphysics.
17. In an interview conducted in 1984, Foucault explained that although he had written very little on Nietzsche and nothing on Heidegger, these two authors had had a considerable influence on his work. "Le retour de la morale", p.40. It may be noted however, that when asked at different stages of his career about "influences", Foucault gave a variety of different answers.
18. For several definitions, see Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism", in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas, vol.2, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), pp.456-65.

Karl Popper sees historicism as:

"an approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical prediction is their principal aim and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history".¹⁹

If, as Hegel says, "the history of the world is a rational process, the rational and necessary evolution of the world spirit", and if the nature of this spirit is "always one and the same", then it follows that by studying that rational process which is history, one can deduce possible directions for the future.²⁰ Thus, although historicisms such as humanist Marxism reject the charge of fatalism, and lay considerable emphasis on the role of action by subjects in history, this action can only speed up the inevitable process of historical progress and change. To be a good revolutionary one must follow the direction indicated by History at any given moment. As Popper remarks, "all the thoughts and all the activities of historicists aim at interpreting the past in order to predict the future".²¹ Although historicists claim that all is subject to continuous change, and that all truth is relative to one's historical position, the mechanism of change itself does not change, and

19. Karl R. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p.3.

20. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.29.

21. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, p.50.

society moves through necessary and predetermined stages.²² World history from its very beginning constitutes a rational whole, a "progress of the consciousness of freedom", the awareness that "man is by nature free, and that freedom of the spirit is his very essence".²³ In other words, the self-conscious and rational but preprogrammed realisation of man's liberty is the end and essence of history. All history leads to the present in an inexorable progress from ignorance to truth. As Philippe Ariès points out in a discussion about Marxist history, this approach "destroys the otherness of history".²⁴ History is reduced to the perpetual realisation of the Same. Whatever the variations, historical time does no more than reveal essences, such as Reason, Man, Freedom and so on, which remain unchanged throughout history.²⁵ Indeed, a certain conception of history and a certain conception of Man go hand in hand: as Althusser remarks "in many circumstances

22. Ibid., p.51.

23. Hegel, Lectures, p.54.

24. Philippe Ariès, Le temps de l'histoire (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1954), p.40. This remarkable volume written at the end of the War takes up themes in historiography (discontinuity, the history of the present, the history of difference, reactions to anti-humanism) that were not to become widely discussed until much later.

25. Cf. Hegel, Lectures, pp.44-45. Popper, Poverty of Historicism, p.33; see also Louis Althusser's most useful discussion of Hegel's conception of the nature of historical time. He points out that for Hegel "historical time does nothing but reflect the essence of the social totality of which it is the existence". Louis Althusser, Roger Estabiet and Etienne Balibar, Lire le Capital, vol.1 (Paris: Maspero, 1966), p.39. For other useful brief discussions of Hegel's idea of history see Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, trans. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven: Yale University Press 1961), pp.29-30; H.G. Gadamer, "Historicité", in Encyclopaedia Universalis, vol VIII (Paris, 1968), pp.452-53.

humanism and historicism both rest on the same ideological problematic".²⁶ However as ideas in history about these things are constantly changing, some historicists adopt a relativist position, arguing that it is impossible to ever know which view is true, and that all views are equally true - or untrue.

Foucault writes in direct opposition to these ideas. In his view, to resort to traditional explanations of historical change relying on notions such as influence, causality, traditions, development and evolution and "mentality" or "spirit of the age" is merely to invoke quasi-magical metaphysical entities.²⁷ As he explains somewhat vehemently in an interview in reply to criticisms:

"There is a sort of myth of History for philosophers ... a kind of great and vast continuity where the liberty of individuals and economic or social determinations are all tangled up together ... When one of these three myths is interfered with, these worthy people start to cry that History has been raped and murdered. In fact, it is quite some time since people as important as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, the English historians etc., put an end to this myth of History ... This philosophical myth which I am accused of killing, well, I am delighted if I have killed it, because it is precisely that myth I wanted to kill, not history in general. You can't kill history, but as for killing History for philosophers - absolutely - I certainly want to kill it".²⁸

26. Althusser, Lire le Capital, p.73; cf. AS p.22.

27. AS p.32; cf. Foucault, "Deuxième entretien avec Raymond Bellour", in Le livre des autres, Bellour, p.193. Foucault, "Linguistique et sciences sociales", Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales 6, no.19 (1969), p.254.

28. "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, pp.21-22.

And to "kill" this myth of history, to do away with the "abstract, general and monotonous" explanations of change it proposes, Foucault upholds a principle of discontinuity.²⁹ This principle of "discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series and transformation",³⁰ to which one can add later "local struggles" and "specific intellectuals", remains constant throughout Foucault's entire career, even if it is applied differently to a variety of objects and situations. Indeed, Foucault argues that the very idea of history presupposes discontinuity, as the past can only be an object of study if it is discontinuous and different from the present. But discontinuity is a paradoxical notion because, as Foucault points out in L'archéologie du savoir:

"it is both an instrument and an object of research and because it defines the field of which it is the effect. It allows the historian to individualise areas of study, but can only be established through the comparison of those areas. It is a paradoxical notion because, in the final analysis perhaps, it is not simply a concept present in the discourse of the historian, but something that the historian secretly supposes to be there. In fact, how else can he speak except on the basis of that rupture which offers him history - and his own history - as an object?"(AS:17, AK:9).

Philosophy today, continues Foucault in an interview, should "diagnose the present, describe how our present is different, and absolutely different, from that which is not it, in other words

29. Foucault, "Réponse à une question", Esprit, no.371 (May 1968), p.854.

30. AS p.31, cf. p.44.

from our past".³¹ This separation of the past and the present runs directly counter to the historicist approach, based as it is on the historical continuity of essences between past and present.³²

Discontinuity also appears in the way Foucault structures his own historical writing. At the most general level he posits a series of discrete historical "periods": for example, the Renaissance, the Classical Age, and the Modern Age. Secondly, he deliberately sets out to reject all historicist notions of historical change based on continuity: such as cause, influence, tradition, development, evolution, origins and teleology, "Mentality" or "Spirit of the Age". Thirdly, he questions traditional ways of organising texts into disciplines (such as medicine or psychology) or according to authors, works or

31. Foucault, "Foucault répond à Sartre", p.21. cf. a comment by Michel de Certeau: "The past is primarily a means of representing a difference. The historical operation consists in ordering data according to a present law which can be distinguished from its "Other" (the past), and in distancing oneself from an acquired situation, thus marking by a discourse, the effective change which allowed this distancing." "L'opération historique", p.33.

32. Jacques Léonard remarks: "Foucault's originality consists in his refusal at any price of the Hegelian totalising view, which integrates opposites and provides a positive justification for everything that has happened up till now". Jacques Léonard, "L'historien et le philosophe. A propos de Surveiller et punir: La naissance de la prison", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle et débat avec Michel Foucault, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.26.

entities such as the "great man", the "genius" and so on.³³ All of these notions imply essences such as a unifying or unchanging subject of history, or unities of "truth" (clinical medicine has always existed, even if previous ages were too ignorant to be aware of it (NC:53-54)). Once all these unities have been dissolved (if this is ever possible in reality) one can draw out different relations and patterns, discover different lines of "rupture", unity or change in our past. Later in Foucault's career, during the 1970s, discontinuity came to serve as a methodological basis for his political theories (strategies of power and resistance, the "specific" versus the "universal" intellectual, "local" struggles versus The Revolution).

The same rejection of a certain type of history, a rejection which was often characterised as anti-history, is also to be found in quite a number of the writings of the "structuralist" school during the 1960's. Even the Annales school of historians who had quietly begun to investigate "structures" before the general rush, were accused of writing a kind of anti-history.³⁴

33. See AS pp.31-43, chapter titled "Les unités du discours", for a detailed analysis and rejection of these categories. See also Foucault, "Réponse à une question", pp.851-53; and Foucault, "La situation de Cuvier dans l'histoire de la biologie", Revue d'histoire des sciences et de leurs applications 23 (1970), p.88.

34. André Burguière comments in 1971 that "structural analysis" had long been familiar to historians and that the "previous life of structuralism was part of the history of the Annales school". "Histoire et structure", Annales: E.S.C. 26, no.3 (May 1971), p.II. For a discussion of some of these criticisms see Georg G. Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), pp.68-72.

The historians however, as we have seen, took up Foucault's work with enthusiasm, for they recognized in it a way of salvaging history from the general attack on their discipline and elevating it once again, in renovated form, to its former position as queen of the human sciences. The anti-historicists of the 1960's, Foucault, the structuralists and the Annales school thus sought to eliminate a kind of history that tended to adopt the "legislative and critical power of philosophy".³⁵ However in so doing, they in fact reinforced history's philosophical pretensions, but in a form more acceptable to today's tastes and requirements. Indeed history and philosophy have become far more closely related than they ever were.

Although Foucault's anti-historicist history differs from that of traditional historians in quite a number of respects, it must be noted, as he himself makes clear, that he is continuing historiographical work begun by the Annales school of historians, by historians of science such as Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, and by the historian of comparative religion and myths, Georges Dumézil.³⁶ He says: "I am not all sure that I have invented a new method ... what I am doing is not so different from many other contemporary American, English, French

35. "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault", p.205.

36. Ibid., pp.189-191; "Foucault répond à Sartre", pp.21-22; AS pp.225-27,265.

and German endeavours. I claim no originality".³⁷ Foucault is perhaps being unduly modest here, but his work has certainly had the advantage of drawing attention to these hitherto unjustly neglected intellectual enterprises.³⁸ In addition, Foucault has made a considerable contribution of his own in developing certain historiographical ideas, and such has been his influence, as well as his ability to anticipate trends, that in recent years historians have been starting to adopt those very procedures that previously distinguished his work from their own.³⁹ Thus most of Foucault's "innovations" are now to be found in varying proportions in the work of the new generation of *Annales* historians, writing what Jacques Le Goff calls "the new history".⁴⁰

However, Foucault's choice of history, particularly in its Nietzschean form of genealogy, is not simply a philosophical

37. "A conversation with M. Foucault," Partisan Review 28, no.2 (1971), interview with John K. Simon, p.192; cf. "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault", pp.190-91; the introduction to L'archéologie du savoir; "Réponse à une question", pp.857, 860.

38. Paul Veyne, the *Annales* historian, remarks that if initially he thought that "Foucault was simply a philosopher who had discovered our ideal and realised it with more talent than others, and that was all", it was not until later that he "understood the vaster nature of the enterprise". "La fin de vingt-cinq siècles de métaphysique", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.11.

39. One would perhaps not go so far as Lawrence Stone, who remarks "Foucault's work has had an enormous and disturbing influence upon traditional views of recent Western history ... It is he who has set the agenda for the last fifteen years of research". "Madness", The New York Review of Books, 16 December 1982, p.29.

40. See Jacques Le Goff, "L'histoire nouvelle", in La nouvelle histoire, ed. J. Le Goff, Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne (Paris: CEPL, 1978), pp.210-241.

one. It is an ethical or moral one, in keeping with the Nietzschean critique of values and morals.⁴¹ He hopes to do away with the idea of "eternal truths" and with a certain form of calm self righteous morality. As Foucault says late in his career, "the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves [is the] historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings".⁴² What Foucault means in this rather difficult statement is that by studying history we can see the limits within which men of past ages thought and acted, as well as the slow formation of ideas, objects and sensibilities that we currently take for granted and which appear to have existed from all time. As Paul Veyne remarks in a discussion about Foucault's work:

"It is certainly a curious thing, quite worthy of intriguing a philosopher, this capacity that men have for being unaware of their limits, their rarity, for not seeing that there is emptiness around them, for believing every time that they are comfortably established in the plenitude of reason".⁴³

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41. By "ethical" and "moral", is meant: (1) ethics: "the part of philosophy which studies and defines the rules and imperatives which should guide human conduct". Logos, Grand dictionnaire de la langue française, (Paris: Bordas, 1976), (2) morals: "of or pertaining to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, volitions or character of responsible beings", The Oxford English dictionary, (3) ethics: "theoretical study dealing with the normative consequences, the ends and principles of human action", Grande Larousse de la langue française, (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1975).
42. "What is Enlightenment?", p.47.
43. Paul Veyne, Comment on écrit l'histoire suivi de Foucault révolutionne l'histoire (Paris: Seuil, 1971,1978), p.216.

People have not always thought the same way throughout history, Foucault argues, and if certain institutions and ways of thought and values have changed, it is not through some form of historical necessity, but through the far more haphazard channels of human ambition, blunder, and any number of historical accidents. The aim of Foucault's history is to show that our present is not the result of some inevitable historical necessity.⁴⁴ In studying history and historical limits, we can reflect upon our own limits and try to move beyond them.⁴⁵ The knowledge of their existence means we are less determined by them, and can try to devise ways of thinking something else.⁴⁶ As Foucault says, "It is a question, basically, of presenting a

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44. Foucault, "La poussière et le nuage suivi d'un débat avec Michel Foucault: Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot, p.44. Or as Foucault puts it in "Theatrum philosophicum", Critique no.282 (November 1970), p.906: "In its fracture, in its repetition, the present is a throw of the dice", cf. p.895. In 1970, Foucault seems to have developed quite an enthusiasm for describing history as the result of "a throw of the dice". Cf. "Croître et multiplier", Le monde, 15 November 1970, p.13 and; "7 propos sur le 7^e ange", Preface to La grammaire logique. La science de Dieu (Paris: Tchou, 1970), p.x.
45. "Foucault ... is writing a history of the present in order to make that present into a past. Writing from the brink of a dramatic shift in the structures of our experience is essential to Foucault's task because this enables him to conceive of the present as that which is itself almost history". Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present' ", p.44, cf. p.35.
46. Foucault explains in L'usage des plaisirs that his histories were written in an effort to examine how far thought could be liberated from "what it silently thinks and allowed to think otherwise", p.15. As he remarks elsewhere he wanted to "produce a shift in thought so that things can really change". Serge July, "Le démineur des lendemains", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.3.

critique of our own time, based upon retrospective analyses".⁴⁷ Thus in exposing the not always "respectable" historical origins of institutions such as asylums and prisons, and of disciplines such as the human sciences, or of attitudes towards sexuality, Foucault hopes to shock people out of their complacency, thereby provoking them into changing systems, institutions, and ways of thinking.⁴⁸

If a certain emphasis has been placed up till this point on the logical coherence of Foucault's overall project as a philosophy, history and ethics of the limits, it is now time to draw attention to the apparent contradictions in the realisation of that project, contradictions that have provided endless fuel for discussion in the secondary literature. If Foucault started with histories which ignored the subject, individual choice and the ethical reflection that informed these choices, in 1984 he admits that he had to resort to "slightly rhetorical" methods to exclude this dimension.⁴⁹ Nonetheless this level

47. "A conversation with M. Foucault", p.192.

48. This aim of Foucault's history seems to be particularly popular with a number of recent English speaking commentators, due, no doubt, to the fact that it casts a revolutionary aura around the foucauldian historian or genealogist. He becomes, as a result, the author of "radical critiques", or damning indictments of the current status quo.

49. Foucault, "Le retour de la morale", p.38. In reference to these rhetorical methods, Fons Elders adding his own rhetorical exaggeration, considers that Foucault's "style conjures up images of a general of the Ming dynasty or a Count Dracula. He likes to reject any expression of emotion". "Postscript", in Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), p.288.

always existed at an implicit level in Foucault's work. As a study of the collective results of individual behaviour, Foucault's histories finally have implications for the study of individual subjectivity. Related to this subjective dimension is the question of freedom and limits. In the 1960s Foucault declared (no doubt to distinguish his position from Sartre's) that "man does not start with freedom but with the limit, the line of the uncrossable".⁵⁰ During this period, although Foucault rarely, if ever, mentioned the word freedom, associated as it was with Sartrian and existentialist thought, ultimately the end result of his argument is that our freedom is exercised by being aware of, and crossing the limits. If limits restrict our freedom, the transgression of limits is an expression of our freedom. It is this interest in limits (and history) that distinguishes Foucault's ideas from those of Sartre. Peter Kemp, however, braving the wrath of Foucault supporters, "even venture[s] to assert that this philosophy has secret roots in Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist claims about subjectivity and freedom, as well as in the ethical claims of another French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, about the Other and the Different".⁵¹ If the resemblances between the work of Sartre

50. "La folie l'absence de l'oeuvre", in HF (1972), p.578. An early critic of Foucault observes, "it is unrealistic and comical to be always wanting to clash swords with Sartre in order to form a personal system of thought. It is quite possible to advance an original philosophy without claiming to come from nowhere". Robert Misrahi, "Le rêve et l'existence selon M. Binswanger", Revue de métaphysique et de morale 64, no.1 (1959), p.104.

51. Peter Kemp, "Review of Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics by H.L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow", History and Theory 23, no.1 (1984), p.85.

and Foucault are in fact more tenuous than Kemp suggests,⁵² there are certainly a number of similarities between the thought of Lévinas and Foucault although it is more a question of parallel researches than "roots".

In the work he produced up until 1966, there was an insistent emphasis on the existence of a rather mysterious confrontation or dialogue between the Same and the Other in history.⁵³ But at the same time, Foucault was unable to decide at which point, at which limit, this confrontation emerged most clearly. In Histoire de la folie he was convinced it was madness, in Naissance de la clinique, it was death and in Les mots et les choses, it was the "being of language". In addition to this interest in the outer limits, Foucault was also interested in the way the Same was ordered. Hence we find two parallel discussions in this work, one concerning historical structures or patterns of intelligibility, and the other concerning the limits of that order. But after Les mots et les choses, perhaps disappointed with his inability to define the limits once and for all, Foucault abandoned his enthusiastic search in this direction and

52. Foucault argues, for example, in a discussion concerning his notion of "subjectivity", that unlike Sartre he does not think a subject or self can be either "authentic" or "inauthentic". The only logical consequence of the idea that the self is not given to us is that "we have to create ourselves as a work of art". "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.351.

53. Jean-Marie Domenach observes the "outline of a cosmic dialogue" in Foucault's work. "Une nouvelle passion", Le nouvel observateur, 20 July 1966, p.77.

tried to concentrate his energies on the description of the order of the Same, at the same time feeling obliged to relocate the "Other" within the "time of our own thought" (AS:21).

It is this abandonment of the limits which marks the beginnings of a profound change in Foucault's work. Much has been made of a change that occurs in his work in about 1970, so much so in fact, that recently some critics have begun to express their exasperation as this "conventional wisdom".⁵⁴ There are good reasons however to retain the idea that there is a difference that occurs roughly around 1970 in Foucault's work, even if not for the usual reasons put forward. These reasons generally relate to Foucault's "discovery of politics" after May 1968 - an impression fostered by Foucault himself⁵⁵ - and the introduction of Nietzschean genealogies of the workings of power into his analysis.⁵⁶ L'ordre du discours, which Foucault

54. Jeffrey Minson, Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.114.

55. Foucault claims that it was not possible to "pose the problem of power" before 1968, in an interview titled "Verité et pouvoir", L'arc (1977), interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, p.19, trans. as "Truth and Power", in Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy, eds. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral, 1979), p.34.

56. Edward Said, for example, posits a "major shift" in Foucault's work in 1968, a change which consists in "reconceiving the problem of language not in an ontological but in a political or ethical framework, the Nietzschean framework". "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions", Critical Inquiry 4, no.4 (1978), p.708. Colin Gordon locates a development from the rules of discourse to a discursive "police" in L'ordre du discours. "The Birth of the Subject", Radical Philosophy, no.17 (1977), p.15.

himself describes as a work he wrote at a "time of transition" is usually taken to be the key turning point in this process.⁵⁷ But in fact the beginnings of a "change" occur far earlier - in 1966 - and concern the rejection of the exterior limits rather than the adoption of power.

During the 1970s, Foucault gradually constructed a vision of society and history in which the Same and the Other were totally coextensive and indeed interchangeable, inextricably bound together in their movement, locked in a life and death struggle which had no end, and no meaning but its own inevitability. No dialogue was possible in this world, and even this hopeless contest was doomed to annihilation: "A day will dawn when all that disparity finds itself effaced. The power which will come to be exercised at the level of everyday life ... will be made up of a fine, differentiated, continuous network".⁵⁸ To put it another way, the "Other" would be totally controlled or dominated by the Same in the infinite reproduction of a power so finely differentiated that we would no longer be aware of the Other.

During this period which lasted until about 1982, Foucault's work abounded with images of struggle, fragmentation and isolation, which at the same time existed paradoxically within a totalising system. This was because although the Other was not reduced to the Same, as is the case with the Hegelian dialectic,

57. "Interview with Lucette Finas", in Michel Foucault. eds. Morris and Patton, p.67.

58. "Power and Norm: Notes", in *ibid.*, pp.88-99.

it was totally coextensive with the Same.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, Foucault was manifestly uneasy about this marvellously logical and watertight view of modern society he had constructed, and invited people to select any ideas they found useful in his books in order to smash systems of power, including his own books if necessary.⁶⁰ He also repeatedly insisted that history was not determined, that transcendental unities should be done away with and that we should be aware of the historical origins of ideas or institutions we thought eternal. Unfortunately these exhortations, although met with enthusiasm, were merely to become items for dogmatic repetition by Foucault's followers.

However, the logic became a little less implacable in Foucault's work of the 1980s, and he became less reluctant to use the word "freedom", or to openly declare that individual human beings do have a certain liberty of action. He also came to the conclusion that we will never have "any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits ... we are

59. In an interesting discussion on the "event", Foucault criticises the dialectical approach to history because it "does not liberate the different; on the contrary, it guarantees that it is always recuperated. The dialectical supremacy of the Same allows it to exist, but only according to the law of negation, as the moment of non-being. You think that you are seeing the subversion of the Other declaring itself, but in secret, contradiction is working for the salvation of the identical". Foucault, "Theatrum philosophicum", p.899. Ultimately, this criticism also applies to an approach which sees the Same and the Other as coextensive.

60. "Des supplices aux cellules", Le monde, 21 February 1975, p.16. Jean Baudrillard comments: "The very perfection of this analytical chronical of power is worrying" and describes Foucault's writing as "too beautiful to be true". Oublier Foucault (Paris: Galilée, 1972), p.12.

always in the position of beginning again".⁶¹ New objects are constantly emerging in history and it is only too easy to assume that these objects have existed from all time, and have been true for all men (even if they remained in ignorance of them). The struggle to understand our historical limits is an ongoing and difficult one, but necessary if we are not to fall into the traps of complacency and self assured intolerance.

"The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly as a theory, a doctrine, not even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them".⁶²

Generally, three points can be made concerning these developments in Foucault's work: first of all, the relationship of the Same and the Other changes: from one that is to be found at the limits of history (a history which also possesses its own order), to a relationship situated within the order of history itself, then finally to a relation to be found at the personal as "subjective" level. Secondly, different historical points of contact between the Same and the Other such as madness, death, language, penalty and sexuality assume varying amounts of importance at different stages of Foucault's career. Thirdly, the construction of certain historical objects, such as the human sciences and the individual, are constantly reformulated in terms of Foucault's changing views on the limits.

61. "What is Enlightenment?", p.47.

62. Ibid., p.50.

These complexities have provoked an enormous amount of discussion, not only because they constitute internal variations and contradictions within Foucault's own work, but because they reflect and crystallise wider preoccupations within contemporary society. These preoccupations concern the question of how far a person is determined by his historical, biological and cultural situation, and how far he may escape the range of determinations weighing down upon him. It is also a discussion about the relative merits of a world view based on ahistorical essences and continuity and a world view firmly grounded in history, in limits, difference and discontinuity - a philosophy that is a history. In short, we are dealing with a debate about our modernity and the best method of thinking it through and creating a new basis for action. As Philippe Ariès notes, historian and public alike, are caught in a sort of a dialectic of the present and the past in a quest to understand our modernity - a modernity which is no longer "a kind of ideal aim" as it may once have been, but an urgent problem that needs to be thought through now.⁶³

63. Raymond Bellour and Philippe Venault, directors, "L'histoire une passion nouvelle: table ronde avec Philippe Ariès, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paul Veyne", Magazine littéraire 123 (1977), p.17. Also on the question of "modernity" and that eternity which is the present moment, see Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", pp.39-42.

CHAPTER FOUR

CREATOR OR DESTROYER OF SYSTEMS?

In Chapter Two, we examined the debate over Foucault's disciplinary classification: whether he was a historian or a philosopher. In this chapter, we will pursue this debate onto slightly more complex terrain, in the light of our remarks about Foucault's general "project", and its modifications over time. The question here concerns whether Foucault's works constitute a philosophical "system", a general and universal view of the world, its reality and history, or a destruction of systems, a series of diverse "histories" - isolated "theories" - to be used as "tools" only in very specific historical situations.

Again, Philippe Ariès draws attention to the ambiguous point of junction between these two poles in Foucault's work. He remarks :

"The empiricism of historians has allowed this philosopher, who has truly remained a philosopher, to escape from the univocal character of systems (and perhaps from philosophies?) and to grasp the extraordinary diversity of human strategies, the profound meaning of that irreducible diversity".¹

1. Philippe Ariès, "L'histoire des mentalités", in La nouvelle histoire, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne (Paris: CEPL, 1978), p.412.

Let us begin by summarising some of the major differences between the debate in French and English. With the publication of Les mots et les choses in 1966, there was a tremendous amount of criticism in French about Foucault's "system", and the bleak impersonality of his writings. But these critics did not mean, as did later many English speaking writers, that Foucault was not an empiricist, but rather that he was not an existentialist, Marxist or personalist. During the 1970s with the return of the political obsession, Foucault's "anti-systematic" stance as a mode of politico-intellectual activism attracted much interest. Nonetheless, Foucault's "theoretical tool-box" was often described as his "system" in discussions of his work.²

The preoccupations of English language writers, however, are somewhat different. In particular, the debate over whether Foucault's work is a system or a "tool-box" is one that has assumed a major importance in the last few years. Indeed, many recent English language writers on Foucault open by describing either Foucault's books, their own book, or both, as "tool-boxes".³ This overwhelming interest in tool-boxes is not simply because a number of writers wish to adopt a certain

2. See for example Bernard-Henri Lévy, "Le système Foucault, Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.9.

3. In the introduction to a published collection of working papers, George Alexander describes the collection as a "tool-box". "Introduction: On Editorial Strategies", in Language, Sexuality and Subversion, eds. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (Sydney: Feral, 1978), p.20. See also the title of Michael Clark's book: Michel Foucault: An Annotated Bibliography. Tool Kit for a New Age (New York: Garland, 1983); cf. Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel Foucault (Hampshire, Macmillan, 1983), p.1 and; Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault, The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1981), p.1.

political stance concerning the role of the intellectual, as might appear at first glance. It is also a matter of that well-known and well-worn cliché of Anglo-Saxon thought: empiricism. As one writer says, for the Anglo-Saxons, "no theory is better than a poor one, while [for the French], a poor theory is better than none at all".⁴ For all their scorn of "traditional" Anglo-Saxon intellectual practice, the English speaking supporters of the "tool-box" method are, in many cases, only supporting a new, and perhaps more insidious, version of the empiricist dream of a theory and ideology free approach to the real. These ardent advocates of Foucault's lack of system paradoxically built his thought into an all explaining structure that can be applied to any situation and thus open our eyes to its stark and sordid reality. But before we launch into a more extended examination of this type of criticism, let us begin with Foucault's early French critics.

If there were relatively few English speaking criticisms of Foucault's work in the 1960s, there were a large number of French critics who saw Foucault's work as an inhuman "system", laying the foundations for a bleak and mechanical technocracy, perpetuated only by the sheer inertia of system and anonymous predetermined rules.⁵ These kinds of remarks, of course, are

4. Paul Jorion, "Letter: 'Le regard éloigné'", Times Literary Supplement, 4 May 1984, pp.495-96; or as one critic comments after complaining about Foucault's obscure and abstract methodological discussions: "To the empirical English, the proof of the methodology is in the reading". Ronald Hayman, "Cartography of Discourse? On Foucault", Encounter 47 (December 1976), p.74.

5. As Donald J. McDonnell points out, Foucault was seen as a member of "a new generation of thinkers ... whose passion was not for 'meaning', 'man' and 'commitment' but for 'concept and the system'". "On Foucault's Philosophical Method", Canadian Journal of Philosophy 7, no.3 (1977), p.537.

different from those which describe Foucault's work as being in itself a total system of explanation, but in practice the two discussions often overlap. The espousal of "system", implies in itself a "systematic" approach to the world. The passion for "system", according to these critics, eliminated history, fragmenting its continuity, and ordering its human disorders into impersonal and abstract structures. It was a type of thought which was not only "totalitarian" and "dogmatic" but was also "violent" and "terrorist". "Foucault does not escape from the violence of the system", says one critic dramatically, "his 'passion for the concept' bears a strong resemblance at certain moments to an intellectual 'terrorism'".⁶ It was also quite evident to other commentators that Foucault and the whole of the anti-psychiatric movement in his wake were possessed of a "systematic and theoretical spirit ..., a demagogic tendency to flatter the masses by systematic criticism and scandal".⁷ Worse still, Foucault's work represented a nihilistic and systematic attack on reason. Of Les mots et les choses, Revault d'Allonnes declares dramatically: "Reason is in danger ... That a cascade of 500 pages of reasoned errors could move an intellectual world, ... that this 'trendy' philosophy could be

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6. B. Lemaigre, "Michel Foucault ou les malheurs de la raison et les prospérités du langage", Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 51 (July 1967), p.453; for another reference to Foucault's intellectual terrorism see Emmanuel Todd, Le fou et le prolétaire (Paris: Laffont, 1979), p.140; for a description of Foucault's work as "totalitarian", see J. Proust, dir., "Entretiens sur Foucault", La Pensée, no.137 (February 1969), p.13.
7. Henri Baruk, "Réflexions sur l'antipsychiatrie", Revue internationale de philosophie 32, no.123 (1978), p.30. From the date of this remark, one can see that, in some cases, these views of Foucault's early work persisted to a late date.

the object of a veritable intellectual dictatorship, is all that we need to complete the picture of Ubu's kingdom".⁸ To add to this accumulation of negative attributes, Foucault's system was "inhuman" and "technocratic",⁹ a nihilistic "ideology of despair",¹⁰ a parched and silent desert. The psychiatrist Henri Sztulman describes his work as "desert-like ..., all subjectivity, all humanism are rejected, indeed despised. No human cry is heard the length of these thousands of pages, in the closed and sterile world of disincarnated thought in which Michel Foucault moves".¹¹ "The itinerary is arid and the countryside which surrounds it is desolate: man has disappeared",¹² remarks another critic. But then finally we come to the real

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8. Olivier Revault d'Allonnes, "Michel Foucault: les mots contre les choses", Raison présente 2 (1967), p.14; cf. Gérard Mendel, La révolte contre le père: une introduction à la sociopsychanalyse (Paris: Payot, 1969), p.329.
 9. Jeannette Colombel, "Les mots de Foucault et les choses", La nouvelle critique : Revue de marxisme (May 1967), p.8. Jean-Marie Auzias defends Foucault against Revault d'Allonnes' remark that Foucault's "epistemological space" is that of the "technocrat's desk and office (bureau)", suggesting that no doubt Revault d'Allonnes "writes on his knees or amongst the workers at the Renault factory". Jean-Marie Auzias, Clefs pour le structuralisme, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seghers, 1967), p.144.
 10. Colombel, "Les mots de Foucault", p.13; cf. Mendel, La révolte contre le père, p.328. Mendel also describes Foucault's book as a "psychotic" and irrational negation of reality, pp.289,361.
 11. Henri Sztulman, "Folie ou maladie mentale? Etude critique psychopathologique des conceptions de Michel Foucault", Evolution psychiatrique: cahiers de psychologie clinique et psychopathologie générale 36, no.2 (1971) p.277.
 12. Jean-Luc Chalumeau, La pensée en France de Sartre à Foucault (Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1974), p.61; cf. Jean Claude Margolin who describes Foucault's prose as "inhuman". "Tribut d'un antihumaniste aux études d'humanisme et de renaissance: note sur l'oeuvre de Michel Foucault", Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance 29 (1967), pp.702,703.

point of all these discussions which is that Foucault wanted nothing better than to deny and destroy all that had gone before and construct his own "system" of thought. Thus, if Foucault destroyed previous "systems", it was only in order to set up a bigger and better, and much more systematic "system".

"What Foucault has to offer is ... a system with its grandeur and its constraints" comments one writer.¹³ And Jean-Claude Margolin considers that Foucault displays "the typically philosophical need to systematise still further and to raise pure ideas to the heights of abstraction, bending facts and books to fit in with the organisation of his own personal problematic".¹⁴ In a similar vein, Roger Garaudy describes Foucault's thought as an "abstract and doctrinary structuralism", which excludes everything that cannot be integrated into the system.¹⁵ One critic claimed, rather extravagantly, in 1966 that he saw Les mots et les choses as the beginning of a movement of "a kind of atheistic teilhardism or rather the foundation of a neoprimitive religion."¹⁶ Another critic accused Foucault of

13. Jean d'Ormesson, "Passage de l'homme on les avatars du savoir", Nouvelle revue française 15, no. 171 (1967), p.488.

14. Margolin, "Tribut d'un antihumaniste", p.703; see also Mohamed El Kordi, "L'archéologie de la pensée classique selon Michel Foucault", Revue de l'histoire économique et sociale 51 (1973), pp.334-35.

15. Roger Garaudy, Perspectives de l'homme: existentialisme, pensée catholique, structuralisme, marxisme, 4th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), p.244, cf. p.250. See also J.M. Pelorson who describes Les mots et les choses as "dogmatic". "Michel Foucault et l'Espagne", La Pensée, no.152 (August 1970), p.99.

16. Robert Kanters, "Tu causes, tu causes, est-ce tout ce que tu sais faire?", Figaro littéraire, 23 June 1966, p.5.

creating an "imperialist" and "neopositivist" system which sought to explain reality while entirely ignoring the "dignity of man" and the "reality of our spiritual existence".¹⁷ Sartre spoke of Foucault's thought as being an "eclectic synthesis" and criticised him for trying to constitute "a new ideology, the last rampart that the bourgeoisie can still erect against Marx".¹⁸ Of course, Sartre's pronouncements caused a considerable stir, since Foucault was generally seen to be the most likely candidate to succeed him as the star philosopher in France. A host of critics (especially Marxist critics) rushed forward to repeat Sartre's remarks in order to give the weight of authority to their own arguments.¹⁹ Other critics, such as Jean-Marie Domenach, also taxed Foucault's "system" with a political nihilism or quietism: "one waits with interest to see how, without a subject and without values, the enthusiasts of systems can call on the present system to become a liberating society". He also concludes that Foucault's "provocative" interview with La

17. Lemaigre, "Michel Foucault", pp.458,457.

18. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre répond", La quinzaine littéraire, 15 October 1966, p.4. Michel Foucault expressed some amusement at Sartre's description because, as he points out, Sartre was himself defined by the Communists during the 1950s as the "last rampart of bourgeois imperialism". "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, p.21.

19. See, for example, comments by Pierre-Henri Simon, "Actif et passif de l'année 1966", Le monde, 28 December 1966, pp.10-11.

quinzaine littéraire "rings like the manifesto of a new school".²⁰

Further, Foucault's "system", his interest in structures and discontinuities, was seen as an attempt to "fix the past", kill history, to write an "anti-history". It was obvious to many writers that Foucault "despised history and its continuity",²¹ and that he and other "structuralists" saw history as "destructive and traumatising".²² The modern thought of rupture is a thought that "dreams of terror and the absolute", declares Jacques d'Hondt in apocalyptic tones. He continues:

"Does there exist a social class for whom, as far as we can predict, there exists no future and who are in danger of having no descendents? ... Is not the theory of radical rupture the conceptualisation of the absence of any way out, illusively projected into the past? It would then easily seduce the worried bourgeois youth".²³

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20. Jean-Marie Domenach, "Une nouvelle passion", Le nouvel observateur, 20 July 1966, p.26; cf. Domenach, "Le système et la personne", Esprit 5 (1967), pp.772,774,775; Domenach, Enquête sur les idées contemporaines (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp.19-20. Domenach is referring to Foucault's interview with Madeleine Chapsal in La quinzaine littéraire, 15 May 1966, pp.14-15. In spite of Domenach's critical remarks he was always an enthusiastic supporter of Foucault's work. Indeed Domenach, Foucault and Claude Mauriac set up the Groupe d'information sur les prisons, see Domenach, "Un engagement sans prétention, ni manipulation", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.9; cf. Henri Lefebvre's remarks about "The System" and structuralism cited in Karlis Racevskis, Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp.142-3; on Foucault's "passion for the system", see Mikel Dufrenne, Pour l'homme (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p.37.
21. Pierre Burgelin, "L'archéologie du savoir", Esprit 35 (May 1967), p.856.
22. Domenach, "Le système et la personne", p.775. "History is burned as it was adored", he remarks further, p.774.
23. Jacques d'Hondt, "L'idéologie de la rupture", Revue de théologie et de philosophie 21, no.4 (1971), pp.255,260; cf. Jacques Milhau, "Les mots et les choses", Cahiers du communisme, no.2 (1968), p.67.

Again, it was Sartre's comments which gained the most credence on this subject. He described Foucault's work as being an attack on history, replacing "cinema by the magic lantern, movement by a succession of immobilities", adding that this attack on history is, "of course", an attack on Marxism.²⁴ Summing up Foucault's crimes, another critic indignantly notes that Foucault "totally rejects Marxism" and "proclaims the death of man and the end of History".²⁵ There were a few critics, however, who seemed pleased that Foucault had put an end to history. In 1961, long before "structuralism" had become a popular movement, Michel Serres remarks: "Archaeology is the end of history ... the end of time and the installation of spaces, the suspension of geneses and the flourishing of systems, goal, limit, vanishing, the death of history as a science and as the science of the human sciences".²⁶

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24. Sartre, "Sartre répond", p.4. Foucault replied to some of these criticisms in "Foucault répond à Sartre", pp.20-22. In L'archéologie du savoir, in a footnote about "tableaux" a word which can be translated into English as tables, tableaux or paintings (amongst other things), Foucault remarks: "Is it necessary to point out to the last dawdlers, that a "tableau" (probably in every sense of the word) is formally a "series of series"? In any case, it is not a little fixed image which is placed in front of a lantern to the great disappointment of children, who at their age, of course, prefer the vivacity of cinema", p.19. This footnote is not included in the English translation. Perhaps the translator thought in 1972, that the allusion to Sartre's criticism was too obscure for the English reader.
25. Jean-François Kahn, "La minutieuse conquête du structuralisme", L'Express, 21 August 1967, p.41.
26. Michel Serres, Hermès I: La communication (Paris: Minuit, 1968), p.200.

Foucault certainly had his defenders, and not all the critics cited above totally rejected his ideas, but it is more than clear that his writings had touched on a nerve, which as it has often been remarked, united the warring forces of existentialism, personalism and Marxism to deal with the threat his work represented.²⁷ In describing his work as systematic or "abstract", French critics were not opposing it to a "more solid", empiricist approach, as were numerous Anglo-Saxon critics when they described his work as too "general" or "abstract". Rather they were protesting against what they saw as the denial of humanist values by the technological and bureaucratic development of society, by the invasion of "system", they felt that Foucault's work represented.

Foucault, it seems, was initially undismayed by this barrage of criticism and boldly defended his views in an interview with Madeleine Chapsal in 1966. In this interview, which does indeed read like the manifesto of a new school as Jean-Marie Domenach suggests, Foucault takes his critics to task on behalf of a young

27. For some of these defences see Auzias, Clefs pour le structuralisme, p.140; Georges Canguilhem, "Mort de l'homme ou épuisement du cogito?", Critique 24 (1967), pp.599-618. In the mid 1970s, Bernard-Henri Lévy politicises the question: "the denunciation of his method as "fixist" and immobilist ... As if they were trying as hard as they could to forget the essential question: that it is traditional history, the history of continuity and the subject, which long ago proved its political impotence". "Le système Foucault", p.8.

generation of thinkers who had begun to write in the late 1950s and 1960s. In this interview, he describes their passion for "the system", which he defines as a "group of relations which is maintained and transformed independently of the things it binds", a "theoretical structure" which is also "anonymous" and governs thought and behaviour in any given age. Humanism, he continues, "pretends to resolve problems it cannot pose!", problems such as happiness, artistic creation, reality and the relation of man to his world, and "all those obsessions which are absolutely unworthy of being theoretical problems".²⁸ But all is not lost, as Foucault declares that "our system" will have nothing to do with these unworthy obsessions: "it is humanism that is abstract!" he protests, "it is the 'human heart' which is abstract, and it is our research which wants to link man to his science, to his discoveries, to his world, which is concrete".²⁹ Needless to say, any existentialist, humanist or Marxist who had not been enraged by the more cautious claims of Les mots et les choses, found all their worst suspicions confirmed after reading this interview.

In English, even if the words "anti-history" or "system" were used in relation to Foucault's work, the terms of the discussion were quite different. Some of Foucault's more recent English language critics have, in fact, referred to the earlier French

28. Foucault is perhaps being a little extreme here, as he has in fact, spent a good deal of time and paper discussing the last two problems in one form or another.

29. "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", pp.14-15.

controversies with self righteous disapproval.³⁰ When critiques of Foucault's work first began to appear in English, mainly in the early 1970s, there were a great number of complaints that Foucault's ideas were too "all explaining", that he ignored "facts" and that he was too concerned with "poetry". One can still find remarks like these in more recent literature, but not as frequently. David Rothman describes Histoire de la folie as both too general and too rigid: "The explanation ... is so caught up with ideas that their base in events is practically forgotten".³¹ Foucault's "claims are all of such generality that it is impossible to inquire as to their range of validity or usefulness".³² Edith Kurzweil comments that "his system, like his mind, is a catch all, a sponge that absorbs whatever it comes in contact with, only to inflate his theory".³³ One critic contrasts Foucault's "system" with empirical sociology, saying

30. Karlis Racevskis notes: "Early misconceptions about Foucault concerned his supposed ahistoric or antihistorical stance". Michel Foucault, p.75. "It seems that the time when structuralism was perceived as 'anti-historical' has passed", remarks another critic more neutrally. Jean Carduner, "What is Going On in French Literary History?", Modern Language Journal 61 (1977), p.161.

31. David J. Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum : Social Orders and Disorder in the New Republic (Boston : Little and Brown, 1971), p.xviii.

32. Raymond Boudon, "For a Positive Epistemology", in French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal Since 1968, ed. Charles C. Lemert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p.59; see also Maurice Cranston, "Men and Ideas: Michel Foucault", Encounter 30 June 1968, p.42.

33. Edith Kurzweil, "Law and Disorder", Partisan Review 44, no.2 (1977), p.297.

that the former "does not lend itself to verification or falsification". Indeed, in the final analysis, he claims, Foucault's writings are "nothing more than a statement of 'political beliefs', skilfully disguised behind fancy philosophical rhetoric". Only experts who understood the French intellectual scene would be able to detect this duplicity.³⁴

In a short article that appeared in the French newspaper Libération after Foucault's death, John Sturrock, Literary Editor of The Times Literary Supplement, was also at pains to emphasise what he perceived as Foucault's difference from the Anglo-Saxon intellectual tradition, commenting that in England, Foucault was seen "as a theoretician building grand edifices without much concern for the effects, or a tardy Hegelian searching for Geist, the Spirit of the Age, something which the English greatly distrust".³⁵ Another critic who describes Foucault as a structuralist, says that his "methodology is punitive: he can understand something only by locking it up, formulating a structure in which to restrain it".³⁶ Racevskis notes comments

34. Robert Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.141,177.

35. Mauriès, Patrick, "Dans les pays anglo-saxons: une influence contestée", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.5. It is obvious from Sturrock's comments that neither he, nor those he has been talking to, have read far beyond certain debates concerning the treatment of the episteme in Les mots et les choses. However, a comment by Cousins and Hussain suggests that this idea is not entirely outmoded. They argue that every now and then something like a zeitgeist appears in Foucault's work. Michel Foucault, p.105.

36. Peter Conrad, "Syntax and Sin", New Statesman, 30 March 1979, p.451; cf. a remark by Frederick Jameson to the effect that Foucault's "monolithic" thought does not allow for anything that might exist outside the system. The Political Unconscious (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp.90-92.

that Foucault's work displays "a predisposition for plenitude",³⁷ and Poster, in agreement with Michel de Certeau, notes a tendency in Surveiller et punir towards a "totalizing logic".³⁸

There are others who argue that, although Foucault might claim to be doing away with continuity, teleology, cause and effect, these notions are still in fact secretly present in his "system". "Teleology ... invades Foucault's history ... despite his contention that notions of development and morality are both to be eschewed by the 'effective historian'", says Perry Meisel. It is a "teleology" which manifests itself in a nostalgia for a past age. Meisel then goes on to criticise the "transcendental ideality of Foucault's own search for a 'typology of discourse', for something outside the game that will explain it".³⁹

Another critic argues that continuity creeps back into Foucault's work in the "intuitive dimension of the a priori which reinvents temporality".⁴⁰ Peter Dews attaches a "powerful and latent

37. Racevskis, Michel Foucault, p.83.

38. Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p.65.

39. Perry Meisel, "What Foucault Knows", Salmagundi, no.44-45 (1979), p.240. For other comments on Foucault's nostalgia for a past age, see Clifford Geertz, who describes Surveiller et punir as "the rise of Whig History in reverse ... the rise of unfreedom". "Stir Crazy", New York Review of Books, 26 January 1978, p.6; see also Peter Gay, "Chains and Couches", Commentary 40, no.4 (1965), p.96; Richard Poirier, "The Powerful Secret", New York Times Book Review, 14 January 1979, p.28.

40. Dalia Judovitz, "Review of Language, Counter-Memory, Practice", Modern Language Notes 93 (1978), p.758.

historicism" to the disappearing form of Man in Les mots et les choses.⁴¹

Other critics, however, complain that Foucault does not explain enough in his histories, that his historical method is defective. Hence he is "more successful at describing change than explaining it",⁴² and his discontinuities (often described as "transcendental") remain "unexplained".⁴³ From the dates of some of these criticisms, it can be seen that this idea is not simply restricted to Les mots et les choses. Others claim that Foucault "is obsessed with the inescapable fact of ontological discontinuity",⁴⁴ or that facts "are squeezed into a model

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41. Peter Dews, "The Nouvelle Philosophie and Foucault", Economy and Society 8, no.2 (1979), p.150.
42. Michel Ignatieff, "Anxiety and Asceticism", Times Literary Supplement, 28 September 1984, p.1072, cf.p.1071; see also Colin Lucas, "Power and the Panopticon", Times Literary Supplement, 26 September 1975, p.1090; Roger Hahn, "The Birth of the Clinic", American Journal of Sociology 80, no.6 (1975), p.1503; Michael Donnelly, "Foucault's Genealogy of the Human Sciences", Economy and Society 11, no.4 (November 1982), p.372; Karel Williams, "Unproblematic Archaeology", Economy and Society 3, no.1 (1974), p.47.
43. Peter Wright and Andrew Treacher, eds., The Problem of Medical Knowledge. Examining the Social Construction of Medicine (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), p.7. Karlis Racevskis remarks of the episteme that "it posits certain periodic totalities, supposes a structure of invisible epistemological determinisms and does not allow for effects of causality or continuity", Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.58.
44. Edward W. Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p.285. Said remarks a few years later, however, that Foucault "is right in believing that history cannot be studied exclusively as a series of violent discontinuities (produced by wars, revolutions, great men)". "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions", Critical Inquiry 4, no.4 (1978), p.711.

of brusque transformations".⁴⁵ Hayden White's early article also set the tone for many subsequent remarks concerning an "anti-history" in Foucault's work, an anti-historicist "dis-remembrance of things past".⁴⁶ In any case it was quite clear to many of these critics that, as Altieri remarks of Derrida and Foucault: "Their very insistence on creating a scandal, on destroying all that has preceded them, is strong evidence that we are dealing with a myth".⁴⁷

In French Foucault's denial of historical "explanation" not only led critics to condemn him for killing history or being a "poor historian", it also led to the accusation that he was a "desperate positivist". By "positivism", most French writers understood an anti-historical scientism, a love of facts divorced from history and humanism. Foucault is very rarely accused of

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45. Ian M. Hacking, "The Archaeology of Foucault", New York Review of Books, 14 May 1981, p.32.
46. Hayden V. White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground", History and Theory 12, no.1 (1973), pp.23-54. For comments on White's notion of "anti-history" see Michael S. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present'", History and Theory 20 (1981), p.44. See also Brian Stock, who remarks that for Foucault, the "only acceptable history is a thorough antihistory". "Literary Discourse and the Social Historian", New Literary History 8 (1977), p.183. Another critic claims that "Foucault's dismissal of the intrinsic value of the discipline of history is extreme". James A. Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written", American Historical Review 84, no.5 (1979), p.1299.
47. Charles F. Altieri, "Northrop Frye and the Problems of Spiritual Authority", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America 87, no.5 (1972), p.973. George Huppert, writing in 1974, also comments that Foucault "disregard[s] all his predecessors ... All the scholarship of the past century or two was wasted effort, for lack of the method which alone can supply the answers". "Divinatio et Eruditio: Thoughts on Foucault", History and Theory 13 (1974), p.191.

being a positivist in English.⁴⁸ In fact, quite the contrary, as we have seen. Sylvie Le Bon declares that, not only does Foucault "deny history", reducing the event to a "solitary truth ... a pure fact reduced to its positivity ... , he sacrifices his own work, preferring to expose it to death by unintelligibility rather than abandoning his positivist postulate".⁴⁹ Another critic argues that L'archéologie du savoir is basically a "formal positivism of linguistic inspiration".⁵⁰

But if Foucault was rejecting other "systems", and trying to formulate his own, even if it collapsed into a self destructive positivism, what was the new alternative he was proposing? At this point, a great number of French critics in the late 1960s and English language critics during the 1970s eagerly suggested a convenient label: "structuralism". The issue of whether Foucault is or was a structuralist, and what relationship his work bears to this disparate movement that some see as forming a distinctive philosophical system, is still being discussed.⁵¹ There

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48. The ultimate insult", as Georges Canguilhem describes it. "Mort de l'homme", p.603.
49. Sylvie Le Bon, "Un positiviste désespéré: Michel Foucault", Les temps modernes 22 (1967), pp.1311,1299.
50. El Kordi, "L'archéologie de la pensée classique", p.309; see also on Foucault and positivism, Revault d'Allonnes, "Michel Foucault", p.29; Mikel Dufrenne, "La philosophie du néopositivisme", Esprit 5 (1967), p.794; Garaudy, Perspectives de l'homme, p.245; Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre répond", p.94.
51. François Wahl remarks: "Quite frankly: when I am asked about structuralism, more often than not, I have no idea what they are talking about. A clamorous rumour has been going around amongst the frogs that gather at the swamp's edge that structuralism is a kind of philosophy; a philosophy that wants to get rid of a lot of good things, man in particular". Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme? 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1968), vol 5: Philosophie. La philosophie entre l'avant et l'après du structuralisme, p.7.

are some noticeable differences between the way this question is addressed in French and English. Again, it is a difference very similar to the one that emerges over the classification of Foucault as a historian or philosopher. If the French, are on the whole, concerned with using Foucault's work as an excuse to define structuralism, and the philosophical, epistemological and political questions it raises, the Anglo-Saxons are more interested in Foucault's classification, in finding a suitable label which will allow him to be readily identified as part of a distinguishable system of thought.

Earlier Anglo-Saxon critics tended to describe Foucault as a structuralist in order to differentiate him from that other French system of thought, existentialism.⁵² Unfortunately, the English preface to Les mots et les choses put them in somewhat of a "quandary", since in this preface Foucault insisted on depriving them of this useful label to fit his work.⁵³ As a result, the critics became divided into two camps on this issue, those who argued that Foucault's views on the matter were irrelevant, and that some, if not all, of his work was manifestly structuralist, and those who accepted Foucault's rejection of the label with an almost religious faith. "With customary perversity", argues one critic, "Foucault insists that he is not a structuralist, but the label persists, justifiably, in sticking".⁵⁴ Likewise, G.S. Rousseau insists that "although

52. See for example David Paul Funt, "The Structuralist Debate", Hudson Review 22, no.4 (1969-70), p.629.

53. Peter Caws, "Language as the Human Reality", New Republic, 27 March 1971, p.34.

54. M. Howe, "Open Up a Few Corpses", Nation, 26 January 1974, p. 118.

most of his serious readers classify him as a structuralist he continues to maintain that he is not a structuralist".⁵⁵ Hayden White also remarks that it is Foucault's interest in "defamiliarizing" the past "that permits Foucault to be classified among the structuralists, in spite of his denial of any common cause with them".⁵⁶ Later English speaking critics eagerly defended Foucault from any charge of structuralism, and for many of them, as Colin Gordon points out about two particular writers, "the very activity of 'structuralist' thinking constitute[d] a moral error".⁵⁷ For these critics, Foucault's work was "profoundly anti-structuralist", even if prior to the "structuralist era" Foucault had unwittingly used the term "structural analysis".⁵⁸ "Foucault was never a structuralist, strictly speaking, or post-structuralist", argue Dreyfus and Rabinow, but it was the sinister influence of that movement that caused him to "play ... down his interest in social institutions and concentrate ... exclusively on discourse".⁵⁹ Cousins and Hussain declare

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55. G.S. Rousseau, "Literature and Science: The State of the Field", Isis 69, no.245 (1978), p.589.
56. White, "Foucault Decoded", p.53; cf. Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis, p.140. Another critic describes Foucault as participating in the "metaphysical pathos" of structuralism even if he was in fact a "Weberian". Michael Peters, "Extended Review of Madness and Civilization and Structuralism by Jean Piaget", Sociological Review 19 (1971), pp.635,638.
57. Colin Gordon, "Diagnosis as Disease", Times Literary Supplement, 15 July 1983, p.761.
58. Sheridan, Michel Foucault, p.90.
59. Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault, pp.XX,17; cf. Poster, Foucault Marxism and History, p.9.

bluntly that Foucault's "reputation as a structuralist is a silly comedy".⁶⁰

On the other hand, French commentators in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before "structuralism" went out of fashion in Paris, were more concerned with describing first and foremost their own views on what structuralism was, than seeing how far Foucault's work could be accommodated under this label. This complex and lengthy discussion need not concern us in detail here beyond a few examples. One critic comments for instance, "If there is a "structuralism" in Foucault ... it must be understood in the light of Roman Jakobson's linguistics".⁶¹ Roland Barthes argues that Foucault's Histoire de la folie is "structural" on two counts, at the level of the analysis and that of the project,⁶² and Jean Piaget argues in his book on structuralism, that Foucault's work is not rigorous enough to be defined as a structuralism.⁶³

But what of the "old" systems Foucault attacked or was seen to be attacking in Les mots and les choses? One of them in particular, rose to the occasion, and in recent years has been

60. Cousins and Hussain, Michel Foucault, p.75.

61. Chalumeau, La pensée en France, p.49.

62. Roland Barthes, "Savoir et folie", Critique 17 (1961), p.918.

63. Jean Piaget, Le structuralisme (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p.11. See also Auzias, Clefs pour le structuralisme, p.11. Auzias noting that most so called "structuralists" strenuously reject the label, remarks "Let us say it clearly: Structuralism is Lévi-Strauss".

doing its best to accommodate and make use of those very ideas by which it had previously been so scandalised. This system is, of course, Marxism. The variety of opinion on Foucault's relation to Marxism has been immense and impassioned, and already two entire books, not to mention a large number of articles have been devoted to this subject.⁶⁴ The few remarks that Foucault has made on the subject of Marx or Marxism have been endlessly repeated and discussed from every possible angle. So much so, in fact, that Foucault was heard to say furiously to an unfortunate enquirer in 1975: "Stop asking me about Marx! I never want to hear about that gentleman again. Talk to those whose profession it is, who are paid to talk about him! As for me, I am totally finished with Marx!".⁶⁵ Again, as with the discussions on structuralism there is a difference between remarks in the French and English language literature. Most French critics tend to agree that Foucault is not a Marxist, whereas a number of English speaking critics seem to operate under the assumption that all French intellectuals entertain some necessary, even if tortured, link with this body of thought.

When Foucault's work Les mots et les choses appeared, not only were a number of Marxist writers in France annoyed that he cavalierly ignored the dialectic and "history", they were shocked by Foucault's deliberately provocative statement that Marxism had

64. See for example Barry Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History.

65. Claude Mauriac, Et comme l'espérance ..., cited in Claude Roy, "Claude Mauriac, miroir ébloui", Le nouvel observateur, 29 March 1976, p.53.

not represented a break in Western knowledge.⁶⁶ What was more, it was claimed that his studious effort to ignore Marxism condemned him to sterile description and an incomplete view of the world. Dominique Lecourt remarks, for example, that what is missing in L'archéologie du savoir, is the "class point of view", and that only by introducing class into theory and practice, will Foucault be able to pass from "ideology" to "science".⁶⁷

Another critic goes even further to claim that Foucault, by ignoring the dialectic and class struggles, reaches "the depths of epistemological and historical blindness".⁶⁸ The distance of Foucault from Marxism was emphasised by a number of writers on a number of occasions. One need not repeat Sartre's comments. In 1984, Robert Maggiori asserted that Foucault "who was not labelled as a Marxist thinker" was not taken up by the students in 1968, and remarked that he was more concerned with the "real injustices of which individuals were the victim" than with ideologies.⁶⁹ But Annie Kriegel, on the other hand, says Foucault was taken up by young people in 1968 "whose philosophical procedure was radically foreign and indifferent to

66. Le Bon, "Un positiviste désespéré", p.1319; Revault d'Allonnes, "Michel Foucault", p.41.

67. Dominique Lecourt, Pour une critique d'épistémologie: Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault (Paris: Maspero, 1972), p.133.

68. Jacques Milhau, "Les mots et les choses", p.67.

69. Robert Maggiori, "Michel Foucault: une pensée sur les chemins de traverse", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.2.

Marxian work".⁷⁰ Paul Veyne remarks that one of the surprises for the historian dealing with Foucault's philosophy is that it resembles neither Marx nor Freud.⁷¹ In addition, during the 1970s, the new philosophers eagerly seized upon Foucault's work as an anti-Marxist analysis of power.⁷² Dominique Lecourt, this time defending Foucault against the excesses of these new philosophers, noted carefully, however, that Foucault's work did not represent a "pure and simple" rejection of Marxism.⁷³ But some Marxists considered that Foucault's ideas could, in fact, make a very useful contribution to Marxist thought. Jacques Milhau in the Cahiers du communisme describes Foucault as occupying "a place in the forefront of non-marxist philosophy", and considers that his "archaeology" would be most useful for Marxists.⁷⁴

Let us now turn to some of the comments to be found in English, comments which tend to be more complex than those found

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70. Annie Kriegel, "La souffrance et l'honneur", Le monde, 26 June 1984, p.33.
71. Paul Veyne, Comment on écrit l'histoire suivi de Foucault révolutionne l'histoire (Paris: Seuil, 1978), pp.214,242.
72. See for example, Lévy, "Le système Foucault", p.7.
73. Dominique Lecourt, Dissidence ou révolution (Paris: Maspero, 1978), p.86, cf. pp.71-89.
74. Milhau, "Les mots et les choses", pp.52,60-61; Roger Garaudy also suggests that Les mots et les choses can be useful for Marxism. Perspectives de l'homme, p.244; see also Lecourt, Pour une critique d'épistémologie.

in French. Some writers argue that Foucault is either an anti-Marxist, or simply a non-Marxist, and others that even if he is not exactly a Marxist, he is Marxist in spirit, or at least almost Marxist. Still others claim that Foucault's rejection of Marx has "dangerous consequences".⁷⁵ It is claimed in one work that "Foucault has made Marx's thought his own, or at least his means of criticizing society. He is concerned with false consciousness". Later, in a desperate effort to claim Foucault as a true follower of Marx, the writers state: "If Foucault can be called a Marxist, this can be done only in the most general and idealist manner ... he avoids Marxist rhetoric, always employing Marx's own means of analysis, focussing on empirical facts".⁷⁶ Barry Smart also remarks that, although "quite substantial elements of Foucault's work are compatible with Marxist analysis", other elements are "theoretically inconsistent" with Marxism. He goes on to say that one of the most important differences between Foucault's thought and Marxist theory, is the fact that Foucault avoids "global theorising" and "totalising analysis and is generally critical of systematicity".⁷⁷ Another writer suggests that "a compelling case can be made ... which depicts Foucault as a continuation of

75. Said, "The Problem of Textuality", pp.710-11.

76. Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis, pp.136,153. Another critic claims on the contrary, that Foucault is a "disciple of Marx the rhetorician". Paul Robinson, "Review of The History of Sexuality, vol.1: An Introduction", New Republic, 28 October 1978, p.30.

77. Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique, pp.41,74.

and departure from the Marxist tradition ... The conclusion is inescapable that Foucault is continuing the work of the Western Marxists by other means".⁷⁸ He also repeats the now familiar argument, that Foucault is more materialist than Marx (because of his emphasis on "bodies"), saying that he has accomplished a "similar task to that of Marx, but without much of the accompanying metaphysical baggage".⁷⁹ Commenting on an alleged lack of interest by "the Left" in Foucault's work of the 1960s, Colin Gordon remarks "the trouble with Foucault's [early] work was that its originality was in inverse proportion to its utility for Marxism".⁸⁰ Occasionally, however, an English speaking critic will unexpectedly remark that "although Foucault is a man of the Left, he has never been associated with the sort of leftism which consists of the systematic application of Marxist or crypto-Marxist cant to historical and social problems".⁸¹

To sum up these comments, some critics try to argue that Foucault is a model philosopher who miraculously escapes from the weaknesses and the totalising dogmatism of the "system", incarnating only its best points. Hence, he is not only more "materialist" than Marx, he is also a return to a purer

78. Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History, pp.1,40, cf. p.44.

79. Ibid., pp.86-87; cf. Sheridan, Michel Foucault, p.159. For other comments on Foucault's "Marxist affinities" see Charles Lemert and G. Gillan, "The New Alternative in Critical Sociology: Foucault's Discursive Analysis", Cultural Hermeneutics 4, no.4 (1977), p.313; Mark Philp, "Notes on the Form of Knowledge in Social Work", Sociological Review 27, no.1 (1979), p.111; P. Hillyard, "Review of Discipline and Punish", Community Development Journal 14, no.2 (1979), p.64.

80. Gordon, "Afterword", in PK p.232.

81. Roger Kaplan, "Jail and Society", Commentary 65, no.5 (1978), p.83.

pre-Marxist (empirical) Marx. He also avoids the "metaphysics" and "system" associated with Marx and his followers, maintaining a constant critique of "totalities" and great truths - in other words - a sensible empiricism. Unfortunately, even if this were, in fact, an accurate description of Foucault's intentions, a pure empirical Marxism without the "system" or the philosophy would be logically impossible. For, as François Châtelet quite correctly points out, it is impossible to separate a method from its philosophical bases.⁸²

What is most interesting about these remarks, perhaps, is the authors' apparent need to make Foucault's work fit into some pre-existing system of explanation. As Jean-François Revel remarks incisively:

"The need to be grouped under an authority, so that challenging a theory, preferring one book to another, becomes not only a matter of intelligence or taste, but a serious action, to which is attached a nuance of righteousness or guilt, is a situation which leads numerous readers to infringe on the magic of an authority only on condition that they are sheltered behind another authority".⁸³

82. François Châtelet criticises those "who stake their honour on specifying 'that they are not philosophers' and that they are only retaining the method from Marxism, as if a method could be separated from its ontological and epistemological assumptions". Chronique des idées perdues (Paris: Stock, 1977), p.186.

83. Jean-François Revel, Pourquoi des philosophes? suivi de la cabale des dévots et précédé d'une étude inédite sur la philosophie depuis 1960 (Paris: Julliard, 1971), p.418. This remark can be applied to a lot of commentary on Foucault, besides the Marxist variety. In particular, one notices in English that certain of Foucault's commentators are now regarded as "authorities" on his work and their interpretations are often accepted without question. In France, the widespread repetition of Jean-Paul Sartre's comments in 1966 is perhaps the most extreme (although shortlived) example of this kind of argument by authority in relation to Foucault.

This kind of process is only too evident when it comes to some of the discussions on Foucault's relation to Marxism. Also evident in some of the remarks cited above, is a certain view of Foucault as the philosopher of difference, of all attacks on unity, totality, system, and metaphysics. A remark by Jacques d'Hondt serves as a suitable opening to the next part of our discussion: "The perspective which commands attention now, is that of dispersion: the vast world explodes into a plurality of little systems".⁸⁴

After his initial defence of the system, and after the events of May 1968, Foucault changed his mind and declared he was interested in pluralities, systems and the political. He constantly insisted on the fact that his work was not a system, that he was not "universal intellectual" revealing a truth that others should adhere to. This theme was taken up in the critical literature, especially in the English speaking world. But let us first of all look at some of the comments in French. It is interesting to note that some French critics, particularly before 1975, described Foucault's work as a system that was anti-systematic, or a system that was based on "difference". In an article titled "Le système Foucault", Bernard Henri-Lévy claims that Foucault is "one of the rare militant philosophers of today, perhaps the only one, to have produced the theory of his

84. d'Hondt, "L'idéologie de la rupture", p.258. This "plurality" in Foucault's work was often contrasted to the dialectic in the 1960s.

militantism ... the only one to have found in his system, his theoretical 'tool-box', the justification for the form of his 'engagement'".⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze argues, in a similar vein, that L'archéologie du savoir "represents the most decisive step in a theory-practice of multiplicities", and that the conclusion of this book is a call for a "general theory of productions which must also be identified with a revolutionary practice". Deleuze goes on to praise Foucault's destruction of the subject and other "historical mystifications", such as progress and consciousness.⁸⁶

Again, these remarks can still be seen in the context of a critique of existentialism and historicism, as well as the desire of the intellectual in the 1970s to be politically engaged. In 1976, at the height of discussions in France about the existence or non-existence of the intellectual, and in the middle of raging debates about the breakdown of all systems, values and norms, Dominique Grisoni remarks in the jargon of the time: "The philosophical-body exists. Temporarily. In its most 'realistic' form, that is such-as-it-really-is-in-itself, segmented, exploded, differentiated, bloated, bearer of all subversions, rich with all possibilities". He goes on to say that even if he has proposed a set of "instructions" for the readers of the

85. Lévy, "Le système Foucault", p.9.

86. Gilles Deleuze, Un nouvel archiviste (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), pp.29,27,30.

collection he is editing, they should nonetheless choose the approach they find suits their purposes best.⁸⁷ This is, of course, very much the style and the approach Foucault himself adopted at this period. This theme of a fragmented philosophy, this championship of "local" forms of knowledge which "by their mere liberation have split the already crumbling ground of totalising discourses linked to institutions exercising centralised power",⁸⁸ was a most popular one at the time, Foucault's work being one of the focal points of the discussion. The remarks on his work in this context, can be divided into several categories. For example, there were those that echoed Foucault's exhortations to do away with theory, such as François Ewald's praise for Foucault's lack of "theory", and the fact that "he does not speak in the name of truth, which in secret he possesses".⁸⁹ There were others who argued that, far from being a positive attribute, Foucault's lack of theory was a political mistake which doomed his thought to helpless moral and political pessimism. Thirdly, there were others who found that "the well known 'Foucauldian schema'" was becoming just as

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87. Dominique Grisoni, ed., Politiques de la philosophie (Paris: Grasset, 1976), pp.17-18. This collection includes an interview with Foucault and an article about him. The language that Grisoni uses, a type of apocalyptic philosophico-journalistic style, characterises much discussion in France during the 1970s. It is a style that many recent English speaking supporters of Foucault have adopted, to the greater confusion of their readers.
88. Philippe Nemo, "Le pouvoir pris en flagrant-délit par Foucault", Nouvelles littéraires, 15 January 1976, p.7.
89. Ewald, "Une pensée sans aveu", p.46.

cumbersome as a Marxist schema".⁹⁰ There were also those who, while accepting the validity of Foucault's wish to do away with great systems, argued that he carried out this campaign with system and coherence.

In the obituaries which appeared in French newspapers after Foucault's death in 1984, the debate emerges clearly. Here we find a number of remarks to the effect that his interest in toolboxes and doing away with "systems" does not exclude a logical coherence in his own work. "Is he a historian or a philosopher? Master thinker or destroyer of truth? A political or an antipolitical figure?" asks one writer, finally concluding that if Foucault was "a model of rigour", he was still not a "master thinker" having chosen not to prophesy or "to moralise".⁹¹ The same writer also discusses Foucault's books as "toolboxes" which each can use according to his needs. Claude Jannoud argues that in spite of Foucault's unexpected detours en route, he always wrote with "the same method and the same plan". At the same time, he did not seek "to discover

90. Foucault, Jacques Léonard et al, "Table ronde", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle et débat avec Michel Foucault, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.54.

91. Droit, "Un relativisme absolu", p.10. "Master thinker" is the most usual translation of the French expression "Maître à penser" which Le Petit Robert defines as a "person of whom one is the disciple, who is seen as a model", or in other words, a guru. Both expressions were made fashionable in philosophy by the new philosophers, one of whom, André Glucksmann, published a book titled Les maîtres penseurs (Paris: Grasset, 1977) condemning such master thinkers as Marx and Hegel.

universal truths, or the key to history which would explain everything".⁹² Pierre Bourdieu expresses his wish

"to try and express what was probably least apparent about his thought, its constancy and coherence, its theoretical and practical rigour. Constancy of an intellectual project, constancy of a way of living intellectual life. With to begin with, the will to break with the totalising ambition of what he called the 'universal intellectual'."

This was all without "abdicating the greatest ambitions of reflection".⁹³ Robert Maggiori describes Foucault as an intellectual who saw his task as "to think what could be thought and not to tell others what to think". Yet, he continues, because of the enormous influence of his books, Foucault is in spite of everything still a master thinker, no matter how much he sought to reject this label.⁹⁴

In French criticism, therefore, we notice a marked move away from a preoccupation with a Foucault "system" in the late 1960s, to a view that, in spite of the coherence of Foucault's work, he was not imposing a unilateral "system" on his readers. Rather, he was providing "food for thought ... his style liberates reverie".⁹⁵ But in the intervening period, during the late 1970s,

92. Claude Jannoud, "Loin des synthèses totalisatrices", Le Figaro, 26 June 1984, p.33.

93. Pierre Bourdieu, "Le plaisir de savoir", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.1.

94. Maggiori, "Michel Foucault", p.2.

95. Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), p.237.

there were quite a number of protests that Foucault's ideas on power were far too "all explaining". In a scathing review of La volonté de savoir, one writer criticises Foucault's vision for being "unilateral, explanatory and unifying" and of applying the same method in all of his books, regardless of the subject matter. La volonté de savoir, he says, "is very much like a discourse of order. Everything is smooth and homogenous ...", and, criticising Foucault on his own terms, he says that Foucault is speaking "from the standpoint of the universal and draws near to what he is fighting. The text as a whole acts as a discourse of truth, a manufacturer of meaning".⁹⁶

But let us go on to examine similar comments in English, beginning with complaints that Foucault has "no theory". This is often intended as a "political" criticism: Foucault has no revolutionary programme, nothing to hold up for us to fight for. Richard Rorty, for example, wishes that Foucault "would speculate. His obviously sincere attempt to make philosophical thinking be of some use, do some good, help people, is not going to get anywhere until he condescends to do a bit of dreaming about the future".⁹⁷ Michael Roth likewise draws attention to the popular criticism that Foucault's work "merely attacks existing power relations without proposing an alternative

96. Dominique Wolton, "Qui veut savoir?", Esprit 7 (1977), pp.39,46. For similar and even more severe criticisms, see Jean Baudrillard, Oublier Foucault (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

97. Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", London Review of Books, 19 February 1981, p.6.

politics, or a vision of the future". But he goes on to argue that Foucault undermines the very idea of a political solution and is not therefore going to propose another one.⁹⁸ Another critic considers that "the political utility" of Foucault's "permanent diagnosis of the ruses of power is unclear", saying that Foucault's stance against all "totalising alliances of knowledge and power, is difficult to define as situated and responsible".⁹⁹ Another critic also remarks severely that "His cry for action is hypocritical. As a critic of specialised and institutionalized discourse, Foucault has made an institution of his own name. His complicity is an intellectual trap - a false fragmentation of the totality ..."¹⁰⁰

Rather surprisingly in recent times there has been a return to some of the criticisms which were to be found in France in the late 1960s. This new group of writings accuses Foucault and his followers of cynical nihilism and irrationalism, of distilling the "Elixir of Pure Negation".¹⁰¹ Philp remarks, for example, that Foucault "offers us no grounds for encouraging resistance or struggles", as his rejection of "human nature and human subjectivity" removes any such grounds, leaving us to struggle for the sake of struggle.¹⁰² Another recent critic condemns

98. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present'", p.45.

99. Clifford, "Review of Orientalism", pp.213-14.

100. Jacqueline Zinner, "Review of La volonté de savoir", Telos 36 (Summer 1978), p.225.

101. J.G. Merquior, Foucault (Glasgow: Fontana Press/Collins, 1985), p.159.

102. Philp, "When knowledge becomes power", p.13; cf. similar remarks by Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History, p.25.

in terms of moral outrage, the "political quietism" of Foucault and his followers, describing as a "counsel of despair" what he sees as their message to abandon "dreams of progress ..., meaning in history ..., the rational pursuit of utopias". His solution is radical: a return to "old-fashioned 'humanism'" and "rationalism".¹⁰³ However there are others who argue that it is precisely because Foucault has a theory, a theory which is far too rigid and inclusive, that his thought does not lead to action. There is no way of persuading people "to give up some of their power for the greater good".¹⁰⁴

But by far the largest group of writings in recent years concerns Foucault's lack of "theory", his opposition to "systems" and great truths, his "refusal" to be a "universal intellectual": "Foucault has persistently and dextrously avoided the canonical roles of revolutionary guru, great-and-good writer or 'master thinker'", enthuses Colin Gordon,¹⁰⁵ who then goes on to argue that Foucault's work is not "a paranoid hyper-rationalist system in which the strategies-technologies-programmes of power merge into a monolithic regime of social subjection", as some readers might think. Instead, he says, "what Foucault may have to offer

103. Iain Wright, "The Suicide of the Intellectuals", The Times Higher Education Supplement, 24 October 1986, p.16.

104. David Lodge, "Adventure among master-theories", Times Literary Supplement, 4 May 1984, p.487. One critic adopts a more unusual tack. He declares in a furious review of La volonté de savoir that "Foucault is not a Big Thinker. He has merely adopted the mannerisms of one. [He] belongs to the 'I-can-say-anything-I-want' school". Robinson, "Review of The History of Sexuality", p.30.

105. Colin Gordon, "Preface", in PK pp.vii-viii; cf. Racevskis, Michel Foucault, p.126.

is a set of possible tools".¹⁰⁶ The remark that Foucault's aim is to "attack great systems, grand theories and vital truths and to give free play to difference, to local and specific knowledge and to rupture, contingency and discontinuity" is also quite a standard one in its various permutations.¹⁰⁷

Quite a number of critics in English, as in French, remark on a certain consistency and coherence of approach in Foucault's work, but are careful to add that this "does not extend to a Foucault 'system' ".¹⁰⁸ Barry Smart remarks, for example, "to acknowledge that Foucault's works do not constitute a system is not synonymous with a denial of their coherence", saying that in spite of the variety of topics and the "somewhat fragmentary character" of his work, "there is a clear direction ... and a strong underlying thematic coherence".¹⁰⁹ It becomes increasingly clear, however, as we have already mentioned, that this view of Foucault as the historian, the theorist (or the genealogist) of difference and locality, the anti-systematist, has itself been turned into the most rigid of systems. In

106. Colin Gordon, "Afterword", in PK pp.233,246,258; cf. Nanette J. Davis, Sociological Constructions of Deviance: Perspectives and Issues in the Field (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1975), p.238.

107. Philp, "When knowledge becomes power", p.12; cf. Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History, pp.73,90,131,159; and Sheridan, Michel Foucault. p.220; Michael Ignatieff also argues that Foucault "had the consistency and self-awareness to avoid making a system of power out of his own ideas", and that he had no consistent methodological or philosophical approach. "Anxiety and Asceticism", Times Literary Supplement, 28 September 1984, p.1071; see also Cousins and Hussain, Michel Foucault, pp.9,10.

108. Sheridan, Michel Foucault, p.205.

109. Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique, p.73; cf. Racevskis, Michel Foucault, pp.17-18,138 and Meisel, "What Foucault Knows", pp.240,235.

addition, Foucault's ideas are called on to provide a validation for the particular system of thought, or mode of organising knowledge generally described as "empiricism".

Just as in our discussion of Foucault's disciplinary classification, we noted that Edward Said provided a condensed example of most of the groups of comments to be found in English on this subject, so he also encapsulates, perhaps unwittingly, the English language discussion on the subject of Foucault's much fêted struggles against theory:

"Not for him is the noisy appeal to a cult of doctrine or of apocalypse or of dogma: he is persistently interested in the responsibilities and the offices of this method, as well as in the untidiness and the swarming profuseness of detail ... The impersonal modesty of Foucault's writing co-exists (paradoxically) with an unmistakable tone of voice that can deliver both insight and learning; he gives the impression nonetheless of having experienced first-hand every one of the books he has read".¹¹⁰

Foucault becomes an empiricist's dream. Not only does he immerse himself in an overwhelming mass of detail devoid of annoying and interfering subjective viewpoints or ideologies, but he is also closer than anyone to the objective truth of these details, having experienced the "facts" for himself. Such a theoretician is to be admired indeed.

More recently some critics have begun to argue that Foucault does not go far enough in this direction. In a critique of Foucault's genealogical method, Jeffrey Minson, taxing Foucault

110. Said, Beginnings, pp.293-4.

with a certain historicism, says that genealogy "ought to be able to set up the possibility of constructing intelligible trains of events and transformations which are conceived as expressions neither of their past or their future".¹¹¹ In other words, we should consult only the succession of true facts existing in an external present, viewed from a god-like point outside of history. This, of course, is the very kind of history that Foucault had gone to such lengths to undermine.

What conclusions can be drawn from all these discussions? Is Foucault seen primarily as a creator or as a destroyer of systems? Is he a "master-thinker", a philosopher explaining the totality of the world, or a historian patiently accumulating masses of empirical, "local" details to construct so many different "histories" or isolated theories, a historian describing a multitude of "experiences"? One would have to argue that, in spite of everything, most writers see in Foucault a very definite philosophy, or approach to the world. For some, this approach represents a perverse and destructive nihilism, for others, an adventure at the limits of thought, for others again, yet another constraining and rigid systematisation of the world.

111. Jeffrey Minson, Genealogies of Morals. Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.108.

Then for numerous scholars, particularly historians, Foucault's books are full of useful ideas that they can use in the course of their own researches.¹¹²

In the next three chapters, we will go on to look at Foucault's work in some detail, with these discussions in mind. His work will be dealt with as an important reflection on the "limits", as well as a demonstration of how soon the "system" returns once the limits and the freedom of a dialogue between the Same and the Other are abandoned.

112. As Jacques Léonard remarks, "Foucault explicitly gives historians ideas for work that can be undertaken" and that he uses Surveiller et punir as "an instrument for work". "L'historien et le philosophe", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot, pp.17,10.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCONTINUITY AND ORDER

Whether Foucault is a historian or philosopher, a creator or a destroyer of systems, one thing obvious to many later critics is that his work is singularly changeable. In this chapter and the ones that follow, we will look at Foucault's own work as a constantly changing body of historical and philosophical reflection. At the same time, we will draw attention to certain structural constants which give more cohesion to his work than would first appear to be the case. In order to emphasise different aspects of Foucault's development, the analysis has been divided into three strands. The first two deal mainly with Foucault's earlier work, beginning with the way Foucault orders his histories and his treatment of the "interior limits" of a culture,¹ and then going onto the more difficult question of the relation of the Same and the Other and limits in his work. The third strand is concerned with Foucault's later work, in which the exterior limits disappear, and in which his analyses of order and his ontological theses merge.

There have been a large number of comments about Foucault's propensity to change his mind. For obvious reasons more comments of this type are to be found towards the end of Foucault's career

1. Etienne Balibar uses this expression in describing the episteme and Althusser's "problematic". "From Bachelard to Althusser: The Concept of 'Epistemological Break' ", translated from Spanish by Elizabeth Kingdom, Economy and Society 7, no.3 (1978), p.222.

than at the beginning. "Foucault is not easily imitated" declares James Clifford:

"His well-known stylistic excesses, his confusing redefinitions, abandonments of positions, and transgressions of his own methodological rules may well be aspects of an ironic program designed to frustrate any coherent formulation, and thus ideological confiscation of his writing. Foucault's work will not occupy any permanent ground, but must attack, pervert and transgress the grounds of truth and meaning wherever they become formulated institutionally".²

Another writer says that "he seems to take a perverse pleasure in shifting his stance" and complains that "things seem to shift in the course of the writing ... by the end we seem to be reading about something else".³ Neither of these critics, incidentally, appears to be able to decide whether to find Foucault's tactics an admirable attack on great "systems of truth", or simply frustrating. Many other English speaking critics react to Foucault's changing ideas with the same infuriated mixture of admiration and frustration. It does not seem to occur to them, however, that Foucault's "shifting stance" might be more than simply a perverse desire to change for the sake of change, or to "subvert totality" at absolutely any

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2. James Clifford, "Review of Orientalism by Edward Said", History and Theory 19 (1980), p.213; see also a comment by Karlis Racevskis, Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.131. "His work is predicated on an evasive tactic that produces identity only to dismantle it".
 3. Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp.73,72.

cost.⁴ From the enthusiasm with which Foucault adopted each of his new positions, it would seem more likely that they represent more a search to find what he felt to be a more accurate and more "true" or "useful" way of thinking through our present relation to the world, and the way people constructed reality in the past. The frequency of the changes in Foucault's work reflect not only the rapidity with which he could see the limitations of what he had already proposed, but a certain, and on occasions perhaps excessive, attention to what others were saying about his work, and the vagaries of French intellectual fashion (particularly in the "political" arena).

French critics have equal problems with Foucault's "shifting stance", but in a culture where it is a habit amongst some intellectuals to publicly and noisily change intellectual or ideological allegiance every few years or so, and where the word "intellectual" is a cover-all for a vast range of activity, Foucault's activities were greeted with some degree of tolerance but not always of sympathy. This habit of changing ideology, in fact, became almost an obligation during the 1970s. As Jacques Bouveresse remarks sardonically in his article about the "new philosophers":

"What a pity, one is tempted to say to oneself today, that one was never Stalinist, Lyssenkist, Althusserian, Maoist etc! What prestige and what advantages can be drawn from the fact of no longer being these things today! What a

4. On occasions however, Foucault did make flippant remarks to this effect. "Why change?" Maurice Clavel asked him earnestly one day. "Just to change!" replied Foucault. "From everything to everything?" rejoined Clavel. "From everything to nothing!" was the reply. "I then called him jokingly a dandy, a dilettante of Nothingness", adds Clavel. Ce que je crois (Paris: Grasset, 1975), p.142.

prodigious effort of thought, truly worthy of the greatest of admiration, did it not require of some to arrive at where they are today, after all that!"⁵

Apart from the new philosophers, other examples of this kind of activity are to be found in the persons of Jean-Edern Hallier, Philippe Sollers and Roger Garaudy. Jean-Edern Hallier, a journalist "intellectual" nicknamed by some "fou-à-lier" (a pun on his surname meaning "completely crazy") and described as an "ideological vagabond" ("clochard des idéologies") has long been the source of amusement on the Parisian intellectual circuit, as much for his extravagant behaviour as for his changes in ideology. In recent years, he has been a Maoist, a new philosopher, a member of the New Right, and a Catholic. Philippe Sollers, one of the new novelists and leading light of the Tel quel group, is also noted for his changes in sympathy from structuralist, to Maoist, from Catholic to a variant of "feminism". As for Roger Garaudy, Benamou and Pudlowski sum up his career: "Communist, Christian, Muslim ... When will the next conversion be?"⁶ Foucault's own changes therefore, although they were not exclusively located in the political arena, were perhaps taken more for granted by French critics, and we do not find to the same extent the utter exasperation on this point that is sometimes evident in the English speaking criticism.

François Ewald does point out, however, that many French critics (particularly after 1968) were annoyed by Foucault's

5. Jacques Bouveresse, "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", Critique 34, no.369 (February 1978), p.103.

6. Georges Marc Benamou and Gilles Pudlowski, "Où sont les intellos d'aujourd'hui?", Pariscope: Parispoche, 31 August 1983, p.xi.

refusal to specify from "where he was speaking". He notes that Foucault refuses to occupy an "assignable place in the categories of our knowledge" and that he practices a "certain art of the sidestep, with irony and gay science. Present everywhere, he is always elsewhere, where he is not expected. Elusive and fleeing".⁷ Roger Pol-Droit in an obituary, remarks that "the name of Michel Foucault is not synonymous with historian or philosopher - it is not even synonymous with 'Michel Foucault'. Never identical to itself. A sign of contradiction".⁸ But, if nothing else, it was a relief to know that these contradictions might be intentional, and one of the favourite passages of these critics in both French and English is one taken from L'archéologie du savoir. At the risk of appearing monotonous, this "dialogue" is worth citing again:

Aren't you sure of what you are saying? Are you going to change again, to shift your ground, to say that any objections are not really aimed at the position you are speaking from? Are you getting ready to say, yet again, that you have never been what you are accused of being? Are you already arranging a way out, which will allow you to suddenly reappear somewhere else in your next book and jeer, as you are doing now: no, no, I am not over there where you were waiting for me, but over here laughing at you".

The answer to all these questions is, of course, yes, but that would perhaps be too simple. Foucault ends his reply to his imaginary interlocuter by saying: "I am probably not the only one who writes in order to become faceless. Don't ask me who I am, or tell me to stay the same: that is the bureaucratic

7. François Ewald, "Foucault: une pensée sans aveu", in Les dieux dans la cuisine, Jean-Jacques Brochier et al (Paris: Aubier, 1978), p.46. Incidentally Roger-Pol Droit uses the same sentence ("Elusive and fleeing") to describe Foucault in "Un relativisme absolu", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10.

8. Droit, "Un relativisme absolu", p.10.

morality, which ensures that our papers are kept in order. It ought to let us be when it comes to writing" (AS:28, AK:17).

In Chapter Three we mentioned that the basis of Foucault's historiography was a principle of discontinuity (the methodological equivalent of the limit), a discontinuity which also underlay his political and ethical views. This principle, however, changed considerably in appearance throughout his career. Beginning with discontinuity on a large historical scale, discontinuity shrank to a smaller and smaller scale to re-emerge in a highly complex series of transformations. In the 1970s, he changed the entire focus of his discussion on discontinuity from the arrangement of historical events and "discourse" to the arrangement of "theory", "power", and the role of the intellectual. By this stage, the particles of discontinuity had become so fine as to almost produce the effect of continuity. In this chapter, however, we will concentrate on Foucault's discussion of historical discontinuity prior to 1970, focusing particularly on his famous notion of the episteme.

The changes in Foucault's approach to discontinuity can be seen by comparing the following quotations. In Les mots et les choses he declares:

"sometimes in a few years, a culture ceases to think as it had done up to that point, and begins to think something else, and in quite a different manner"(p.64).

Three years later in L'archéologie du savoir quite a different view emerges:

"Nothing would be more false, than to see in the analysis of discursive formations, an attempt at totalitarian periodization: that starting from a certain moment and for a certain time, everybody would think in the same way, and despite surface differences, would say the same thing ..." (pp.193-194).

Further, in 1974 Foucault expresses bewilderment at the fact that the Petit Larousse describes him as a "philosopher who founds his theory of history on discontinuity"⁹ and goes so far as to say, in 1978 that "no-one could be more continuist than I am".¹⁰ These statements, particularly the last two, which contain a certain degree of rhetorical hyperbole, do not mean that Foucault has gone from the most extreme form of discontinuity to the most extreme form of continuity.¹¹ What they do point to, is the development in his thought away from the idea of large, unilateral historical discontinuities, to the notion of a multitude of ruptures at a series of different levels. At the same time, Foucault also moved away from a purely

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9. Foucault, "Truth and Power", in Michel Foucault. Power, Truth, Strategy, eds. Paul Patton and Meaghan Morris (Sydney: Feral, 1979), p.31.
 10. "Débat avec Michel Foucault: table ronde du 20 mai 1978", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.43.
 11. A number of critics have remarked on Foucault's tendency towards rhetorical exaggeration: Alan Sheridan comments perceptively in relation to Foucault's views on Marxism, "As so often when Foucault is saying something that runs counter to received opinion, his language verges on the hyperbolic". Michel Foucault The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1981), p.71. Raymond Aron also makes a similar remark about Foucault's "Nietzschean preciosities" in relation to Marxism. Marxismes imaginaires: d'une sainte famille à l'autre (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p.341; cf. G.S. Rousseau, "Whose Enlightenment? Not Man's: the Case of Michel Foucault", Eighteenth Century Studies 6 (1972-72), pp.238-56. Rousseau condemns Foucault's "inflated rhetoric" in terms of outrage hardly less inflated.

historiographical application of discontinuity to a more "political" one during the 1970s.

Let us now go on to examine Foucault's methodological discontinuity as it emerges in his periodization, his views on historical change, and certain categories in history such as the "object", the "document" and the "discipline". With the exception of his last writings, Foucault's histories tend to be divided into four or five periods: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Classical Age, the Modern Age and finally the contemporary period (from about 1950 to the present). However, the dates marking the beginnings and ends of these periods vary from book to book. This is because in each of his books Foucault is examining a different problem or limit in his search to understand modern Western society. And, as he explains in an interview in 1967 after he had already changed his mind several times about the most important problem or limit in our recent history, different levels and types of history call for different periodizations and different points of rupture.¹² Hence in Histoire de la folie, where madness is the ultimate limit, the boundary dates between each period are selected in relation to fundamental changes in man's relation to madness. The end of the Middle Ages is marked by the disappearance of leprosy from Europe in the fourteenth century which left a social "space" later to be inherited by madness. The period that follows, the Renaissance,

12. Michel Foucault, "Deuxième entretien avec Raymond Bellour", in Le livre des autres, Raymond Bellour (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1971), pp.191,194; cf. "La situation de Cuvier dans l'histoire de la biologie", Revue d'histoire des sciences et de leurs applications 23 (1970), p.86.

comes to an abrupt end at about the time of Descartes. Foucault nominates the date of the foundation of the Hôpital Général in France, and of the "Great Confinement" of mad men, paupers and other "useless" members of society in 1656 as the beginning of the Classical Age.¹³ The Modern Age begins with a "sudden new figure - a restructuring, the origin of which was hidden in an imbalance inherent to the Classical experience of madness" (HF:531), and the "elaboration" of a "new structure of experience".¹⁴ The date Foucault sets for the beginning of the Modern era is about 1794, when the chains were struck from the inmates of the lunatic assylum, Bicêtre, and the era of psychological medicine and mental illness came into its own. Further, in a later article included in the second edition of Histoire de la folie, Foucault claims that this period is at present drawing to a close.¹⁵

Over the years there has been considerable comment on this periodization, and in particular on Foucault's notion of the

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13. Foucault describes the "gesture" of exclusion which gave rise to the Great Confinement as being "just as abrupt as that which isolated the lepers". HF p.94, cf. p.118.
14. HF pp.481,547. The frequent recurrence of the word "structure" in Histoire de la folie was sufficient reason for many commentators to describe this book as "structuralist". Roland Barthes in describing Foucault's work as a "structural history" draws attention to the combination of a diachronic flow of history with the analysis of "unities of sense whose combination defines each epoch". "Savoir et folie", Critique 17 (1961), p.918. Barthes is describing something similar to the episteme, which will appear in Les mots et les choses.
15. Foucault, "La folie l'absence de l'oeuvre", in HF (1972), pp.575,581. This article was originally published in 1964.

"Great Confinement", (HF:93,94). It is now an idea and a periodization widely adopted by many historians studying the period or the problem of deviancy in history. The Annales school of historians have found the notion especially useful for their own researches.¹⁶ Other historians, and in particular some English speaking historians, have wondered if "there is any firm basis in reality to Foucault's vision of the 'age of confinement'",¹⁷ or have remarked that his periodization is not "free of problems".¹⁸

Let us leave these questions of periodization for the moment, to take up the question of historical change. Foucault makes it

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16. See a representative collection of articles translated from French: Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., Selections from the Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations, vol.4. Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978). Roger Chartier, writing in the Annales, comments on the "already classical framework" of confinement proposed in Histoire de la folie. "Pauvreté et assistance dans la France moderne: l'exemple de la généralité de Lyons", Annales: E.S.C. 28, no.2 (1973), p.578; Yvonne Knibiehler, "Les médecins et la 'nature féminine' au temps du code civil", Annales: E.S.C. 31, no.4 (July 1976), p.840; Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Le suicide au Moyen Age", Annales E.S.C. 31, no.1 (1976), p.23; Jean-Paul Tricart, "Génèse d'un dispositif d'assistance: les cités de transit", Revue française de sociologie 18, no.4, (1977), pp.688-89.
17. Lawrence Stone, "Madness", New York Review of Books, 16 December 1982, p.28; see also J.G. Merquior, Foucault (London: Fontana/Collins, 1985), pp.26-29. Merquior provides a useful summary of Anglo-Saxon and German criticisms of Foucault's notion of the Great Confinement and his periodization.
18. H.C. Erik Midelfort, "Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault", in After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J.H. Hexter, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), pp.257-58.

clear in the preface to the first edition of Histoire de la folie, that he intends to do away with certain traditional historiographical methodologies. So in order to trace that "gesture of break" (FD:8) between reason and unreason, the separation and exclusion of Unreason by Reason, neither the "teleology of truth", nor the "rational chain of causes" can be used as an explanation (FD:10). These categories could only make sense after the split had taken place, after Reason had established itself in its identity, excluding the Other of Unreason. For the same reasons, Foucault concludes that psychology and psychopathology are not useful frames of reference for his study, as psychology only became possible as a result of the "silencing" and exclusion of madness, constituting as it does a "monologue of reason on madness" (FD:9). Madness did not wait in "immobile identity", to be finally discovered by psychiatry and "pass from an obscure existence to the light of truth".¹⁹ As he says, "What we want to know, is not what value madness has for us, but the movement by which it took its place in the perception of the eighteenth century: the series of ruptures, of discontinuities, of explosions through which it has become what it is for us, in the opaque oblivion of what it was".²⁰

19. HF p.93. This attack on traditional histories of science, psychology and medicine with their notions of "progress" and the eternity of "mental illness" is a constant theme in Histoire de la folie. See HF pp.131-33, 138-39, 150-51, 231-32, 446.

20. HF p.415, cf. pp.94,118.

This brings us to Foucault's notion of the historical object as it emerges in Histoire de la folie. If some writers, in order to explain difficulties over his classification as a historian, argue that Foucault is dealing with quite different objects from the historian, the difference perhaps goes further than this.²¹ Foucault does not simply deal with different objects, he has a different idea of what an object actually is. Of course, it must be emphasised that this difference is not as great as it may once have been, which is due as much to the influence of Foucault's own writings as to those of the Annales historians.

Instead of assuming that madness has always been the same, even if people were unable to recognise its true nature, an assumption which was standard for nineteenth century and popular historians of science, Foucault is more interested in describing how this object was actually constructed in history. As he explains in L'archéologie du savoir:

"The object does not wait in limbo for the order that is going to set it free and allow it to take on a visible and garrulous objectivity. It does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the outer edges of the light. It exists according to the positive conditions of a complex group of relations" (AS:61).

A number of critics took these views to be expressive of a certain nihilism or relativism, and a complete denial of the

21. Michael S. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present'", History and Theory 20 (1981), p.37. This is one of the best articles to be found in English on certain aspects of Foucault's historiography.

existence of external reality: "For Foucault there is no reality outside discourse, no madness outside of a particular world view", claims one writer,²² and others who allied Foucault to the antipsychiatric (supporters and opponents alike) interpreted Foucault's analysis as meaning that madness was entirely the creation of a repressive society, the result of a particular point of view.²³ However, Foucault's position is more subtle than this, for he believes there is a real material basis for madness (such as behaviour or the chemistry of the nervous system). As he notes in Maladie mentale et psychologie: "Every society is conscious of certain aspects in the behaviour and speech of some people which separates them from other people. These people are treated not quite as ordinary people, ill

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22. David Pace, "Structuralism in History and the Social Sciences", American Quarterly 30, no.3 (1978), p.294. Hayden White also remarks that Foucault, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes "take seriously Mallarmé's conviction that things exist in order to live in books. For them, the whole of human life is to be treated a 'text', the meaning of which is nothing but what it is". "Foucault Decoded. Notes from Underground", History and Theory, 12, no.1 (1973), p.53. In French, the psychiatrist Gérard Mendel describes Foucault as an "intellectual nihilist" for whom there exists "no truth, no certain knowledge of the outside world". "Folie, antifolie et non-folie", La nef 42 (January 1971), p.196.
23. Not all critics were of this opinion however. Roland Barthes writes, "Michel Foucault refuses to constitute madness either as a medical object or as a collective phantasm". Barthes, "Savoir et folie", p.917. One English speaking critic also notes that Foucault "does not contest the facts of criminality ... [or] mental disease ... But just as he probably would affirm that society has the madmen it chooses, so it has the criminals that it needs". Roger Kaplan, "Jail and Society", Commentary 65, no.5 (May 1978), p.8. Foucault does indeed affirm that "each culture has the madness it deserves". "La folie n'existe que dans une société", Le monde, 22 July 1961, p.9.

people, criminals or sorcerers" (MMP:90-91). But as Paul Veyne explains further: "A man must be objectivised as mad in order for the prediscursive referent to appear retrospectively as the material substance of madness; because why behaviour and the cells of the nervous system rather than fingerprints?"²⁴ When Veyne showed his article to Foucault, the latter remarked (to end this series of quotations): "I have never written personally, that madness does not exist, which is something that could be written; because for phenomenology, madness exists, but it is not a thing, whereas we should say on the contrary, that madness does not exist, but for all that, it is not nothing".²⁵

These historiographical themes: the discontinuity of the "object", the rejection of scientific or general historical "progress", of chains of cause and effect, and the rejection of a humanistic teleology, all remained an integral part of Foucault's approach to history throughout his career. They were all themes that provoked the various charges of "system", anti-history positivism, nihilism or political conservatism that we saw in the last chapter.

24. Paul Veyne, Comment on écrit l'histoire suivi de Foucault révolutionne l'histoire (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p.229.

25. Ibid., p.229; see also a comment by Louis Althusser: "One must not confuse the two objects: the idea of the circle, which is the object of knowledge, with the circle which is the real object". Althusser, Etienne Balibar and Roger Estabiet, Lire le Capital, vol.1. (Paris: Maspero, 1966), p.49.

In Foucault's next book, Naissance de la clinique, this mode of analysis was reinforced. In this book he describes the foundation of Clinical Medicine and the sudden "mutation" and "restructuring" of medical knowledge between 1769 and 1825 in France (NC:XIII, 62). Old books and erudition came to be replaced by the doctor's "gaze" and his examination of the body, and the normal and the pathological became the fundamental organizing principles of our view of illness.²⁶ It was in 1816, when Broussais published his Examen de la doctrine medicale, that Foucault considers "the historical and concrete a priori of the modern medical gaze" to have been finally established (NC:197). At the end of the book, Foucault hints at a possible contemporary rupture:

"European culture, in the last years of the eighteenth century, outlined a structure which has not yet been unravelled. We are only just beginning to untangle a few threads, which are still so unknown to us that we immediately see them as marvellously new or absolutely archaic, whereas for two centuries (not less, yet not much more) they have constituted the obscure but solid backbone of our experience".²⁷

26. See Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical", in Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle XI^e-VIII^e siècle, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968), p.19.

27. NC p.203, BC p.199. In an interview conducted some fourteen years after the appearance of Naissance de la clinique Foucault speaks of a "cultural mobilisation" involving medicine which had begun some "fifteen years" before (i.e. about the time Foucault wrote his book). "Une mobilisation culturelle", Le nouvel observateur, 12 September 1977, p.49. Again Foucault's periodization did not go unchallenged and the historian of medicine, Henri Ey, argues that "the clinic was not born on the date that Foucault, using an artificial and contrived socio-ideological analysis, assigns for its entry into the world". Henri Ey, Naissance de la médecine (Paris: Masson, 1981), p.211.

Just as he rejects in Histoire de la folie the traditional frames of reference offered by the history of psychology, here he rejects the picture offered by more orthodox histories of medicine. He condemns "those slightly mythical accounts" which rewrite the history of medicine in terms of the present, and which see clinical medicine as the advance of scientific discovery overcoming the major obstacles thrown in its path by ignorance, religion, and superstition (NC:54 138-39). In the preface, he also criticizes a history of ideas which traces long chains of causes and influences, reconstructing "spirits of the age", or searching for deeper meanings (NC:XIII). Rather, the birth of the Clinic can be seen as the appearance of an entirely new relation of words and things, a reorganization of knowledge: a "new disposition of the objects of knowledge"(NC:68). It can be examined at that level where words and things are not separated, a level where the grid of ordering what is true and false during a given period, comes into being.²⁸ Noting the appearance of a "new structure" (NC:XIV) at the end of the eighteenth century, Foucault comments: "What counts in the things said by men, is not so much what they may have thought beneath or beyond them, but what systematizes them from the outset ..." (NC:XV). This "systematisation" of knowledge which he

28. NC pp.VII-VIII; cf. "Critique de La Revolution astronomique d'Alexandre Koyré", Nouvelle revue française 18, no.108 (1961), p.1124; and "Critique de Hölderlin et la question du père de Jean Laplanche", Nouvelle revue française, no.109 (1962) p.127.

had generally referred to as "structures of experience" in Histoire de la folie, is described variously in Naissance de la clinique as "codes of knowledge" (p.89), "the historical and concrete a priori of the modern medical gaze", (pp.XI,197) and the "fundamental dispositions of knowledge".²⁹ Hence, in Histoire de la folie and Naissance de la clinique, Foucault is proposing a highly ordered and structured approach to history, where the emphasis is on spatial arrangements that are re-ordered in time, rather than on the ongoing and disorderly, yet highly determined, linear flow of progress and evolution.³⁰ This formal and structured arrangement of history is further developed in Les mots et les choses.

The book opens with a quotation from a Chinese encyclopaedia imagined by Borges. The startling difference between the improbable classification of animals in this text and our own system of classification prompted Foucault to reflect on the discontinuity between our modern perception of order and way of organizing the world, and the views adopted by past ages

29. NC p.202. For similar notions, this time relating to the possibility of finding "isomorphisms" (similarities of structure) between the texts of a given period, see Foucault, "Distance, aspect, origine", Critique, no.198 (November 1963), pp.932-33.

30. Jean-Paul Sartre, irritated by this structured arrangement of history in Foucault's work, counters "history is not order. It is disorder". "Jean-Paul Sartre répond", L'arc 30 (1966), p.90.

(MC:7-9). Having noted this difference between the present and the past, Foucault goes on to reflect on the question of how societies organise knowledge into an identity, a coherent orderly system. What principles of order do they adopt so as to render the cosmos intelligible? In a passage from Les mots et les choses, Foucault explains:

"The history of madness could be described as the history of the Other, of what is for a culture both internal and foreign and therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the internal danger). But this is done by shutting it away (so as to reduce its otherness). The history of the order of things could be described as the history of the Same, of what is for a culture both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and collected together into identities" (MC:15, OT:XXIV).

In this book, Foucault is particularly clear in the periodisation he adopts. Hence, we read that "archaeological" enquiry has revealed two major discontinuities in Western culture, one which ended the Renaissance and ushered in the Classical Age around 1660, and another at the beginning of the nineteenth century marking the threshold of the Modern Age (MC:71). Foucault situates this second break between the years 1795 and 1800, although he nominates 1775 and 1825 as the "extreme points" of the change (MC:233, 13). Then at the end of the book, throwing all caution to the winds, Foucault makes explicit what he had only cryptically suggested in his previous work, namely that we are currently on the edge, indeed undergoing, another rupture.³¹ There have been numerous

31. MC pp.396-98. cf. "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal," La quinzaine littéraire, 15 May 1966, pp.14-15.

comments on the periodization Foucault adopts in les mots et les choses, some of them to the effect that it is "scarcely original"³², others contesting the choices of dates. Raymond Aron also notes the controversy over the fact that Foucault situated an "epistemological break" between Adam Smith and Ricardo, and not between Ricardo and Marx.³³ However by far the most frequent criticism, was that these "ruptures" should not occur at all, and that they destroyed the necessary continuity of history. The appearance of "systems" of knowledge, or the episteme, between these points of rupture, caused a further outcry.³⁴

There has been much discussion and confusion over the years about what exactly Foucault means by the episteme.³⁵ Matters are certainly not helped by Foucault himself, who over the years regularly offered different definitions of the notion, usually in

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32. Michel de Certeau, "Les sciences humaines et la mort de l'homme", Etudes 326 (1967), p.353. Etienne Verley comments that Foucault uses "the traditional periodizations of history of ideas". "L'archéologie du savoir et le problème de la périodisation", Dix-huitième siècle 5 (1973), p.151.
33. Aron, Marxismes imaginaires, p.340.
34. The following discussion is an expanded and revised version of some comments on the episteme, in my article "Foucault and the Foucauldians", Economy and Society 11, no.4 (November 1982), pp.452-53.
35. The word has become so popular that the French dictionary Le Petit Robert now offers a definition with an example from Foucault's work. It defines the episteme as a "comprehensive body of organised knowledge (conception of the world, sciences, philosophies ...) characteristic of a social group, an era".

line with his current preoccupations. Even in Les mots et les choses he uses the word in two slightly different ways: firstly to denote the entirety of Western knowledge, complete with discontinuities, from the Renaissance to the present, and secondly to describe different configurations at different periods. Hence Foucault writes of "two great discontinuities in the Western episteme"³⁶ of a "general redistribution of the episteme" (MC:356), and of configurations of the episteme at the time of the Renaissance and the Classical Age.³⁷ The second and more widely used meaning (both by Foucault and the critics) is that there are successive epistemes rather than different configurations of one episteme. Hence there is one episteme during the Renaissance, another during the Classical Age, and a third for the nineteenth century. As Foucault says:

"In a culture at a given moment, there is only ever one episteme, which defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether it is the one that is manifested in a theory, or the one silently invested in a practice."(MC:179)

For example, this episteme not only renders certain types of discourse such as natural history, the analysis of riches and general grammar both "possible and necessary" during the Renaissance, but underlies the monetary reforms of 1575, and mercantalist measures at the same epoch (MC:179,76). In any case, these differences are minor, because whether Foucault is

36. My emphasis: MC p.13, cf.pp.219,337,379,390.

37. MC pp.47,55,183,219.

writing of configurations of the one episteme or of successive epistemes (although he never uses the word in the plural), there can only be one configuration, or one episteme, at any given period underlying all knowledge.³⁸

Let us now go on to look a little more closely at the content of these different "configurations" as they appear in Les mots et les choses. As this has been done a great many times before by numerous expositors in both French and English, there is no necessity to go into great detail here. Briefly therefore, according to Foucault, up until the end of the sixteenth century, "resemblance played a founding role in the knowledge of Western culture" (MC:32 OT:17). In other words, the interpretation of texts and nature was guided during the Renaissance, by a perception of the resemblances and similarities between things, whether real or imaginary, empirical or literary. This type of approach was quite different from the organisation of knowledge by sight and demonstration, which was later to be the favoured basis of order (MC:55, 71). Hence, Renaissance thought was a thought of the Same, and the Classical thought that followed it was a thought of identity and difference. As Foucault explains, the "fundamental network which defined the implicit but inevitable unity of knowledge" during the Classical Age in the 17th and 18th centuries, and upon which all knowledge

38. Foucault also sometimes refers to the "historical a priori" which defines the knowledge of a given period. He describes this as "what in a given age, carves out in experience a field of possible knowledge, defines the mode of being of objects which appear there, arms everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions under which one can deliver a discourse on things which is recognized to be true" (MC:171).

rested, was a "universal science of measure and order" (MC:90,70,71). The centre of this knowledge was the classificatory table.³⁹ The essential problem for the Classical Age, therefore, was finding names for things which, at the same time, placed them in order, a nomenclature that was at the same time a taxonomy (MC:220). This "well made" language, when it was eventually formulated, would designate things perfectly and scientifically, without any residue of error (MC:232). It did not matter whether the language or the system of representation (systems of exchange, systems of plant and animal classification) was arbitrary or natural although furious debates raged over this issue at the time. The aim was to find a system of representation that was a faithful mirror of the order of the world. Thus, if the mode of organising knowledge during the Renaissance was the interpretation of resemblances, that of the Classical Age was the representation of identities and differences.

But for some mysterious reason, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Classical dream of order began to fade (MC:222) and a system of knowledge based on the two-dimensional, timeless and uniformly visible order of the table was replaced by a system which toyed with the murky, ambiguous depths of history. A veil of violence, of obscure life and death

39. MC p.89. In Naissance de la clinique, pp.2,4, Foucault notes that from 1761 to 1798 "the classificatory rule dominated both medical theory and practice: it appeared as the immanent logic of morbid forms, the principle of their interpretation and the semantic rule of their definition ... The primary structure offered by classificatory medicine, was the flat space of perpetual simultaneity. Table and picture (Table et tableau)".

struggles, desire, and the great hidden forces of history was drawn between words and things, obscuring the shape of the real.⁴⁰ This "profound rupture" was marked by the emergence of the positive sciences, and the appearance of literature and History. It was History that was to form the basis for the "very tight-knit, very coherent outlines" of the modern episteme, and it is History which has now become the "unavoidable element of our thought" and the basis of our knowledge and way of thinking.⁴¹ It was no longer a question of elegantly arranged tables but of "great hidden forces developed from their primitive and inaccessible nucleus, and of origin, causality and history" (MC:263). But in recent years, argues Foucault, a change has been taking place, and we are seeing faintly on the horizon the return of "the being of language", a configuration of knowledge in which the "Man" of the nineteenth century humanists will have no place.⁴²

40. MC pp.222-24, cf. pp.263-64. Foucault becomes positively and macabrely lyrical at this point, giving one of his "favourite authors", the Marquis de Sade, pride of place. "The writers we like the most ... are Sade and Nietzsche". "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", p.15. This remark prompted one critic to comment that "Foucault's work has a significant place in the current cult of violence for the sake of violence". Maurice Cranston, "Men and Ideas: Michel Foucault", Encounter 30 (June 1968), p.35.

41. MC pp.395,231, OT pp.384,219.

42. MC pp.396-98, cf. p.339. For other comments on this contemporary rupture and the possible dawn of a new episteme see Foucault, "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", pp.14-15; "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, p.20; "Deuxième entretien avec Raymond Bellour", p.206; "L'homme est-il mort?" Arts et loisirs, 15 June 1966, pp.8-9; Foucault, "La naissance d'un monde", Le monde, 3 May 1969, interview, p.viii; "Préface à la transgression", Critique 19 (1963), p.761 and; Foucault, "Non au sexe roi", Le nouvel observateur, 12 March 1977, p.124.

As we noted in the last chapter, there were numerous protests about the episteme. Many saw it as "a historical totality" which excluded history, a "static system which does not evolve ... Order rules, every link is connection, every correlation, law. Nothing ever happens".⁴³ Others described it as "the theory of a system"⁴⁴ or as "a structure, a coherent system", or even as "transcendental" notion.⁴⁵ Still other critics noted "certain problems", such as the problem of why new epistemes occur at all and why past epistemes remain intelligible to subsequent epistemes.⁴⁶ English speaking critics, more familiar with Kuhn's work than critics writing in French, found strong resemblances between the episteme and the paradigm.⁴⁷

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43. Le Bon, "Un positiviste désespéré: Michel Foucault", Les temps modernes, 22 (1967), pp.1303,1304.
44. Mikel Dufrenne, Pour l'homme (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p.32.
45. Pierre Burgelin, "L'archéologie du savoir", Esprit 35 (May 1967), pp.844,855.
46. J. Proust, "Entretiens sur Foucault", La Pensee, no.137 (February 1968), pp.8-9.
47. See Hayden V. White, "Foucault Decoded", p.27; Peter Caws, "Language as the Human Reality", New Republic, 27 March 1971, p.34; Jean-Paul Brodeur, "McDonnell on Foucault, supplementary remarks", Canadian Journal of Philosophy 7, no.3 (1977), p.557. For a more detailed comparison of the episteme and the paradigm see D.E. Leary, "Essay Review: Michel Foucault, an Historian of the Sciences Humaines", Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences 12, no.3 (1976), p.292; See also, James A. Brown, "Comparative De-Enlightenment: Paradox and Limits in the History of Ethnology", Daedalus 109, no.2 (1980), p.90; Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", London Review of Books, 19 February 1981, p.5; M.Howe, "Open Up a Few Corpses", Nation, 26 January 1974, p.118; Frank Kermode, "Crisis Critic", New York Review of Books, 17 May 1973, p.37; James A. Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written", American Historical Review 84, no.5 (1979), p.1307.

But why this succession of different systems which all last approximately one hundred and fifty years? Why does one system replace another, if each system is self contained and need look no further than itself for explanations of phenomena? "What event and what law do these mutations obey which mean that suddenly things are no longer perceived, described, enunciated, characterised, classed and known in the same way?" (MC:229). Foucault's answer to this is that he does not really know. It is impossible, he says, to explain why this "erosion" from outside our systems of thought takes place (MC:64-65), and impossible to define the nature of this "radical event" which causes an entire change of episteme in "only a few years". To discover why thought changed so quickly at the end of the eighteenth century would require an "almost infinite inquiry involving nothing more or less than the very being of our modernity" (MC:232-33). For the moment, says Foucault, the "archaeologist" of history can do no more than describe these "enigmatic" discontinuities.⁴⁸

Thus in describing the end of Classical thought, he says that representation was:

"paralleled, limited, circumscribed, duped perhaps, in any case, regulated from outside by the enormous upsurge of a freedom, a desire or a will, which was to be considered as the metaphysical underside of consciousness. Something like

48. MC pp.64-65, cf. pp.232-33. In an interview with Raymond Bellour, Foucault again emphasises the "most enigmatic" character of these "very rapid" changes. "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault", p.193. One critic remarks that Foucault's description of "enigmatic" for these changes must "surely [be] the understatement of the year". "Contented Positivist: Michel Foucault and the Death of Man", Times Literary Supplement, 2 July 1970, p.698.

a will or an energy was to arise in the modern experience forming it perhaps, but indicating, in any case, that the Classical Age was over".⁴⁹

Foucault again emphasised his refusal to "explain" change in an article in Esprit, saying he was more interested in describing change than in the impossible task of explaining its fundamental causes.⁵⁰ "After all," he says, "mathematical language since Galileo and Newton has not functioned as an explanation of nature but as a description of its processes. I don't see why non-formalized disciplines such as history should not undertake the primary tasks of description as well".⁵¹ In addition, he insists that simultaneous events or structures (synchrony) are just as much a part of history as the linear succession of events through time (diachrony).⁵² Indeed, argues Foucault, "synchronic analysis" which includes both the successive and the simultaneous, is "much more profoundly historical" than

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49. MC p.222, OT p.209; cf. HF p.401, Foucault remarks here that: "During the eighteenth century something moved as regards madness ... In the homogenous space of unreason, something was slowly working very obscurely, in a hardly formulated manner, and of which only the surface effects can be perceived. A profound upsurge allowed madness to reappear, to isolate and define itself."
50. "Réponse à une question", Esprit, no.371 (May 1968), p.855.
51. "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault", p.194.
52. Pierre Daix defending Foucault against Sartre's accusations of anti-history makes a similar point. "Sartre est-il dépassé?", Les lettres françaises, 2 February 1967, p.10.

traditional forms of history based on causality.⁵³ The question asked by causal types of history, is, what causes a given change? "Synchronic analysis" on the other hand asks a different question which is, for a change to occur, what other changes must be present at the same time? This view of history, as has often been remarked, favours metaphors of space and geometry, rather than those of evolution and development.⁵⁴ This, as Foucault remarks, tends to reinforce a certain impression of "anti-history" in the minds of some "fools".⁵⁵ However, he was unable to totally ignore these

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53. Foucault, "Linguistique et sciences sociales", Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales 6, no.19 (1969), p.254. It is a pity that this particular article is not better known. Its clear and logical exposition of certain historiographical problems, notably the notorious opposition between chronology and structures is most useful in showing why these two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Cf. AS p.220, and "Deuxième entretien", p.191.
54. See for example François Châtelet, "La question de l'histoire de la philosophie aujourd'hui", in Politiques de la philosophie, ed. Dominique Grisoni (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p.52.
55. Foucault, "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", Hérodote 1 (January 1976), p.78. Foucault was never noted for his tolerance towards certain of his critics. See his well known comment about the "tiny minds" of those "half-witted 'commentators'" who label him a "structuralist" (OT p.xiv.), and his savagely amusing article on some of the criticisms of his work: "Monstrosities in Criticism", trans. Robert J. Matthews, Diacritics 1 (Fall 1971), pp.57-60. When one of the unfortunate victims of these attacks ventured to defend himself ("Steiner Responds to Foucault", Diacritics 1 (Winter 1971), p.59), Foucault merely redoubled his efforts on the next page of the same issue (p.60); see also "Lawrence Stone and Michel Foucault: An Exchange", New York Review of Books, 31 March 1983, pp.41-43. For an interesting discussion on Foucault's style of polemics see Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), pp.39-40,82-84.

"fools", and from the championship of "the system" he moved to the championship of systems. He then went to a great deal of trouble to deny that the episteme was a totalizing and unified system underlying the knowledge of a particular place and time; it became, instead, the description of systems and differences in the plural. In an article written in reply to a question asked by the readers of Esprit, Foucault says firmly that "the episteme is not a sort of grand underlying theory, it is a space of dispersion, it is an open field of relations, that can probably be described indefinitely". He goes on to add:

"The episteme is not a general stage of reason. It is a complex relationship of successive shifts. As you can see, nothing is more alien to me than the quest for a constraining, supreme and unique form. I am not trying to detect, by means of various signs, the unifying spirit of a period, the general form of its consciousness; something like a Weltanschauung". 56

He is also at pains to point out that discontinuity is not "a monotonous and unthinkable vacuum" between events which "we must hasten to fill ... with the dreary plenitude of cause or the agile bottle-imp of the spirit (*ludion de l'esprit*)".⁵⁷ He explains carefully in L'archéologie du savoir that discontinuity or "rupture" is not the "buttress" of his analyses, "the limit that it signals from afar ...". Rather, "rupture is the name given to transformations which have an effect on the general system of one or several discursive formations" (AS:231,

56. Foucault, "Réponse à une question", pp.853,854. also on systems see pp.851,857,861.

57. Ibid., p.858.

AK:176-77). Hence Foucault's final aim, in this revised version of "discontinuity", is not to point out where the breaks occur but, having once located these "curious phenomena", to ask what transformation made them possible. "Ultimately, the analysis should not find, then reverse; a break indefinitely; it should describe a transformation."⁵⁸

In L'archéologie du savoir, there is yet another shift in the definition of the episteme, and if the episteme had been one of the fundamental notions of the "archaeological" method in Les mots et les choses, it scarcely rates more than a few pages towards the end of the text.⁵⁹ Here it is defined as the group of relations between different sciences at a given period, and not as an attempt to reconstitute the underlying system which regulates all knowledge at a given time. Foucault goes on to add that "the episteme is not an immobile figure which, appearing one day, might later disappear just as suddenly: it is an indefinitely mobile group of scansions, shifts, and coincidences which establish and dismantle themselves" (AS:250). He describes the episteme as dealing only with the natural, human or social sciences (AS:251-55), whereas in Les mots et les choses the episteme in fact underlies all theories and practices of a period. In his earlier book, Foucault also argues that that

58. Foucault, "La situation de Cuvier" p.86.

59. Dominique Lecourt also comments on this "very remarkable absence" of the episteme in L'archéologie du savoir. Pour une critique d'épistémologie: Bachelard, Canguilhem Foucault (Paris: Maspero, 1972), p.100.

"classical episteme can be defined in its most general disposition, by the articulated system of a mathesis, a taxonomia and a genetic analysis" (MC:89). But in L'archéologie, he denies that these three axes represent anything beyond the "interdiscursive configuration" that could be found by comparing the three disciplines of General Grammar, the Analysis of Riches and Natural History. Thus, if other disciplines were compared, a different series of relations would appear. This definition of the episteme offered in L'archéologie is now the standard one adopted by most English speaking commentators.⁶⁰ But what in fact Foucault appears to have done in L'archéologie, is simply to have given another name to the concept of the episteme as it appeared in Les mots et les choses, this new name being the "historical a priori", or the "archive".⁶¹ The archive is defined as regulating what can and cannot be "known" during a certain period: "It is the general system of the formation of the transformation of statements".⁶² The historical a priori, or the archive, is therefore the system which rules the knowledge of a certain period and culture. It gives rise to a number of "discursive practices", which Foucault defines in the singular as:

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60. See, for example, Sheridan, Michel Foucault, p.105; Mark Philp, "Notes on the Form of Knowledge in Social Work", Sociological Review, 27, no.1 (1979), p.91.
61. AS pp.206-211. Michael S. Roth also draws attention to the apparent equivalence of the notions of episteme, archive, and historical a priori. "Foucault's 'History of the Present'", p.36.
62. AS p.171, cf. p.170; the chapter entitled "The historical a priori and the archive", pp.166-173 and; "Réponse à une question", pp.859-860.

"a body of anonymous historical rules always determined in the space and time that have defined for a given period and for a given social, economic, geographical or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function" (AS:153-54, AK:117).

To paraphrase this, the "historical rules" (regularities and patterns) of a discursive practice which could for example have produced a text of natural history during the Renaissance are specific to a given time, space and culture e.g. Italy during the Renaissance. A modern biological work could not exist during the Renaissance. Not only could it not be written even if the technical knowledge were available, but if a modern text were somehow transported back to the Renaissance it would be totally rejected as it "obeys the rules" of a different discursive practice produced by different circumstances. In L'archéologie du savoir, therefore, even if the episteme is scarcely mentioned, it emerges in a more refined form elsewhere in the text.

As for the episteme itself, Foucault was to go on to offer a number of increasingly narrow redefinitions of this notion in the course of his career. In the foreword to the English edition of Les mots et les choses, published in 1970, he only mentions the episteme in relation to the Classical Age, yet almost half Les mots et les choses is in fact devoted to the episteme of the nineteenth century, and the first two chapters deal with the Renaissance episteme. We also notice that Foucault is eager to deny that he had intended "to draw up the picture of a period", and is at pains to point out that his book "was to be not an

analysis of Classicism in general, nor a search for a Weltanschauung, but a strictly 'regional' study".⁶³

But in 1974, Foucault changed his mind again, admitting that perhaps he had after all originally conceived of the episteme as a system or a theoretical form, or even as "something like the paradigm". This was a mistake, says Foucault, because he really should have been talking about "that central problem of power" which he had as yet "still only very poorly isolated".⁶⁴ In his books Surveiller et punir and La volonté de savoir, the episteme only appears in passing and is defined as specific only to the sciences (SP:312, VS:189). In 1977, Foucault offered a final definition of the episteme, in terms of his then currently favoured notions of power, knowledge and "truth". Noting he was "still caught in an impasse" when writing Les mots et les choses, he says he would now consider the episteme to be a specific case of the "apparatus" (dispositif), which itself consists of "strategic" relations of power and knowledge. The episteme only deals with discourse, whereas the apparatus is both discursive and non-discursive. Further, the episteme deals exclusively with scientific or potentially scientific discourse and defines criteria of truth and falsity within science.⁶⁵ It is

63. OT p.x. Foucault admits in a footnote that although he occasionally uses terms such as "thought", or "Classical science", "they refer practically always to the particular discipline under consideration".

64. Foucault, "Truth and Power", p.32.

65. Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", in PK pp.196-97.

interesting to observe, concerning these last few statements on the episteme and power, that Foucault is no longer making a clear division between his epistemological analyses, concerning the structure and organisation of knowledge, and his ontological theses, concerning what knowledge and society is in itself, its being, its mode of existence. The two levels have merged. It is because of this convergence that we have not included a discussion of Foucault's later work here, reserving it for our last chapter.

But let us return briefly to L'archéologie du savoir. As we have referred to the contents of this methodological work elsewhere in this study, we need not dwell too long on it here. In this book Foucault is purporting to "explain" the complex methodology he had practiced in his earlier books, although as many commentators point out, he appears to spend more time explaining what he should have been doing, as well as exercising his formidable talent for constructing geometrical methods for analysing ideas and history.⁶⁶ It is also a book about history

66. Although there have been a number of complaints from some writers that Foucault's method is far too complex to be usable, others have found that it produces novel results. See for example a fascinating article by Jean-Claude Bonnet in the Annales about cooking, as it is discussed in a number of eighteenth century texts, the Encyclopaedia in particular. The author discusses "culinary statements" (énoncés culinaires), a "culinary field" and the relationship of "a new collective subject" to "alimentary practice". "Le réseau culinaire dans L'Encyclopédie", Annales: E.S.C. 31, no.5 (1976), pp.891,911.

and discontinuity.⁶⁷ Of particular interest in L'archéologie is Foucault's view of ideas as historical "events"⁶⁸ and his treatment of documents as "monuments".⁶⁹ By this Foucault means that instead of using documents to reactivate a collective memory or to point to what people really did and said, they should be treated as monuments, traces left by the past, that the historian tries to decypher and organise into intelligible groups in relation to each other, not in relation to some reality we can never quite capture. Foucault insistently made this point throughout his career, that we can never know what really happened. As he says to Jacques Léonard in 1978, "We must demystify the global instance of reality itself as a totality to be reconstituted".⁷⁰ In any case, as Foucault points out, historians "always take their problems from the present. If it

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67. Jacques Revel comments "The first two chapters of L'archéologie du savoir in fact, are a veritable eulogy to history and the historians of today, I must say they surprised a certain number of historians". Jacques Revel, "Foucault et les historiens", Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.10.
68. "Foucault's central effort is to consider thought taking place primarily as events", remarks Edward Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p.291. For discussions by Foucault of the "event" see "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", pp.43-45. Here Foucault coins the word "eventualisation" to describe what he is doing.
69. AS p.14-15; see also Foucault, "Réponse à une question", p.860 and; "Deuxième entretien avec Michel Foucault", p.191; Jacques Le Goff recommends this idea of the "document/monument" to other historians: "L'histoire nouvelle", in La nouvelle histoire, ed. J. Le Goff. Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne (Paris: CEPL, 1978), p.238.
70. "Débat avec Michel Foucault", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot, p.34.

is not from the immediacy of their personal lives, or the political and social life of their country, it is simply from their university environment".⁷¹

During the 1970s, Foucault replaced his "archaeology" with a "genealogy" and in the definitions he offers of the latter, we are able to see the change from a simple method of ordering documents, to a method which is also a politics and an ontology based on the notion of the universality of power relations. Genealogy, he says, is "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today".⁷² The principle of methodological discontinuity is just as much a part of genealogy as it is of archaeology, and is aimed at highlighting "local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate" and "subjugated knowledges".⁷³ Reinterpreting "archaeology" in terms of "genealogy", Foucault says

"'archaeology' would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and 'genealogy' would be the tactics whereby on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play".⁷⁴

Foucault put this genealogical method into practice in Surveiller et punir and La volonté de savoir. In these two books

71. Otto Friedrich and Sandra Burton, "France's Philosopher of Power", Time, 16 November 1981, p.94.

72. "Two Lectures", in PK p.83.

73. Ibid., pp.81,85.

74. Ibid., p.85.

Foucault returns to his favourite period, the Classical Age, but this time with slightly different dates of "rupture". Hence in Surveiller et punir, Foucault fixes 1840, the date of the official opening of the prison of Mettray as the date when the new "carceral system" was finally formed and the "disciplinary" society came into its own (SP: 300). In La volonté de savoir, although dates are scarcely mentioned, except for some general references to centuries, there is a brief chapter on periodization. Here Foucault argues that modern attitudes towards sexuality, originated in the Middle Ages with the Lateran Council. An important change in attitudes occurred during the Reformation, and later the birth of an "entirely new technology of sex" was heralded by the publication of The Psychopathia sexualis by Heinrich Kaan in 1846 (VS: 154). However, in volumes two and three of the History of Sexuality which appeared in 1984, Foucault changes period entirely and turns his attention to the "problematization" of sexuality in Ancient Greek texts of the fourth century B.C., and in Greek and Latin texts of the first two centuries A.D. In an interview, Foucault explains this change, saying that when he wrote La volonté de savoir, it had been his intention to begin his history in the sixteenth century and continue through to the nineteenth century. In the course of his research, however, he had found himself becoming more and more interested in the question of why sex was perceived as a moral experience in Western society. To examine this problem he felt obliged to search far back into the beginnings of Western thought and to return to the Ancient Greeks.⁷⁵ But at this

75. "Le retour de la morale", Les nouvelles, 28 June 1984, p.41; cf. UP pp.11-12,16.

point, let us leave the historiographical discussion of order, discontinuity and the "interior limits" in Foucault's work and turn to the "exterior limits".

CHAPTER SIX

IN SEARCH OF THE LIMIT

If Foucault insists that all is discontinuous, there is a secret continuity in this discontinuity, which is man's confrontation or dialogue with this very discontinuity, his confrontation with the limits, his destiny and the Other. Several times Foucault thought he had discovered that absolute point in history where the Same meets the Other, but each time he changed his mind, finally concluding that all we can do is adopt a "limit-attitude" in everything we do or know.¹

Perhaps the most obvious way of looking at limits in history, is to look at the margins of our society, marginal groups and marginal experiences. As Foucault says: "It seemed to me interesting to try to understand our society and civilization in terms of its system of exclusion, of rejection ... its limits."² One can examine what makes a society, a system of

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1. "What is Enlightenment?", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p.45.
 2. "A conversation with M. Foucault", Partisan Review 38, no.2 (1971), interview with John K. Simon, p.193. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum comment: "the standard procedure for sneaking the study of marginal groups into history has been to assert that knowledge about them sheds light on the aspirations, fears and conditions of the mainstream of dominant groups of society ... The moral and social values of a society, ... are clarified by the study of those who reject those values and are cast out of society". Selections from the Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations, vol 4: Deviant and the Abandoned in French Society, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978), p.2.

knowledge or a system of beliefs work, by describing what it excludes, what it marginalises. The French historian of prisons, Michelle Perrot, notes the growth of

"a history increasingly haunted by the great nocturnal side of society: illness, madness, delinquency, an exogamic part of ourselves, a broken mirror that reflects our image, an experience of the limit (Michel Foucault) where we can read a culture differently, but just as well as in the thick clusters of majority facts".³

Foucault begins by examining the present in order to locate where marginal groups or experiences lie. He then looks back through history to the point where this group or experience does not represent a margin or a limit, or at least to a point where it represents a very different kind of limit. Invariably this point lies in the Classical Age, the period when "Rationalism" began to come into its own. Foucault only departs from this periodization in his last work, after discovering that the historical parameters

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3. Michelle Perrot, "Délinquance et système pénitentiaire en France au XIX^e siècle", Annales E.S.C. 30, no.1 (January 1975), p.67. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie also notes the importance of the poor and the rejected for the contemporary historian. "Dix années de recherches historiques", Histoire, no.2 (June 1978), p.62; See also H.C. Erik Midelfort, "Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault", in After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J.H. Hexter, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press), p.247 and; Michel de Certeau, "L'opération historique", in Faire de l'histoire, vol.1: Nouveaux problèmes, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp.27-28.

of certain categories of our thought went back further than he had expected. The next step is then to examine how the limit or problem gradually took the form it takes in our modern society. In each of his books the problem or limit Foucault examines, is one that he thinks is absolutely essential for the understanding of our modernity and our relation to the Other. It is from this philosophical point of view that Foucault's subject matter will be considered here, and not from the standpoint of its historical, sociological or political exactitude. The latter kind of analysis has already been undertaken (and indeed is still being undertaken) at great length by a vast array of specialists both in French and English, and there is no need to attempt to reproduce their findings here, interesting though they are.

But Foucault's reasons for studying the margins of history, those grey problem areas at the edge of our society, areas which in recent years have become the focus of so much attention, are not simply philosophical or ethical: they are also personal. In an infrequent autobiographical confession, he says somewhat bitterly: "I was never really integrated into the Communist Party because I was a homosexual ... This problem, say, of locking up the mentally ill - did historians bring it up? No, it was necessary for a 'twisted' person to have the bad idea of introducing questions at once personal and political".⁴

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie supports Foucault's perception of his

4. Otto Friedrich and Sandra Burton, "France's Philosopher of Power", Time, 16 November 1984, p.94.

marginality in the Communist Party in a description of the "softer margins" of a cell to which he belonged in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He mentions that Foucault was far less involved than others in the excesses of Stalinism. He adds that the cell treated this non-conformity with indulgence as it knew he was absorbed in his research on madness.⁵ Foucault also mentions that he first undertook a "genealogy" of psychiatry because he had had some experience of the psychiatric hospital (St Anne's in Paris) and had sensed there, "combats, lines of force, points of confrontation, tensions".⁶ He later admitted that he felt disturbed by his experience working there, as he felt "very close to, and not very different from, the inmates".⁷ In a different context, Foucault remarks on a sudden awareness of his own methodological "eccentricity" and "strangeness" and how far his work "deviated from the most accepted norms".⁸

But if Foucault was one of the pioneers of the history of the margins, he was by no means alone in this interest. Indeed, by the end of the 1960s, interest in and studies of marginal groups had become extremely fashionable. The French dictionary Le Petit

5. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paris-Montpellier P.C. - P.S.U. 1945-1963 (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p.46.

6. "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", Hérodote: stratégies, géographies, idéologies 1 (January 1976), p.72.

7. Friedrich and Burton, "France's Philosopher of Power", p.92.

8. "Réponse à une question", Esprit 36 (1968), p.851.

Robert notes that the French word "marginal", a person living at the edges of society, came into popular usage around 1968. But what exactly are these margins? Given that there is a "mainstream" of historical thinking and action, there are certain fringes who exist at the "limits" of society and do not fully participate in the general activities, behaviour, beliefs or ideas that prevail at the time.⁹ It must be understood, however, that these social margins are not entirely synonymous with the limits. Foucault spells this out clearly in an article titled "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical". Each society, at any given period, practices certain exclusions, or posits certain limits which invite transgression, thereby creating a "system of the transgressive". This system is not entirely defined by the existence of criminals, revolutionaries, mad people, or other abnormal individuals or groups, or even the sum of all these deviant forms.¹⁰ What these elements do indicate, is where the limits lie, where the values and the very being of a society are called into question. One must also be careful not to equate the limits with the division drawn between the "normal and the pathological". The concept of the normal and the pathological is one that only arose in the eighteenth century, as Georges Canguilhem points out in his classic work.¹¹

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9. Forster and Ranum remark that "The marginal groups of society rarely contribute directly to political and social history as it is conventionally written and taught". Deviants and the Abandoned, p.vii.
10. Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical", in Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle XI^e-XVIII^e siècle, ed. Jacques Le Goff, (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1968), p.19.
11. Georges Canguilhem, Essai sur quelques problèmes concernant le normal et le pathologique (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951).

As a consequence, it is more useful to examine why this division took place rather than positing the division itself as a foundation.

Margins themselves can be considered at two distinct levels, as self contained historical existences or creations, which is the approach Foucault takes in Surveiller et punir, or as the markers of the ontological and epistemological boundaries of a culture. Foucault considers both levels in Histoire de la folie. As such, the margins have a rather ambiguous significance in the political or moral arena. As elements that have been unjustly excluded and badly treated by the mainstream of society, their deplorable situation needs to be recognised and rectified.¹² At the same time they represent an admirable rebellion against a society that deserves to be overthrown, and their misery is a heroic signpost. Reintegration would destroy the value of their transgressive gesture. But, if on the other hand, one argues that society has always practiced exclusions, and will always do so, that no sooner do we reintegrate one group, than another is excluded, then we are provided with a never ending supply of limits and transgressive groups on which to practice our political indignation. As Foucault says in relation to madness:

12. Speaking about Foucault and the G.I.P., Claude Mauriac remarks, "What strikes me in his, in our, activity (including our dealings with migrant workers) is that we believe, or pretend to believe, in the possibility of a just society - no much more than that - in a human condition delivered finally, (à la limite) from suffering, death and evil". Le temps immobile, vol.3: Et comme l'espérance est violente (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p.324. In the present context, Mauriac's commonplace locution (à la limite) takes on unexpected and complex resonances.

"Everything we experience today as limits, or strangeness, or unbearable will [one day] be reunited with the serenity of the positive. And what points to this Exterior for us at the moment, might one day point at us".¹³

We will now retrace our way through Foucault's work, but this time to focus on the appearance of the limit. Nowhere is Foucault's search for the limit, then for a principle of order, more succinctly evident than in the career of a certain number of literary and artistic figures throughout his work. In each of his books we find certain writers or artists associated with crucial turning points or experiences. Hence in Histoire de la folie, Cervantes' Don Quixote embodies, in the company of Shakespeare, the last remnants of the Renaissance perception of the "tragedy of madness", before "a critical and moral view" of Unreason comes into its own (HF:49-50). Likewise the works of Sade coincide with the end of the Classical Age, as they stretch to the limits and ultimately destroy the Classical conception of madness (HF:551-553). The works of Nietzsche, Antonin Artaud, Van Gogh and Hölderlin all signal the bankruptcy of the nineteenth century conception of mental illness, and indicate a new and altered re-emergence of the "tragedy of madness" (HF:555-57). In Naissance de la clinique, the "new medical spirit" of Bichat and the works of Sade appear illuminated "in the same light of day" at the end of the eighteenth century (NC:198, BC:195), and the medical experience and the experience of individuality are

13. "La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre" (1964), in HF (1972), p. 575.

related to a lyrical experience expressed in the works of Hölderlin and Nietzsche.¹⁴ In Les mots et les choses, Don Quixote signals the limits of the organisation of knowledge that characterises the Renaissance (MC:61-63), and Sade, by taking classification to its extreme limits, destroys the Classical system of knowledge (MC:222-24,255). In this book, Nietzsche, Roussel, Arland and Mallarmé all point this time to the "being of language." In L'archéologie du savoir, Nietzsche and Artaud's works are called upon as examples in a chapter on the unities of discourse and Nietzsche is described as a practitioner of an anti-transcendental history.¹⁵ And in L'ordre du discours, Nietzsche, Artaud and Bataille are once again called forward as "lofty signs" of contestation, but this time they contest the "will to truth" which imposes prohibitions and seeks to exclude and define madness, and impose a "true" discourse (OD:22-23). Later Nietzsche is linked with Foucault's ideas on power:

"It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say, of philosophical discourse ... Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, but he managed to conceptualise power without confining himself within a political theory to do so".¹⁶

And finally Sade becomes the master of the secular confession of sex in La volonté de savoir (VS:30-31).

14. NC p.202, BC. pp.197-98. The reference to Nietzsche does not appear in the second edition of Naissance de la clinique.

15. AS pp.23-24,35-36. See also "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire", in Hommage à Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp.145-72.

16. Entretien sur la prison: le livre et sa méthode", interview with J.L. Brochier, Magazine littéraire No.101 (June 1975), p.33.

A large part of the following discussion will be devoted to Histoire de la folie. There are a number of reasons for this: not only is Histoire de la folie Foucault's most extended application of a thought of the limit, but it forms in many ways the blueprint for the rest of his work, introducing many themes that he constantly returns to.¹⁷ These include the birth of the individual, humanism, Man as both the subject and object of his own knowledge in the modern episteme, a constant anti-historicism, and an interest in describing discontinuities or transformation in history. It is interesting to note that Foucault was far more vigorous in the defence of this book than in the defence of any of his others, indicating perhaps, that it occupied a special place for him amongst his other work.¹⁸

It is a book which Michel Serres describes as containing a "secret vision", expressing in its "geometry":

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17. This is a point that has now been made by several commentators: See Robert Wuthnow et al, Cultural Analysis: The work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.141,144; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p.9. Foucault himself remarked in 1982, "A researcher, finds perhaps only one or two new things in his lifetime, generally at the beginning". Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Une ascèse de l'égarement", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10.
18. See for example: "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu"(1964) in HF (1972); "Monstrosities in Criticism", Diacritics 1 (Fall 1971), pp.57-60; "Foucault Responds/2", Diacritics 1 (Winter 1971), p.60; Foucault and Lawrence Stone, "An Exchange with Michel Foucault", New York Review of Books, 21 March 1983, pp.41-43.

"the pathetic language of people who undergo the ultimate torture of being cut off, who undergo the disgrace of exile, of quarantine, of ostracism and excommunication. Here is the book of all solitudes. And in the middle of all this suffering, appears the attraction of the limits, the vertigo of proximity, the hope of the renewal of ties, the house at dawn".¹⁹

Serres is describing a poetic vision of the limits of our society and experience. It is a kind of vision which emerges more clearly perhaps in Histoire de la folie than in Foucault's other work. It is, however, an aspect of Foucault's work which is now usually passed over in silence by much contemporary English language criticism, and generally in discussions of Histoire de la folie, attention is drawn to its analyses of aspects of social and institutional history.

The theses put forward by Foucault in Histoire de la folie are by now well known. A voluble and free madness was silenced in the Classical Age, both philosophically by Reason, and institutionally by the "Great Confinement", which locked away a section of the population to create a category of deviants or "asocials" in society. Then at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, madmen were

19. Michel Serres, "Géométrie de la folie", Mercure de France, part I, no.1188 (August 1962), p.696. He goes on to remark with unstinted enthusiasm: "This language is the geometry of negativities. It can be used at leisure to explain the Greek and the Classical meaning of the other, its logical, existential, ontological, moral, epistemological and religious meaning. It can be used to express under one denomination, Platonic otherness, Marxist alienation, medical alienation and existentialist foreignness". "Géométrie la folie", Mercure de France, part II, no.1189 (September 1962), p.72.

"liberated" from their chains by Tuke and Pinel only in order to be bound by a more sinister and more effective moral enslavement. But the book ends on a note of triumph declaring the return of the tragedy of madness in literature to reveal the truth of man and his confrontation with his own destiny.

In the preface to the first edition of Histoire de la folie, Foucault asks:

"What is this confrontation underlying the language of reason? Where can we be led by an interrogation which does not follow reason in its horizontal course, but seeks to retrace in time that constant verticality which confronts European culture with that which is not, which measures it against the range of its own derangement?" (FD:10).

In one form or another, it is this search for "that constant verticality which confronts European culture", or limit, that underlies all of Foucault's work even if it is only in the negation of that limit. Foucault begins by going back to that point in history where reason and madness were an undifferentiated experience, a point when they did not stand starkly opposite each other in a mutually exclusive confrontation (FD:7). From there, it is a matter of tracing the history of an exclusion and the creation of an object, and of writing: "A history of limits - of those obscure gestures, forgotten as soon as they are accomplished, by means of which a culture rejects something and makes it the Exterior".²⁰ It is a matter of

20. Maurice Blanchot, "L'oubli, la déraison", in L'entretien infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p.289.

describing the appearance of a "great immobile structure ... the point where history is immobilised in the tragic which both founds and challenges it" (FD:11).

Foucault's book is a history of man's relation to the Truth and his own truth, through that point of contact with the Other, a madness which today in literature "hangs over history forever" and "masters and leads the world's time" (HF:556, M&C:287-88). Madness, in Histoire de la folie, is not a "thing", it is a function or a structure, our point of communication par excellence with the Other, that point where history escapes from itself towards the "unthought" that founds it, and reveals the truth to those prepared to listen. Madness rests on that limit between the Same and the Other revealing a cryptic glimpse of the truth of both. Although he is far more cautious in Histoire de la folie, in an earlier work Maladie mentale et psychologie, Foucault argues this is true for all societies:

"a society expresses itself positively in the mental illness displayed by its members, whether it places them at the centre of its religious life, as is often the case amongst the primitive peoples, or whether it seeks to expatriate them by situating them outside social life, as does our culture".²¹

21. MMP p.75, cf. pp.91,95. Although this book is not being dealt with in any detail here, it is interesting to note that although it covers similar subject matter to Histoire de la folie, there are some differences in approach. For example in the earlier book, Foucault makes frequent references to non-Western and primitive societies, references that are entirely absent from Histoire de la folie (if one excludes the Ancient Greeks). However, he does make a general reference in Histoire de la folie to "fundamental experiences in which a society risks its own values", p.192.

Foucault begins his long history with the description of the gradual disappearance of leprosy from the Western world, which left the legacy of a certain form of social exclusion which was first to be inherited by venereal diseases, then two centuries later by madness. The social exclusion of the leper opened another form of spiritual communion however, and his misery, his share in the passion of Christ, would be rewarded by eternal life in heaven. But even this form of spiritual reintegration would later be denied to the madman. At the end of the Middle Ages, says Foucault, there was a sudden anxiety about the madman, an anxiety that was embodied in a new symbol: the Ship of Fools. This was by no means purely a literary and artistic invention; it had a real counterpart.²² Madmen who had been chased from towns led a wandering existence on boats, their only prison being the threshold of the city; their exclusion from society was therefore a very literal one. Until almost to the end of the fifteenth century, the theme of death had reigned supreme in man's thought about his existence and destiny. But gradually madness had become the living presence of death, the invasion of a previously remote and final nothingness into the everyday experience of existence. If before, it had been an unawareness

22. It has been suggested by several critics that Foucault fails to distinguish between literary and real historical figures, in other words he fails to "classify" his historical documents correctly, particularly in relation to the Ship of Fools. See J.M. Pelorson, "Michel Foucault et l'Espagne", La Pensée, no.152 (August 1970), p.90. See also Foucault's refutation of this criticism in "Monstrosities in Criticism", pp.58-59; see also Midelfort, "Madness and Civilization", p.253.

of death and the end of the world that had been the madness that had threatened man, now it was the existence of madness itself, the living death, the empty head and insane skull-like grimace that presaged the end of the world.²³ Until the end of the seventeenth century, madness was a voice crying in the wilderness, the sign of another world, and of man's mortality, a sign of the end of the world. It pointed to man's limits, his finitude and weakness in the face of death and before God, a salutary, but not always reassuring reminder to men of their place in the cosmos. This "tragic madness of the world" was most evident in painting during the Renaissance: Bosch, Brueghel, Dürer, Thierry Bouts all expressed it in their work (HF:38). It was an experience of madness which revealed the fragility of man and the world (HF:117). For Foucault, this tragic experience represents the focal point (at once real and imaginary) from where men have been able to reflect upon themselves and the cosmos. But one might pause at this point to ask what he means when he describes this experience as "tragic". Le Petit Robert is helpful here in defining "tragic" as "... evoking a situation in which man becomes painfully aware of a destiny as a fatality which overshadows his life, his nature or his very condition".²⁴ This was the vision of the Renaissance and the

23. HF pp.26-27; cf. MMP pp.91-92.

24. The Nietzschean resonances of this word need not concern us here. Far too much has been said already on Foucault's relation to Nietzsche, much of it quite irrelevant. It is quite possible to read Foucault's work without constantly having to refer to Nietzsche for explanation, as some critics appear to do. In any case, a comparison of both bodies of work quickly reveals their very marked differences and disagreements, as well as any similarities.

Middle Ages, for whom unreason was a spiritual experience, a certain way of experiencing the world as a whole, "a certain tonality behind all perception".²⁵

It is worth considering here some definitions of "spirituality", that Foucault proposed at a time when he admitted he was returning to some of the themes he analysed in Histoire de la folie. In a lecture delivered in 1982, he defines spirituality as the search of the subject to transform experience and its very being as a subject. He explains that spirituality has possessed three characteristics in the West. Firstly, the subject is obliged to modify itself, become other than itself in order to find the truth, secondly, truth can only be obtained through the conversion of the subject, thirdly, the truth then "returns" to transfigure the subject. Cartesian rationalism, however, tried to change this relation, arguing that the truth could be reached by the mere accumulation of knowledge: there was no need to modify the subject. An immoral subject could therefore have access to the truth, something quite unthinkable before Descartes. But, as Foucault argues, knowledge of this type, as has become more than evident in our own day,

25. HF p.117. Foucault describes madness and unreason as "spiritual experiences", but hastens to add "but the word spiritual is not right". "Débat sur le roman", Tel quel, no.17 (Spring 1964), 12-54.

cannot give access to the truth after all, and spirituality has survived, even if only in disguised form. He goes on to say that, in reality, rationality and spirituality are located at two different levels and are therefore not in opposition.²⁶ The career of the "tragedy of madness" is seen very much in these terms in Histoire de la folie. It is an experience that the Classical Age did its best to stifle in its efforts to eliminate a certain form of spiritual confrontation. Even by the end of the Renaissance, argues Foucault, madness was beginning to lose its tragic powers, and if its tragedy still appeared in the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes, it was because: "beyond time they renewed a link with a meaning that was disappearing, a meaning whose continuity would no longer be pursued except in the shadows of the night" (HF:49). It was a continuity that was to re-emerge later in literature, in the writings of Nietzsche, Artaud and Nerval, an experience which although it "received scarcely any other formulation except lyrical", was no less vigorous in "its power of contestation" (HF:188). Foucault is careful to point out that he is not talking about a "thing", or an eternal historical object, but about a certain relation of man to himself and to the

26. Lectures delivered on 5 and 6 January 1982 at the Collège de France as part of a course titled L'hermeneutique de soi. See also "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, pp.371-72.

Other, a relation where man is himself radically in question.²⁷ Much later in quite a different context, Foucault continued to express his regret at the loss of a certain "spiritual dimension", present during the Renaissance. This time it concerned "a political spirituality" which he believed had re-emerged during the revolution in Iran. "I can already hear some French people laughing but I know they are wrong", he concluded defensively.²⁸

At the beginning of the Classical Age, the possibility of a madness at the heart of reason was excluded by Descartes, who declared that although an individual person might well be mad, thought, "as the exercise of the supremacy of a subject which does its best to perceive the true, cannot be insane".²⁹ Madness

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27. Roland Barthes remarks: "Madness does not possess any transcendental content. But what one can infer from Michel Foucault's analyses is ... that madness ... corresponds to a permanent, a transhistorical form, as it were", "Folie et savoir", Critique 17 (1961), p.919.
28. "A quoi rêvent les iraniens", see also Le nouvel observateur, 16 October 1978, pp.48-49; cf. "Entretien avec Michel Foucault", in Iran: La révolution au nom de Dieu by Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet (Paris: Seuil, 1979), pp.227-29. Foucault is more interested in the spiritual transformation of subjectivity than politics in this interview. He never quite managed to live down this error of political judgement, as a number of the obituaries which appeared in France indicate. See also Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), p.239.
29. HF p.58. For an extended and much referred to criticism of Foucault's analysis of Descartes and madness, see Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie", Revue de métaphysique et de morale 68 (1963), pp.460-94.

was no longer that mysterious figure at the absolute limits of the world and man (HF:53,453). It certainly remained a sign of the limits, but it was a sign of the limits of a materialistic reason and a bourgeois order (HF:85). Foucault notes an "extreme rent in the profound life" of the eighteenth century which meant that madness and reason were totally separated from one another. There was no possibility that a contact between these "two forms of questioning ... would set off the spark of a fundamental and irremediable question" (HF:190). As a result, reason was no longer tied to madness in a debate involving the "profound finality" of the destiny of man and his place in the cosmos (HF:198). The language of madness became instead the language of the non-being of error, fantasy and illusion, and the loss of truth (HF:191). It became no more than the "public shame of reason" and, Foucault continues, we have to wait two centuries until Nietzsche and Dostolevsky for "Christ to find once again the glory of his madness", and for the scandal of unreason to acquire once again "a power of demonstration" (HF:171). At the same time, the mad people who had roamed outside the limits of towns and civilisation were enclosed in institutions.

Within a few years of the establishment of the Hôpital Général in 1656, 1% of the population of Paris had been enclosed within its walls (HF:66). What Foucault describes as the "Great Confinement" was a phenomenon that occurred all over Europe. In a society where sloth was seen as the worst sin, all those unable

or unwilling to work, as well as other "immoral" or "unreasonable" people were enclosed. "Unreasonable" people included such people as homosexuals and debauchees, blasphemers and attempted suicides, prodigal sons and finally that most extreme incarnation of "unreason" - madmen. In being associated with these other forms of unreason, as well as being condemned for their inactivity in this work oriented society, those who were mad acquired an aura of guilt.

If the Renaissance had seen unreason as part of the world, in the Classical Age it began to be measured as a certain distance from the norm (HF:117). Foucault notes: "The normal man is a creation and if he must be situated, it is not in a natural space but in a system which identifies the socius with the subject of law" (HF:147). What this means, is that if traditionally, the law had argued that a mad person was not responsible for his actions in law, in the Classical Age a practice began of automatically depriving a subject who had been interned, excluded from society, of legal rights. The inverse also applied, and if the law defined a person as being insane, and therefore legally incapable, he had to be interned. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, madness threatened the very centre of being, but for Classical man this interiority no longer existed, it was other people who were mad. Madness was other, different and foreign to the great mass of ordinary men, and as such no longer a threat (HF:199).

But what Foucault describes as the "absence of madness" was to give birth to something else, the science of mental illness psychology (HF:198). This change at the end of the eighteenth century was marked by the activities of Pinel and Tuke who liberated madmen from their chains. Foucault's thesis that this constituted anything but a liberation is a well known one. As he says somewhat incautiously in Maladie mentale et psychologie: "All this psychology would not exist, without the moralising sadism in which the 'philanthropy' of the nineteenth century enclosed [madness] under the hypocritical species of a 'liberation'".³⁰ If madness was distinguished from the forms of unreason that surrounded it, and reinstated in its own separate identity, it was not due to philanthropy or the progress of truth, but

"to all that slow work which took place in the most subterranean structures of experience: not where madness is illness, but where it is tied to the life of men and their history, where they concretely experience their misery and from where the phantasms of unreason come to haunt them" (HF:439).

In the Classical Age, there had been the remains of a dialogue between madness and reason, a dialogue which was to be found in the action that locked madness away (HF:517), and in that moment

30. MMP p.87. Lawrence Stone and Dr Gerald Weissman of the New York University School of Medicine believe that "Foucault's pessimistic evaluation of lunatic asylums [was] a factor in the recent discharge of thousands of helpless psychiatric patients onto the pitiless streets of New York ... these tragic cases are ... a remote byproduct of Foucault's negative evaluation of the philanthropic dream of Pinel". Stone, "An Exchange with Michel Foucault", p.42.

of freedom when the madman chose to abandon his freedom as a rational being and become the slave of his madness (HF:532). But even this skimpy dialogue and freedom were removed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and from being error par excellence, madness became the paradoxical truth of man. But it was a truth acquired only at the cost of the annihilation of madness. For Tuke, internment was aimed at reducing madness to its truth, a truth which was madness minus society and everything unnatural, which meant that the truth of madness was the essential core of man, in other words Nature, Truth and Morality (HF:495). If in the Classical Age, the madman was a stranger in relation to being, the man of nothingness and illusion, the transgressor of the laws of the world, in the nineteenth century he was a stranger to himself, alienated, the transgressor of his own essence (HF:535,400). Madness was degeneration, the price of progress, and unruly passions, the final truth of man. It was also the triumph of the organic reality of man, the madman being totally enslaved by his bodily chemistry.

The madman of the modern age is, therefore, "other" than himself, but by being "other" than himself he paradoxically reveals his own nature or truth. The madman therefore, becomes once again that symbolic figure standing at the limits, the truth of man, and the negation of that truth. "The man of our days only finds his truth in the enigma of the madman", remarks Foucault, madness being the purest and most extreme form of deviation from the norm of "human nature" (HF:548). Foucault goes on to say that it was through the madman, that man first

became the subject and the object of his own knowledge. Indeed, madness was both pure subjectivity - the experience of madness being so singular as to be inaccessible to others - and pure objectivity - an object of science, the measure of the boundaries of our human nature.

The process of "objectivisation" began perhaps with the practice of Cabanis in the 1790s of keeping an "assylum journal", which recorded the ongoing state of the interned lunatics. As a result, says Foucault, madness acquired a place in time, its past became part of its truth; but at the same time it became an abstract discursive object. It was no longer non-being, it had become the object of knowledge. Just as Foucault was later to talk about the "creation of the criminal" and of the individual, so we find in Histoire de la folie a discussion of the "creation of the madman" and the role this process played in the creation of the "individual", as the object of science and social control. But the creation of a "mental illness", that was nothing more than the buttress of a new anthropologisation of knowledge, its participation in the ascendancy of humanism, still did not succeed in stifling the secret tragedy of madness. It simply reappeared elsewhere, this time in language and literature rather in "the figures of the world" where it had reigned supreme during the Renaissance.³¹ According to Foucault, madness and

31. Cf. "Critique de La Révolution astronomique d'Alexander Koyré," Nouvelle revue française 18, no.108 (1961), p.1124.

dreams expressed the same reality for the thinkers and poets of the early nineteenth century. They both revealed

"a truth of man, which is at once very archaic and very close, very silent and very menacing: a truth which lies beneath all truth, closest to the birth of subjectivity, most widespread at the level of things, a truth which is the most profound retreat of the individuality of man, and the inchoative form of the cosmos" (HF:536).

This secret continuity of the tragedy of madness is to be found in Diderot's Le neveu de Rameau, in the work of Raymond Roussel, Artaud Nerval and Hölderlin, Van Gogh and Nietzsche, but all too often only at the cost of the madness of the author himself.

Today (or at least in 1961), Foucault argues, we see two different configurations, madness and mental illness, which after becoming confused in the seventeenth century are now "coming apart before our very eyes, or rather in our language".³² But in spite of this return of the tragedy of madness, the writer's madness annihilates his art, even if this madness is its very foundation. Once he crosses the boundary from sanity to madness his writing becomes nothing more than a psychological document, the product of mental illness; conversely, the work of art excludes madness.³³ Language and writing, acts of rational and free creation, cannot be produced from within a madness which

32. "La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre", p.577.

33. HF p.557. See also "La folie l'absence d'oeuvre", pp.575-82; "Critique de Hölderlin et la question du père de Jean Laplanche", Nouvelle revue française 10, no.109 (1962), pp. 125-27 and "Le non du père", Critique 18, no. 178 (March 1962), pp.200,208.

is the negation of both reason and freedom, although a work may well present a kind of structural analogy with madness.³⁴ The work of art can only resemble or produce an effect of madness, it is not the language of madness itself. Nonetheless, argues Foucault, culture measures as its highest and most advanced points those works, which at their limits, disappear into madness, tracing "a contour against the void".³⁵ "Through the madness that suspends it, the work of art opens an emptiness, a pause of silence, a question without a reply, it provokes an irrevocable rupture where the world is obliged to question itself" (HF:556). So madness triumphs after all in Foucault's account. Western culture, believing that it had managed to neutralise and define madness in the science of psychology, in fact finds itself measured by the extremes of works such as those by Artaud, Nietzsche and Van Gogh. And as it is not sure what madness really is, it cannot even be sure what this measurement means (HF:557).

A number of critics however, were not overly impressed by this equation of madness with a certain spiritual quest, the point of communication, of dialogue between the Same and the

34. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques: Dialogues, texte présenté par Michel Foucault (Paris: Armand Colin, 1962), p.xxiv.

35. In an interview given in the same year as Histoire de la folie was published, Foucault declares that he had been influenced by Maurice Blanchot and Raymond Roussel and that what "interested and guided him was a certain form of the presence of madness in literature". "La folie n'existe que dans une société", Le monde, 22 July 1961, interview with Jean-Paul Weber, p.9.

Other. One of the rare English speaking critics to note that for Foucault madness was "a fundamental and ultimate category of human existence", complains that Foucault "heartlessly" forgets that "madmen are human beings and not metaphors for poetry", a strange remark if one considers that poetry is usually closely concerned with human experience.³⁶ A French psychiatrist writing a few years later is likewise shocked by Foucault's "poetical" views, but for different reasons. His remarks are worth quoting in full:

Thus we are well advised of the crime that Psychiatry is going to commit by seizing an object that does not belong to it: the marvellous Unreason. We are going to be told that Psychiatry has confiscated poetry!!! Psychiatry is not going to be established, legalised, or mobilised except in the service of and to uphold the pious thought of right thinking people. It is the fear and trembling of Reason which causes Unreason, the divine Madness to be locked up! Psychiatry ... [is] like the Police in the service of the Goddess Reason incarnated in the repressive structures of the Law".³⁷

But Foucault's enthusiasm for madness as the most extreme limit of our culture throughout history, its moment of truth, the indicator of its being, was to have a rather short lived career.

36. Steven Marcus, "In Praise of Folly", New York Review of Books, 3 November 1966, p.8. Or as another critic remarks dryly: "It is not clear how witches, burnt at the stake, would feel about Foucault's thesis". B. Mazlish, "The hysterical personality", Journal of Interdisciplinary History 11 (1980), p.111.

37. Henri Ey, "Commentaires critiques sur l'histoire de la folie de Michel Foucault", Evolution psychiatrique 36, no.2 (June 1971), p.255; see also in the same issue G. Daumézon, "Lecture historique de L'histoire de la folie", pp.227-41. Likewise Henri Baruk accuses Foucault of "attacking and putting psychiatric hospitals in the pillory". "Réflexions sur l'antipsychiatrie", Revue internationale de philosophie 32, no.123 (1978), p.30.

In an article written in 1962, Foucault had already shifted his position and appeared to have some difficulty in deciding which limit was more important: death, madness or language? Death and language are both to be found as limits in Histoire de la folie, but they are subordinated to madness. Certainly "the fatality of death, the non-written law of the fraternity of men", would appear to be a rather important limit, but on the other hand, madness is that "emptiness", that "void", towards which poetry and literature are drawn to find their justification and annihilation.³⁸ Yet language certainly seems to possess a "sovereign structure", as it speaks and emerges from that ontological area that God has vacated. For the moment however, death seems to win out, and it is the limit that Foucault proposes both in Raymond Roussel and Naissance de la Clinique, although all three "limits" are present in both books - particularly in Raymond Roussel.

It is not my intention to discuss Raymond Roussel in any detail here. As has been remarked before, it is the least known of Foucault's books and for good reason. Roussel's work remains relatively unknown, in spite of the enthusiasm of a number of nouveaux romanciers, probably because it is both extremely cryptic and very tedious. If anything, Foucault's book is even more cryptic, although his style is more elegant than

38. Foucault, "Le non du père", pp.204,208.

Roussel's.³⁹ It is the poem of Foucault's own philosophical obsessions about death, language, madness and the Same and the Other: he is describing his own work as much as Roussel's. To list only some of the words and images that constantly recur in its pages: limits, mirrors, repetition, death, the Same, silence, immobility, difference, visibility, absence, void - all images that are found again and again in Foucault's work. This book is a poetical rendition of the obscure drama played out by language and death at the limits of our knowledge. It alludes to the problems of the Same and the Other, form and substance, appearance and reality, the relation of words and things and a language without a subject. Its pages are riddled with tortuously complex plays on words: descriptions and extensions of Roussel's own work. Foucault, in describing Roussel's language, could very well be describing his own work:

"It is not built on the certainty that there is a secret, one only, and one that remains sedately silent. It glitters with a shining uncertainty which is all surface, and covers a kind of central blank: impossible to decide if there is one secret or none, or several and what they are".⁴⁰

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39. As an anonymous critic remarks: "The amount of factual information would go on a postcard, and even this is not directly offered either as information or as factual basis for an argument, but has to be picked up almost by deduction". "Old New Novelist", Times Literary Supplement, 12 July 1963, p.511.
40. Raymond Roussel (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p.19. This can be compared with another remark on Roussel which could equally well apply to Foucault's "archaeological" aims in writing history: "language is placed flat on things: it skims meticulously over their details, but without perspective or proportion. Everything is seen from afar, but with such a piercing, so supreme and so neutral a gaze, that even the invisible surfaces in one immobile polished light". "Pourquoi réédite-t-on l'oeuvre de Raymond Roussel? Un précurseur de notre littérature moderne", Le monde, 22 August 1964, p.9.

The only key to the secret of Roussel's work exists at the threshold of death, but it is a key which at the same time destroys the possibility of ever knowing that secret. The "key" is a posthumous work, Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres, which explains the procedures that he had used in writing his book. But in actual fact, if this book reveals the mechanisms with which Roussel constructed his complex plays on words, it does not explain the end result. Foucault argues that even the physical circumstances of Roussel's death (his body was found before a locked door which was normally left unlocked) reflect the paradoxical relations of death, a secret, and a key in his work.⁴¹

Death is also a key, a threshold in Naissance de la clinique. There are many close similarities in structure between this book and Historie de la folie, but already Foucault's thought has become more complex. As he explains in Les mots et les choses, illness is an experience that can be analysed in terms of both the Same and the Other. Illness is disorder, a dangerous "otherness" within the human body at the very heart of life, but it is also a natural phenomenon with certain classifiable regularities. According to this interpretation therefore, madness can be classified as the Other, and illness as both the Same and the Other (MC:I5, OT:xiv). Foucault, in fact, sums up his book in its often quoted first sentence: "In this book it is a question of space, language and death, it is a question of perception" (NC:V). Just as in his previous book the

41. Raymond Roussel, pp.10-12,86.

origins of the human sciences, anthropology, and the rise of the notion of the individual, the truth of man and his world are all inextricably linked to madness, so all these things become inextricably linked to death and its vehicle medicine, in Naissance de la clinique. At the end of the eighteenth century, Foucault says, "death left its old tragic heaven and became the lyrical core of man: his invisible truth, his visible secret".⁴² The tragedy of death has now replaced the "tragedy" of madness, as well as its privileged position at the "lyrical core of man", and as the "truth of man" in Foucault's work. Indeed such is Foucault's enthusiasm for medicine that one critic remarks: "Surely it is one of the few works written in the twentieth century to recognise medicine as central to all the human sciences. Its author, a scientific poet to the degree that he signs paean after paean to medicine, has erected this monument to Apollo, the god of medicine."⁴³

42. NC p.176. Of this statement, one English speaking critic remarks "Foucault who leaps shamelessly overboard at times like these, may be history's most hyperrational romantic". M. Howe, "Open Up a Few Corpses", Nation, 26 January 1974, p.119.

43. G.S. Rousseau, "Review of The Birth of the Clinic", Philological Quarterly (1975), p.793. Rousseau is one of Foucault's more amusing critics, maintaining as he does a constant state of shocked indignation at what he regards as Foucault's inattention to facts and unjustified excursions into "poetry". In this particular review, he notes a number of "rhetorical structures" in Naissance de la clinique, such as The Historically Meaningless (p.790). The Perceptive Insight Embedded in Ambiguous Rhetoric and Syntax, The Poet Speaks (p.792). Under The Medical Propagandist apart from the remark quoted above, he says: "About twenty per cent of The Birth of the Clinic is preoccupied with the restoration of medicine to the status it ought to enjoy: a noble aim in view of the genuine lack of interest of most humanists. When one considers that few humanists regard medicine in general as a subject worthy of study, the value of such undisguised propaganda increases", p.793.

However, death does not make its appearance until towards the end of Naissance de la clinique when Bichat, breaking with an old form of medical knowledge, based his new science of the functioning of organs and illness on the dissection of corpses, on the introduction of death into life. He showed that rather than illness possessing its own vitalistic essence, of which death was only the possible final term, illness was the appearance of death in life, death becoming a gradual process, as different organs or muscles died during an illness. This introduction of death into knowledge, says Foucault, reactivated a theme which had remained dormant since the Renaissance. As we have seen, Foucault refers to this presence of death in the Renaissance view of the world in Histoire de la folie, but it is to link it with madness, a madness which in its "medicalisation" at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the first instance of the creation of the modern individual. But in Naissance de la clinique, it is death that is important. Bichat becomes "the contemporary of the man who introduced abruptly, in the most discursive of languages, eroticism and its inevitable peak death". Sade has now become a figure of death, rather than madness, and language no longer the vehicle of madness, becomes the vehicle of that most extreme figure, death. Death was a major theme in the nineteenth century explains Foucault, summoning up the names of Goya, Géricault, Delacroix and Baudelaire to support his argument. "The knowledge of life is only given to a cruel, reductive and already infernal knowledge which only wants it dead" (NC:175,BC:171). This nineteenth century perception of death, however, was quite different from

the Renaissance perception, which regarded death as the great leveller; but for the nineteenth century, on the contrary, death created individuality. An approach to the examination of life and vital functions based on their "death", meant that death became an analytical tool for creating different individual categories.

Foucault goes on to argue that Western man could only construct himself as an object of science, as an individual, in reference to death, to his own destruction. At this point Foucault pauses to make a slight shift in his view of madness: "from the experience of Unreason were born all psychologies and the very possibility of psychology, from the placement of death in medical thought was born a science which professes to be the science of the individual" (NC:201). The whole experience of individuality in modern culture now becomes linked to death instead of madness. Death imposes a division and a finitude linking the universality of language to the "precarious and irreplaceable form of the individual" (NC:201). Medicine as a science of the individual who is both the subject and the object of his own knowledge is of paramount importance in the constitution of the human sciences. Although modern medicine reminds man of the limit of death, it also speaks of man's efforts to achieve technical and scientific control over this limit. The medical experience is therefore closely related to a "lyrical experience" that appears in the works of (Hölderlin, Rilke and Nietzsche).

"Is it surprising that the figures of knowledge and language obey the same profound law and that the irruption of finitude should dominate, in the same way, this relation of man to

death, which, in the first case authorises a scientific discourse in a rational form, and in the second, opens up the source of a language which unfolds indefinitely in the emptiness left by the absence of gods?" (NC:202, BC:198).

This idea of death is a very abstract one, and goes beyond the simple medical fact in Foucault's work. In an article on language and death published in the same year, he remarks: "It is quite possible the approach of death ... hollows in being and the present, that emptiness from which, and towards which, we speak",⁴⁴ whereas before, it had been madness that was the void which both founded and annihilated language. Few writers, however, in either French or English, were willing to take up madness and death as the ultimate limits of our culture, and its moment of truth, with the same enthusiasm as Foucault.⁴⁵

Perhaps they felt that these limits were either too specific, or too negative to be useful. On the other hand, considerably more attention was paid to what was to be his next enthusiasm: language. If quite an extended discussion on language is to be

44. Michel Foucault, "Le langage à l'infini", Tel quel 15 (Autumn 1963), p.44; see also Foucault's remark on "the visible emptiness of the origin from where words come to us". "Distance, aspect, origine", Critique 19 (November 1963), p.945.

45. There were nonetheless some exceptions, particularly in the case of madness. Nanette J. Davis reinterprets the oblivion of madness in sociological terms. She remarks that, for Foucault, in the modern age "unreason is ultimate reality, as it reveals the underlying state of being that is normally repressed by family and institutions". Sociological Constructions of Deviance: Perspectives and Issues in the Field (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1975), p.237. Bernard Henri Lévy also comments that in Histoire de la folie emerges "a new concept of foundation and ... a new theory of society ... A grounding ..., which by a strange optical effect, possesses all the characteristics of a frontier". "Le système Foucault", Magazine Littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.7.

found in both Histoire de la folie and Naissance de la clinique, it remains simply the contemporary vehicle, mainly in its literary form, for the expression of either the tragedy of madness or the tragedy of death. But before Foucault arrived at language, there were some minor detours en route.

In mid 1963, Foucault ventured an experimental probe into the domain of sexuality as limit, arguing that because of universal prohibitions (incest), sexuality marks the limit of the law, and the transgression of this limit becomes a "philosophy of eroticism".⁴⁶ Once again this "philosophy" appears in language, and here Foucault comments very clearly on why he believes language or literature is so important for contemporary man:

"... language has ceased being the moment when the infinite is unveiled. It is in its density that we now experience finitude and being. It is in its obscure dwelling place that we meet the absence of God and our death, the limits and their transgression."⁴⁷

46. Préface à la transgression", Critique 15, no.195-6 (August 1963), pp.751-69; see also the Preface to Oeuvres Complètes, vol 1: Premiers écrits (1922-1940) by Georges Bataille, edited and annotated by Denis Hollier (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p.5; see also a remark in VS p.145. "If one grants that the threshold of every culture is the forbidden incest, then sexuality since the beginning of time is to be found under the sign of law and right" (that is, according to the ideas of modern western society).

47. "Préface à la transgression", pp.767-68; cf. an article written in 1962, in which Foucault discusses an idea that each period has its own "erotic science" which operates at the Limit. "Un si cruel savoir", Critique 18, no.182 (1962), p.601. Incidentally sexuality occupies quite a different place in this article from the position it occupies in the three volumes of Histoire de la sexualité. In the latter it is a matter of quite different limits, of quite a different relation of the Same and the Other.

By this Foucault means that since the "death of God", there has been no exterior being, no absolute Other we can call on to validate our reflection. As a result, we are forced back within the limits which measure the finite boundaries of our being.⁴⁸ As language approaches the limit of "death", argues Foucault, it doubles back on itself in a reflection of mirrors to infinity, striving to create its own "meaning" from within itself. As there is nothing to interpret except itself, once it is no longer able to rely on the "word of the infinite", a God-given meaning, language is doomed to infinite self interpretation, to analyse its own historical meanings, seeking to overcome the limit of death of the void by repeating itself.⁴⁹

Already we can see the beginnings of a preoccupation with the "being of language" starting to emerge in Foucault's work. It is a preoccupation which is developed to its greatest extent in Les mots et les choses. Hayden White remarks on a similarity of "plots" between Histoire de la folie and Les mots et les choses. Just as the former was concerned with the "disappearance" and "reappearance" of madness, Les mots et les choses is about the "disappearance" and "reappearance" of its "hidden protagonist, language".⁵⁰ Although White does not refer to Naissance de la

48. Foucault uses the term the "death of God" to refer to what he describes the "constant space of our experience", rather than to refer to a "historical death" of God or make a statement about his inexistence. "Préface à la transgression", p.753.

49. "Le langage à l'infini", pp.45-46,53.

50. Hayden V. White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground", History and Theory 12, no.1 (1973), p.29.

clinique one could likewise comment on the "disappearance" and "reappearance" of death in this book. What White does not say, however, is that these figures in fact occupy very similar places in Foucault's analysis. It is not simply a matter of an analysis of madness, followed by an analysis of the "being of language", it is a question of the limits of an entire culture, that privileged point of communication between the Same and the Other. Other writers, when they recognise that language occupies a fundamental position in Les mots et les choses, tend to extrapolate back to Foucault's previous work, where they can detect a similar philosophical structure or "system". Hence a French critic writing in 1967 comments: "Tragic, Same, Other: different expressions which refer to a single centre, whose real name is pure language, whose experience is experience of the outside, thought of the outside". He goes on to argue that this encapsulates Foucault's "deepest intention" in all his books to date.⁵¹ Where Lemaigre is mistaken, is in equating "the experience of the outside" with "pure language" in all of Foucault's books up to and including Les mots et les choses. In fact, the shift towards this kind of equation began to occur in 1964, after Histoire de la folie and Naissance de la clinique, when in "La folie l'absence d'oeuvre", Foucault remarks that madness is "excluded language". If for centuries, madness has

51. B. Lemaigre, "Michel Foucault ou les malheurs de la raison et les prospérités du langage", Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 51 (July 1967), p.451. On the other hand, Pierre Bourdieu sees a progression: "The social critique of reason leads to the social critique of language, that major limit of human thought". "Le plaisir de savoir", Le monde, 27 June 1984, p.10.

been the visible sign of transgression, today, "far from the pathological, from within language ... an experience is being born which will put our entire system of thought into question".⁵² Madness is no longer the limit par excellence, it has become simply one limit among many. In a discussion with the new novelists, Foucault explains that at different periods, different limits come more into focus, certain types of behaviour are more "transgressive" in certain cultures at certain times than at others. Hence, "the problem Reason-Unreason" assumed a particular importance in the Classical Age.⁵³ In another article he recommends that the object of critical discourse should not be to reinforce the traditional categories of humanism. Rather it should describe the relation "of a speaking subject to that singular, difficult, complex and profoundly ambiguous being (because it designates and gives all other beings their being, including itself) which is called language".⁵⁴

But let us now turn to Les mots et les choses.

Until the end of the sixteenth century, he argues in this book, this being which was language was an integral part of the world. Each thing had its own "signature" put there at the origins of the world, and the task of knowledge was to interpret and read these signatures just as it was to interpret

52. "La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre", pp.578,582.

53. Foucault et al, "Débat sur la poésie, Tel quel, no.17 (Spring 1964), p.76.

54. "Le Mallarmé de Jean-Pierre Richard", Annales: E.S.C. (September 1964), p.1004.

commentaries and the writings of the Ancients. The World formed one enormous book waiting to be decyphered, and if people were unable to read the signs in the World, it was because their vision had been clouded by original sin. Thus words and things formed a continuous whole, as things themselves were a form of language that had to be interpreted. Language therefore existed in its own right as a thing amongst others. With the Classical Age, however, all this changed. Words and things became separated, divided (just as madness had been divided from Reason), and language became "discourse", arbitrary signs or labels that simply pointed to things. No longer a "thing" amongst other "things", language simply came to represent things.⁵⁵ Just as madness became non-being in Histoire de la folie during the Classical Age, and the theme of death is silenced in Naissance de la clinique, so language also loses its being in Les mots et les choses during the same period.⁵⁶ However, if

55. "Language was no longer one of the figures of the world, or the signature imposed on things from the depths of time. Truth found its manifestation and sign in clear and distinct perception. It was the task of words to translate this truth if they could, but they no longer had the right to be its mark. Language withdrew from the midst of being to enter into its age of transparency and neutrality" (MC p.70, OT p.56, cf. MC p.109, OT p.94).

56. At least one critic remarks on Foucault's apparent disgust at "representation": "Foucault proceeds in the manner of the pathologist. He 'reads' a text in the way that a specialist in carcinoma 'reads' an X-ray of tissue. He is seeking a syndrome and looking for evidences of metastatic formations that will indicate a new growth of that disease which consists of the impulse to use language to 'represent' the order of things in the order of words". White, "Foucault Decoded", p.31. Indeed, it became quite a vogue (which Foucault both echoed and created) to pronounce the word "representation" with distaste. Unfortunately, particularly in English speaking literature, this war against "representation" completely divorced from its metaphysical foundations, often remained highly mysterious and it was seldom explained, or indeed even understood, why it was so undesirable.

language lost its being, the representational knowledge of the Classical episteme had no other access to the "universal" except through language, and one of the dreams of the eighteenth century was to compile all knowledge into one great Encyclopaedia (MC:99-103). Language or rather "discourse", remained a fundamental key to the truth, and words formed a favoured way of representing order (MC:216). At the end of the Classical Age however, language ceased to represent things, and words discovered their "old enigmatic density" (MC:315, OT:304). Because language was so closely tied to representation, this change that transformed general grammar into philology was far more profound than the changes undergone by natural history and the theory of wealth at the same time; it was a change involving "the very being of representations" (MC:245). Foucault argues that if the birth of philology was a part of that same "archaeological upheaval" which gave rise to biology and political economy, its birth has not been as well publicised. This is in spite of the fact that the consequences of its foundation have probably been far more widespread in our culture, "at least at the subterranean levels which underlie and support it" (MC:294). But, as was the case with madness and death, this "re-emergence" of language did not mean a return to the Renaissance.⁵⁷ For the Renaissance, the "being of words" originated from the Word which had been there since the beginning

57. Gérard Mendel undertaking a "sociopschoanalytical" critique of Les mots et les choses, criticises its "nostalgia" for the Renaissance episteme, for "a universe of magical thought". He continues "We are here at a very regressive level where maternal imagos reign." La révolte contre le père: une introduction à la sociopsychanalyse, 2nd ed. (Paris: Payot, 1969), p.333.

of time. For the moderns, words are historical objects, whose history one must analyse to find their true meaning, only to discover that language has no meaning but itself.⁵⁸ Or as Foucault says in Naissance de la clinique, "We are doomed historically to history, to the patient reconstruction of discourses on discourses, and to the task of hearing what has already been said".⁵⁹ As soon as language becomes the object of knowledge "it has nothing else to say but itself, nothing else to do but glitter in the brightness of its own being" (MC:313). Language today is torn between commentary - the search to find a secret and hidden meaning - and criticism - the search to ensure that words correspond correctly to things and label them correctly. The human sciences today are trapped in a double obligation, says Foucault, that of finding a hidden meaning and that of formalisation or systematisation.⁶⁰ This opposition is in Foucault's view, at least at this stage of his career, the profound dilemma of our modern age.

58. "Interpretation in the sixteenth century went from the world (both things and texts) to the divine Word which could be decyphered there. Our interpretation, in any case the one that was formed in the nineteenth century, goes from men, from God, from the sciences or chimera, to the words which made them possible. What it discovers is not the supremacy of a primary discourse, but the fact that we are, before the least of our words is uttered, already dominated and overcome by language". MC p.311. On modern "commentary" which tries to translate a non-existent primary word, which turns out to be language itself, see also NC pp.XII-XIII; cf. "La prose d'Actéon", Nouvelle revue française 12 (1964), p.459.

59. NC p.XII, BC p.xvi; see also, "Le Mallarmé de Jean-Pierre Richard", p.1002.

60. "Entretien avec Raymond Bellour", in Le livre des autres, Raymond Bellour (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1971), p.140; cf. MC pp.94-95.

The new "being of language", the "enigma of the word, its solid being" reemerges today in literature (MC:119).

"Through literature, the being of language shines once more at the frontiers of Western culture - and at its centre - for it is what has been most foreign to that culture since the sixteenth century; but it has also, since this same century, been at the very centre of what Western culture has overlain." (MC:59, OT:44).

The re-emergence of language spells the death knoll for the Man of the humanists. For as they sought to analyse the interior substance of Man, his nature, all they found were more and more words, more and more history, until eventually, it was words they were examining not a construction called "Man".⁶¹ The figure of Man, in Foucault's view, is but an unfortunate aberration doomed to an early death sandwiched between two figures of language. This "Man", he argues, is a strange "empirico-transcendental doublet" (MC:330, OT:319). He is both the object of his own knowledge, and the subject, the originator of that knowledge. He is both an empirical entity and its transcendental foundation. We can deal with our finite nature and found it in science,⁶² our limits becoming our justification, our positive

61. "The only thing we know at the moment in all certainty, is that in Western culture the being of man and the being of language have never, at any time, been able to co-exist and to articulate themselves one upon the other. Their incompatibility has been one of the fundamental traits of our thought". MC p.350, OT p.339.

62. Cf. NC pp.201-202. "Medicine offers modern man the obstinate and reassuring face of his finitude; in medicine death is returned to again and again, but at the same time it is exorcised. And if it insistently announces to man that limit which he carries within himself, medicine also speaks of that technical world which is the armed, positive and fully occupied space of his finitude".

strength.⁶³ This type of knowledge, by making its own limits its foundations, (rather than transgressing them) attempts to eliminate any confrontation with the Other, and neutralises a certain panic before the void. But the dissolution of those limit/foundations into the exteriority of language show that this humanist Man and his scientific achievements is a false security, a mere myth. We are still ultimately faced with the limit, the exterior void. Once again Foucault returns to the examination of a certain relation between man and the Truth, a relation which was almost silenced during the eighteenth, and more particularly, during the nineteenth century. In Les mots et les choses, Foucault argues that because language reveals the "truth" of our knowledge and culture, and because it is present in literature, philosophers should turn their attention to literature, but not with some theory of meaning in mind (MC.59). In Histoire de la folie Foucault had also chastised philosophers for their inattention, but then it was for their failure to recognise madness in their reflection on the world, confusing it entirely with its modern pathological embodiment in mental illness. "But let us make no mistake about it", Foucault wrote emphatically, "under their speculative gravity, it is definitely a question of

63. "The experience which forms at the beginning of the nineteenth century no longer lodges the discovery of finitude within the thought of infinity, but at the very heart of those contents which are posited by a finite knowledge, as the concrete forms of finite existence". MC p.327. In Les mots et les choses, these contents are language, work and life.

the relation of man to the madman, and of that strange face - so long a stranger - which now takes on the virtues of a mirror" (HF:538).

If madness and death remain limits in Les mots et les choses, it is in reference to the "being of language". Don Quixote becomes the first modern work, because in this work the Renaissance episteme organised around "resemblance" fails to correspond to a reality which is based on a form of knowledge based on identity and difference and tables. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Foucault argues, the madman was recognised as being "the one that was Different to the extent that he was unable to know Difference"; everywhere he only sees resemblance.⁶⁴ Likewise, at the other end of the spectrum, poets were able to see the similarities between things: the poet "hears another more profound discourse, which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things" (MC:63). But if the madman annihilated signs in resemblance, the poet listened to the secret wordless "language" of resemblance and expressed it in signs. Between these two extremes, Foucault argues, a new form of knowledge opened up at the end of the Renaissance, a knowledge based on identities and differences. The being of language was unveiled in our age by the works of

64. For an enlightening and poetic reflection on Foucault's description of Don Quixote the "hero of Same and the Other", as expressing "the paradoxical situation of man, a finite being aspiring to infinity," see Jean-Claude Margolin, "L'homme de Michel Foucault", Revue des sciences humaines 128 (1967), p.711.

such writers as Roussel and Artaud, revealing that "region where death prowls". Language shows that man is finite, but in revealing the finitude of man, language unable to bear this very finitude overbalances into madness "that unformed, mute, meaningless region where language can be liberated" (MC:395).

In Les mots et les choses, noting a current preoccupation with language, Foucault asks:

"Is it a sign of the approaching birth, or, even less than that, of the first glow, low on the horizon, of a day scarcely heralded as yet, but in which we can already guess that thought - the thought which has been speaking for thousands of years without knowing what it is to speak or even that it is speaking - is about to recapture itself in its entirety and be illumined once again in the lightning flash of being?"⁶⁵

But is this preoccupation with language the sign of the end of an old episteme or the appearance of new forms which are incompatible with it? Foucault, recognizing perhaps that he is being overly optimistic, admits that he does not know how to reply to these questions or whether he will ever know (MC:318).

By now it will be quite apparent that Foucault had very definitely decided in his work of the 1960s that whatever this secret limit between the Same and the Other is, its presence is revealed today in that "useless and transgressive fold we call

65. MC p.317, OT p.306. B. Lemaigre remarks that Foucault "discovers ... the being of language at the heart of the thought of the outside, at the common focus of multiple experiences revealed by so much poetry, mysticism, philosophy". "Michel Foucault", pp.452,459.

literature".⁶⁶ Although he analyses three different "things", madness, death, and language, he is still describing the same experience, a profound confrontation or dialogue between the Same and the Other at what is, perhaps, ultimately an indescribable or even unknowable level of our history and being.⁶⁷ It is a level that Foucault insistently questions, trying to find some way of understanding it, rendering it intelligible and giving it a concrete content.

This constancy of a philosophical search to understand our limits, and a historiography that draws attention to those limits, even if the content of those limits changes, points to more than just a theoretical "tool box". Foucault's works up to 1966 represent a very definite view of the world, but rather than a philosophy based on an unchanging central focal point, it is a philosophy based on a changing boundary, a changing relation between the Same and the Other, mysteriously apparent in the events of history. Hence Foucault's philosophy is of necessity

66. "La folie, l'absence d'oeuvre", p.581. Although Foucault rarely mentioned literature during his later "power" period, he did at one stage situate it within his system of power: "... literature forms part of that great system of constraint by which the West compelled the everyday to bring itself into discourse; but it occupies a special place there: bent on seeking everyday life beneath itself, on crossing over the limits, ... [it takes] upon itself the charge of scandal, of transgression or of rebellion. More than any other form of language, it remains the discourse of "infamy": it remains its task to say the most unsayable - the worst, the most secret, the most intolerable, the shameless ... But we must not forget that this singular position of literature is only an effect of a certain apparatus of power which traverses in the West the economy of discourse and the strategies of the true". "Interview with Lucette Finas", in Michel Foucault, eds. Morris and Patton, p.91.

67. Foucault refers to "episodes in this profound history of the Same". MC p.398.

also a history. It does not matter that Foucault is unable to discover which limit is the "right one". Indeed as he realises later, it is impossible to do so. It is the awareness of limits, of a dialogue, the possibility of a history which is not merely a sterile repetition of the Same, which is the important point that emerges from Foucault's work. The major difficulty, however, which Foucault only partially dealt with before he died, was the problem of what constitutes moral action for the present individual or society: how can this action be carried out and with what end in sight? "For instance shall we become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves and so on".⁶⁸

Certainly it is very clear where Foucault's sympathies lie, with the oppressed, the downtrodden and the powerless, the rejected. But what remains unclear, is what, after Foucault had exposed the undesirability of certain systems of ideas, could then be done about it.⁶⁹ This is something that Foucault preferred to leave to others to make their own decisions about. Unfortunately in the work which he produced during the 1970s, work which we will examine in the next chapter, he offered far fewer choices to his readers than he had in his earlier work, and it becomes uncertain on occasions just how far he is merely reinforcing the system, and how far he is undermining it, despite his indignant rhetoric.

68. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.355, see also pp.352-54.

69. As W.R. Albury very correctly points out, "There are no grounds for supposing that power relations will melt away in the full light of exposure like some vampire caught in the rays of the sun". "Michel Foucault and the Powers of Darkness", Paper presented at a Conference on Culture and Ideology, Lorne, 1980, p.7.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LIMITS FORGOTTEN

After Les mots et les choses, the outer limits begin to disappear from Foucault's work, and after about 1970, the notions of "power" and "politics" come to occupy an important place in his work. A tremendous amount has been written about this phase of Foucault's work and it has now become quite familiar ground. For this reason it is not essential to concentrate too closely on the detail of Foucault's theories here. In addition, as was indicated in Chapter Four, this work will be approached from quite a different angle from that which is usually taken, in keeping with our theme of the "history of the limits".

One might begin by remarking, that for all the intrinsic interest and usefulness of Foucault's work on power, discipline and regimes of truth, it falls back into the political myth which he had exposed so convincingly in Les mots et les choses. He argues in this book that because modern thought has transformed the limits of man and his knowledge into transcendental foundations, it becomes both knowledge and transformation of its object of reflection. Hence, modern thought is already a morality, already an ethics: it is not a reflection on an exterior Other, but a totally self referential and self transforming system. Man has in fact located the "Other" of himself, that undiscoverable "something" he searches to know

within himself. What need is there, then, for philosophy to declare its political or ethical allegiance when it is in itself an ethics or a politics or a thought of the self realisation of man?¹

But having criticised the limitations of modern knowledge so well, Foucault does not go beyond them. Of his subsequent work, Jean Baudrillard remarks in 1977, that Foucault remains within the system of power he criticises, and that his writing is the mirror image of the spirals of disciplinary and molecular power he condemns. "Foucault stops at the threshold of a present revolution of the system which he never wanted to cross".² This sudden withdrawal and inability to take his own thought to its logical conclusions, was remarked upon also by Maurice Clavel, in relation to Les mots et les choses. Foucault in a letter to Clavel said that he would have liked to have "traced the outline" of humanism and structuralism, but "the task appeared so immense, it required such an uprooting, that I didn't

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1. Speaking of the awareness of thought as "a perilous act", Foucault referring to his favourite authors, remarks: "Sade, Nietzsche, Artaud and Bataille knew it for all those who wanted not to know it; but it is also certain that Hegel, Marx and Freud knew it. Can one say that all those, who in their profound stupidity affirm that there is no philosophy without political choice, that all thought is 'progressive' or 'reactionary', do not know it? Their foolishness is to believe that all thought 'expresses' the ideology of a class, their involuntary profundity is that they point to the modern mode of being of thought". MC p.339.
 2. Jean Baudrillard, Oublier Foucault (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p.20. Baudrillard also remarks that in Foucault's work "one remains within the discourse of politics - 'one never escapes it' says Foucault - whereas it should really be a matter of grasping the radical indefinition of politics, its inexistence..." p.79. Baudrillard's criticisms of the notions of power have provided some useful ideas for the present analysis.

carry it through to the end, I didn't formulate it as I should have, and at the last moment I closed my eyes".³

Not only is there a difference of approach, but there is a marked difference between the style, imagery and tone of the work Foucault produced during the 1960s and that of the 1970s. After 1970, he appears to find thinking and writing rather dreary and burdensome and a certain enthusiasm vanishes from his work, leaving in its place, what Jacques Léonard describes as a "veiled anger against the ... normalising society"⁴ and Richard Rorty as "more and more sophisticated expressions of resentment".⁵ And as Clavel remarks, "in spite of the quality, the intelligence of Surveiller et punir", he appears in a way to be writing "to keep himself busy".⁶ This change of tone is more than simply

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3. Maurice Clavel, Ce que je crois (Paris: Grasset, 1975), pp.133-38,139.
 4. Jacques Léonard, "L'historien et le philosophe. A propos de Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison", in L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle et débat avec Michel Foucault, ed. Michelle Perrot (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p.19.
 5. Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", London Review of Books, 19 February 1981, p.6.
 6. Claude Mauriac, Le temps immobile, vol.3: Et comme l'espérance est violente (Paris: Grasset, 1976), pp.518-19; Clavel, Ce que je crois, p.142. Clavel also argues that Foucault had said everything for once and for all in Les mots et les choses, which is perhaps rather an overstatement of an intuition that Foucault had lost a kind of enthusiasm "which unified his thought, his action, his being ...". For a refutation of Clavel's criticism that he is just "keeping himself busy", see Francois Ewald, "Foucault, une pensée sans aveu", in Les dieux dans la cuisine, Jean-Jacques Brochier et al (Paris: Aubier, 1978), p.46. Ewald does not refer to Clavel by name.

just an impression one gains from Foucault's increasingly rapid changes of mind about what the essential key to thought is today or a certain insistence on the "fictive" nature of his writings. One also finds him commenting directly on the difficulty of thinking and writing. In an article written in 1970, in which he invites us to liberate difference and to engage in "a thought of the multiple", he remarks: "Thinking does not console or make you happy. Thinking crawls along apathetically like a perversion ..."⁷ and he says to Fons Elders in 1974:

"I do not say things because I think them; I say them rather with the aim of self-destruction, so that I will not have to think any more, so that I can be certain that from now on, they will lead a life outside me, or die the death, in which I will not have to recognise myself".⁸

In an interview in 1975, he also remarks that he does not like writing: "It is a very difficult activity to master. Writing only interests me in so far as it can be incorporated into the

7. "Theatrum philosophicum", Critique, No.282 (November 1982), pp.899,908.

8. Fons Elders, Postscript to Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), pp.288-89. This can be compared with Foucault's well known remarks in L'archéologie du savoir about writing so as "to no longer have a face" and in L'ordre du discours, where he says that he would prefer not to have to begin speaking, to be the originator of the discourse; but to be instead "the point of its possible disappearance". OD pp.7-8. However these statements are far more "philosophical" in tenor, and refer to Foucault's idea of a subject dispersed and fragmented by language.

reality of a combat ... I would like my books to be sorts of scalpels, Molotov cocktails or minefields and that they would explode after use like fireworks".⁹

In any case, it would appear that Foucault did not find a vision of the world in which the Same and the Other were totally coextensive a particularly easy one to think through. This can also be seen in the fact that for much of this period, Foucault spent his time insisting that he was doing the precise opposite of what he was actually doing. While recommending that his readers should use history to show that people have not always thought the same way they do now, that there is no such thing as historical necessity, and that ideas are historical events, in Surveiller et punir, La volonté de savoir and a number of articles, he paints a picture of a world totally determined down to its finest particles by the inescapable workings of an anonymous and insubstantial "power".

Perhaps, Foucault's interest in the simple "there is", or in an order which does not communicate with the disorder of the void, dates back to 1966, when he says to Raymond Bellour: "My object is not language but the archive, that is, the accumulated existence of discourses". He goes on to explain that he is

9. "Entretien", Les nouvelles littéraires, 17 March 1975, interview with Jean-Louis Ezine, p.3; cf. OD p.73 where Foucault remarks that Georges Dumézil encouraged him to write "at an age when I still believed that writing was a pleasure".

"haunted by the existence of discourses, by the fact that words took place ... [and] left traces behind them".¹⁰ In L'archéologie du savoir he proposes a systematic method of describing this great mass of discourse, (AS:183) and in his insistence on a principle of discontinuity, notes that instead of simply existing at the limits of our history, the Other pervades the very fabric of history at the most everyday level of the event. Archaeology, he says, is intended as "a description of what has already been said at the level of its existence".¹¹ It is a "theory free" description, if by theory is meant "the deduction from a certain number of axioms, of an abstract model applicable to an indefinite number of empirical descriptions" (AS:149). Rather than "founding a theory", Foucault claims he is doing no more than "establishing a possibility";¹² if theory is unity, then archaeology is multiplicity.¹³ The possibility

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10. "Entretien avec Raymond Bellour", in Le livre des autres (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976), p.201; see also "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", La quinzaine littéraire, 15 May 1966, p.15.
11. AS p.173. Archaeology "liberate[s] a coherent area of description". AS p.150. Foucault expresses some regret that he had as yet been unable to formulate a "theory".
12. AS p.150; see also some comments in Les mots et les choses, pp.64-65 concerning the inexplicable discontinuities which mark the end of one episteme and the beginning of another. Foucault notes that all his archaeology can do at present is describe these changes. Perhaps at some later date, he suggests, it might be possible to offer explanations, cf. pp.229-30.
13. AS pp.209,269. Deleuze considers that L'archéologie du savoir "represents the most decisive step in a theory-practice of multiplicities", Un nouvel archiviste (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), p.29; see also his remarks to Foucault about his work, and his political activities alongside prisoners. Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir", L'arc 49 (1972), pp.3-5.

of a type of thought which could undermine "totalities" and unifying theories, and do away with "transcendental" categories, was one that returned with increasing insistence and frequency in Foucault's work during the 1970s. This would appear remarkably like the aims espoused by positivist and empiricist types of thought, if it were not for one thing: the undermining of that paradoxically transcendental category upon which this type of thought is based, namely the "fact". Following Nietzsche, Foucault insists that there is no such thing as a "fact", that there are only interpretations of other interpretations.¹⁴ Any perception of "reality" we have is already an intellectual construction.¹⁵ This "surprising mixture ... [of] positivism and nihilism" as Vincent Descombes describes it, led some of

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14. In a well known passage, Foucault paraphrases Nietzsche: "If interpretation can never end, it is quite simply because there is nothing to interpret. There is absolutely nothing primary to interpret, because fundamentally, everything is already interpretation, each sign is in itself not the thing which is offered to interpretation, but the interpretation of other signs". Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", in Cahiers du Royaumont: Nietzsche (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p.189. This is, of course, a restatement of the views on the modern "being of language" that were expressed in Les mots et les choses.
15. These discussions have been taken up at length by historians and epistemologists. Unfortunately we do not have the space to deal with them here.

Foucault's critics, and Foucault himself at a certain period, to describe his histories as "novels" or "fictions".¹⁶

In L'archéologie du savoir, the existence of discourse replaces the being of language, just as the latter had replaced death, and death had replaced madness. Revising his views on madness, Foucault claims that in Histoire de la folie, he had been trying to reconstitute madness, going on to say that this was not what he should have done:

"We are not trying to reconstitute what madness itself might have been, in the form in which it first presented itself to some primitive, fundamental, vague, barely articulated experience, and in the form in which it was subsequently organised (translated, deformed, travestied, repressed perhaps) by discourses, and the oblique often twisted game of their operations".

He adds in a footnote that "This is written against an explicit theme of my book Madness and Civilisation, and one that recurs particularly in the preface".(AS:64, AK:47) In this passage we notice a number of interesting shifts: first of all, in Histoire de la folie Foucault rather than attempting to define what

16. Vincent Descombes, Le même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (Paris: Minuit, 1977), pp.138-9. See Foucault "Interview with Lucette Finas", in Michel Foucault, Power, Truth, Strategy eds. M. Morris and P. Patton (Sydney: Feral, 1979), p.74. "As for the problem of fiction, to me this is a very important problem; I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say that they are outside truth. It seems possible to me to make fiction work within truth, to induce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make the discourse of truth arouse, 'fabricate' something which does not as yet exist, thus 'fiction' something".

madness was, had been far more concerned with the existence of a certain experience of the limit, which he argued, was found in its most pure form in madness. Secondly, "discourses" (even repressive ones) as a concept or even as a word, scarcely rate a mention in Histoire de la folie. However a large number of critics, particularly in English, have taken this description of Histoire de la folie at face value, and we find quite a number of criticisms of this book, couched in either the terms Foucault uses in the passage above, or those of an interview conducted in 1977.¹⁷ In this interview the "discursive" reinterpretation was substituted for one in terms of power: "At the point of junction of Histoire de la folie and Les mots et les choses, there was, under two very different aspects, this central problem of power which I had as yet only very poorly isolated".¹⁸ He also remarks that he wrote Histoire de la folie on the horizon of questions which could all be summed up in two words "knowledge and power".¹⁹ His discussion in the same interview of the

17. See for example Colin Gordon who adopts the definition offered in L'archéologie. "Afterword", in PK pp.235-36. Robert Wuthnow et al adopt the definition in terms of power. Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.144.

18. "Vérité et pouvoir", L'arc 70 (1977), p.18; "Truth and Power", in Michel Foucault, eds. Morris and Patton, p.32. See also "Sorcellerie et folie", Le monde, 23 April 1976, p.18. Here Foucault declares that "madness is no less an effect of power than is non-madness".

19. "Vérité et pouvoir", p.16, "Truth and Power", p.28. In another interview given in the same year Foucault describes "two great technologies of power: one which was weaving sexuality and one which was dividing off madness". "Interview with Lucette Finas", p.68.

Marxists' lack of interest in topics such as madness, has also led some English speaking critics to take it for granted that "Foucault's work from Madness and Civilization onwards was motivated by a wish to address a series of intellectual-political questions which had been either neglected or badly discussed by the Marxist-dominated intellectual left".²⁰ This, however was far from being the case, as we have suggested in previous chapters. In the same interview, Foucault also describes and rejects a methodology of history based on the ordering of discourse; this being, of course, a rejection of his own archaeological approach. In a passage reminiscent of L'archéologie du savoir he remarks: "the problem is both to distinguish events, differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the threads which bind them, make them give rise to one another". He goes on to say, however: "relations of power, not relations of sense ... [History] should be able to be analysed down to the slightest detail, but according to the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics".²¹

In recent years, however, there has been an interesting trend amongst English language critics towards "reinstating"

20. Minson, Genealogies of Morals. Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.12.

21. "Verité et pouvoir", p.19; "Truth and Power", p.33; cf "Body/Power", in PK p.62 and; "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", Hérodote: Stratégies, géographies, idéologies 1 (January 1976), p.73.

L'archéologie du savoir, as discussion becomes more widespread concerning major difficulties with Foucault's genealogies of power.²² Others such as Colin Gordon suggest that certain aspects of this book, contrary to popular belief, form the "essential ground" for the further concepts Foucault was to introduce.²³ But Foucault's attempt to be a "happy positivist" (AS:164, AK:125, OD:72), even if his "facts" were all fictions, met with a shortlived success indeed, as a host of critics rushed forward to point out both in French and English the inherent difficulties with this approach.²⁴ By the time he came to write L'ordre du discours, he had abandoned the vision of a systematic description of the discursive "artefacts" left by the past, for one in which "discourses" became the dangerous and precious objects of political struggle. In every society, Foucault says, the production of discourse is carefully controlled and regulated in an effort to reduce its non-conformity, its propensity to escape from a manageable system. As in his earlier books, he proposes the existence

22. Jeffrey Minson remarks for example "For myself, the whole (theoretical) question of power in Foucault has become an unprofitable one ... the Archaeology is an exemplary ... book; loyalty to its precepts would have precluded many of the excesses of Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality". Genealogies of Morals, pp.114,116.

23. Gordon, "Afterword", p.244.

24. François Châtelet's comments in 1966 that archaeology remains purely descriptive, suggesting that Foucault try the genealogy of Nietzsche, which of course he did, some years later. "L'homme ce narcissisme incertain", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 April 1966, p.20.

of a certain division in our history, but it is no longer situated at that limit where our discourses and knowledge fade into silence and ignorance. It is a division which is internal to the operation of discourse and knowledge, a principle which orders the production of discourses in a society.

Starting with the Ancient Greeks, Foucault describes the means by which a constraining system of exclusion operates in our discourse, noting three major procedures of exclusion. The first is prohibition: the areas of sexuality and politics becoming the areas where the rules of prohibition and exclusion are most concentrated, the second is the opposition between reason and madness. As Foucault so often does, in a most curious fashion, he treats his previous ideas as the work of somebody else in order to refute or modify them: "I will be told that ... the word of the madman is no longer on the other side of the division; that it is no longer null and void; that on the contrary it puts us on our guard ... But so much attention does not prove that the old division is no longer operative" (OD:14). The third and most important principle, and the one that governs the first two is the "will to truth". Foucault also takes the opportunity to reinterpret some of L'archéologie du savoir. The unities of discourse (the work, the author, the discipline) are no longer simply the remnants of a metaphysics based on continuity, a metaphysics that should be done away with, they become sinister forms of restriction and constraint imposed upon discourse (OD:38). But on the other hand the solution offered to

this problem is similar, and Foucault proposes a way of countering this ordering of discourse by using notions such as those of the "event" and the "series" and the other related ideas of "regularity, chance, discontinuity, dependence, transformation" (OD:58-59).

"It is not a question either of the succession of moments of time, or of the multiplicity of various thinking subjects. It is a question of caesurae which break the moment and disperse the subject into a plurality of possible positions and functions ... One must conceive of relations between these discontinuous series, which are not of the order of succession (or simultaneity) in one (or several) consciousnesses".²⁵

At about the same time that discourses became the objects of political struggle in Foucault's work the "unconscious" grid of order that underlay their production, governing the division of truth and falsity for a given period, underwent a politicisation.²⁶ This "unconscious" was gradually transformed into what Foucault was to describe later as "an absolutely conscious organised, considered strategy which can be clearly read

25. OD p.60; cf. Foucault, "Theatrum philosophicum", p.895.

26. "What I would like to do ... is to reveal a positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse", Foucault remarks. OT p.xi; see also Foucault's remark on p.xiv: "What conditions did Linneaus (or Petty or Arnauld) have to fulfill, not to make his discourse coherent and true in general, but to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse?"

in a mass of unknown documents which constitute the effective discourse of a political action".²⁷ But whether conscious or unconscious, the same level is still being addressed: that grid between words and things which systematically orders the world into a particular form of intelligible existence for a given society or period: in other words a historical a priori. During the 1960s in Foucault's work, the order of the Same and an exterior Other confronted each other at the limits, and change at this level occurred as the result of that dialogue. Once the exterior limits vanish however, internal relations become more important and it becomes a question of power, of who controls this level and by what means. In 1970, Foucault put it this way (again in an unacknowledged rejection of his own earlier ideas): "new problems have appeared: no longer what are the limits of knowledge (or its foundations), but who are those who know? How is knowledge appropriated and distributed?"²⁸ Thus, as soon as the limits began to retreat in Foucault's work, politics began to advance, discreetly at first, then quite stridently in a self

27. "Des supplices aux cellules", Le monde, 21 February 1975, interview with Roger-Pol Droit, p.16. In this interview Foucault refutes previous theories without mentioning that they were (at least partially) his own. "A logic of the unconscious must ... be replaced by a logic of the strategy".

28. "Le piège de Vincennes", Le nouvel observateur, 9 February 1970, p.35. Concerning these types of declarations, Jacques Bouveresse remarks acutely: "... a philosopher who says 'philosophy today is ...' should consider that he is perhaps simply giving a 'persuasive definition', and that it is always a little suspect to present as a historical necessity what might simply be a personal option, in itself perfectly legitimate and defensible". "Pourquoi pas des philosophes?", Critique 34, no.369 (1978), p.118.

abnegating crypto-Maoism during the early 1970s. In the interview with Madeleine Chapsal in 1966, where he proclaims his discovery of the "there is", and the System, he remarks, much to the surprise of the interviewer, that the opposition of the thinkers of the System to existentialism and humanism is a "political" one.²⁹ L'archéologie du savoir also mentions "politics" in its last few pages (AS:273) as many critics note with grave approval.³⁰

But politics did not really become a major issue in Foucault's work until after about 1970. In the early 1970s, Foucault, who was involved in a number of political activities with the Maoists, proposed revolution on several occasions, defining revolutionary action "as the simultaneous agitation of consciousness and institutions"; which implies, he says, that we should attack the relationships of power in institutions and in knowledge.³¹ He recommends that prisoners should rebel collectively against "the system of training" to which they are

29. "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal", p.15.

30. AS p.273; Alan Sheridan remarks for example that L'archéologie ends on a "prophetically political note". Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1981), p.110.

31. "Revolutionary Action 'Until Now'", in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.228. This interview was originally published in French in 1971.

subject.³² He also remarks more moderately in a discussion with Chomsky, that "the real political task is to criticise the workings of institutions".³³ In 1972, we find him proposing that the "non-proletarianised pleb" (which included marginal groups such as the mentally ill, delinquents and prisoners) should join in the "revolutionary battle" against "capitalism" and the "bourgeoisie" under the leadership of the proletariat. "Because what capitalism is basically afraid of ... [is] the lads who go out into the streets with their knives and guns, ready for direct and violent action".³⁴ However, after some of Foucault's non-Maoist friends expressed reservations about the violence of his views in 1972, he eventually toned them down.³⁵ Elsewhere we find him referring to "a regime of the dictatorship of class", or "class struggles".³⁶

These political writings are certainly not amongst Foucault's more original efforts, and as Annie Kriegel remarks, his belief

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32. "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview", Telos 19 (Spring 1974), interview with John K. Simon, p.157. Much later, Foucault declared it was the duty of prisoners to try and escape, since the prison could turn them into "dangerous" characters. "Attention: danger", Libération, 22 March 1978, p.9.
33. Foucault and Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power", in Reflexive Water: ed. Elders, p.171.
34. "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists", in PK p.26, originally published in French 1972; cf. "Table ronde", Pourquoi le travail social? Esprit 40 (1972), p.698.
35. See Mauriac, Et comme l'espérance ..., pp.373-74.
36. Foucault and Chomsky, "Human Nature", p.170; Foucault et le GIS (Groupe Information Santé), "Médecine et lutte de classes", La nef, no. 49 (October 1972), pp.67-73.

in the revolutionary efficacy of a coalition of marginals, was the sign of an "incurable romanticism".³⁷ And even in spite of this revolutionary rhetoric a number of writers in France still found it difficult to understand why he engaged in activities to help the marginals and the oppressed, and where the logical connection lay between his philosophy and his politics. When asked by Maurice Clavel, a particularly enthusiastic exponent of Foucault's ideas on the death of man, why he engaged in his various political activities, he replied "'In the name of the excluded and the imprisoned, through humanism'. 'Therefore for a vaster, universal finally a real humanism!'" added Clavel, but did not manage to elicit a response from Foucault.³⁸

Out of all these political activities in the early 1970s came Foucault's book Surveiller et punir. In this book Foucault

37. Annie Kriegel, "La souffrance et l'honneur", Le Figaro, 26 June 1984, p.1. Claude Mauriac comments that during a discussion with Foucault about prisons, during which the latter remarked that "the suppression of all prisons" could be conceived of", he received the impression that Foucault was in "full Utopian flight", Et comme l'espérance ..., p.324.

38. Clavel, Ce que je crois, pp.140-141; cf. Jean-Marie Domenach, "Un engagement sans prétention, ni manipulation", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.9. There are numerous remarks about Foucault's dedication to helping the powerless. Serge Livrozet comments: "For all the manifestations of the rights of Man, whether they were immigrants, handicapped, prisoners or taxed with madness, Michel Foucault integrated, as if in spite of himself, into the system, always displayed a categorical intellectual refusal of all forms of exclusion". "Le philosophe aux portes de la prison", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.8. Foucault's lawyer Georges Kiejman also comments "It is less well known what a modest, obstinate and exemplary defender he was of those who have no rights". "Le premier à reconnaître s'être fourvoyé dans l'erreur khomeiniste", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.9.

describes the birth of the modern prison system between 1760 and 1840. He traces the disappearance of torture and public executions as a legal means of punishment in the penal system and the development of a different regime which no longer punished the body but sought to control the "soul". The objective of this new system was to "cure", correct and train, rather than to punish. Foucault quotes Mabley writing in 1789, "let punishment ... strike the soul rather than the body" (SP:22). But even if physical punishments such as imprisonment, isolation and hard labour remained current, their object was no longer the same, for the body had become the means of access to the "soul", of depriving an individual of certain "rights" or "possessions", such as his liberty. "Punishment passed from an art of unbearable sensations to an economy of suspended rights" as Foucault puts it (SP:16). The torturer and the executioner were replaced by a "whole army of technicians": prison guards, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers and chaplains (SP:26). But one must not make the mistake, says Foucault, of thinking that the suppression of torture in the penal system was the proof of a growing humanitarianism. The old methods were simply no longer an effective means of controlling a certain element of the population in a rapidly changing society (SP:80, 90). This is, of course, a similar argument to the one Foucault uses in Histoire de la folie concerning the birth of the science of psychiatry, and the more "humane" treatment of madmen.

It is at this point that Foucault introduces his famous (some would say notorious) notion of power: "That thing which is so enigmatic, both visible and invisible, present and hidden,

invested everywhere, which is called power".³⁹ It is indeed enigmatic, for Foucault never explains why he thinks it is so important. It would seem that he has simply adopted a variation of Nietzsche's notion of a "will to power" underlying all pretensions to morality.⁴⁰ It is a notion, either on its own or in its variant form "power-knowledge", that many writers have come to see as being the "unity of Foucault's work",⁴¹ a "fundamental theme" of his history and genealogy as well as a "fundamental question concerning our present". Indeed so popular was the idea that, as Robert Maggiori remarks, "the power-knowledge relationship became the pivot of what one could call the current mode of thought".⁴³ In English speaking countries, the notion of "power" continues to thrive and acquire new dimensions and applications especially in sociology and as a form of intellectual politics.⁴⁴

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39. Foucault and Deleuze, "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir", p.7.
40. As Jeffrey Minson correctly points out however, Nietzsche in revealing the "immoral bases" of morality, saying that "morality" is nothing but the workings of a rapacious and naturalistic "will to power", is only setting up one "essentialist moral argument" against another. Minson Genealogies of Morals, pp.71-72. For a similar point see Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel Foucault (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1984), p.264.
41. Christian Jambet, "L'unité d'une pensée: une interrogation sur les pouvoirs", Le monde 21 February 1975, p.17.
42. Colin Gordon, "Preface" in PK p.viii. More unusually, Cousins and Hussain consider that Foucault's emphasis on power is "inflated" and "unwarranted". Michel Foucault, pp.201,227.
43. Robert Maggiori, "Michel Foucault: une pensée sur les chemins de traverse", Libération, 26 June 1984, p.5.
44. In France, however, there has been a shift away from power towards the consideration of questions of personal ethics, ontology and Foucault's invitation to think beyond his thought, in other words an emphasis on philosophical questions.

Foucault describes the birth of the prison in terms of a change in "tactics of power", from a discontinuous "macropower" exercised by the sovereign to a "microphysics of power" (SP:31), which now permeates all levels of social relations, focusing on the "body", producing "individuals" who are "useful" and "productive".⁴⁵ Rather than being simply the victim of power, therefore, the individual is in fact created by power, as a means of facilitating the control of power over bodies.⁴⁶ Much has been said about Foucault's ideas on the creation of the modern individual, and recently some critics have begun to use the ideas Foucault expressed on the subject in Naissance de la clinique to complement his power centred analyses in Surveiller et punir. It is a process that interested Foucault right throughout his career but, contrary to what now seems to be now a widespread belief, he did not always see the rise of the individual in terms of "power".⁴⁷ In Histoire de la folie, it was the result of the alienation of madness and the creation of a science based on the silencing of the language of the Other. In Naissance de la

45. Cf. "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", p.81.

46. "Two Lectures", in PK p.98.

47. In recent years, since the publication of Foucault's last books, there also appears to be a certain tendency towards confusing the philosophical category of the "subject" with the category of the "individual". This is an error which does not occur in Foucault's own work, but it is possible that his historical treatment of both categories, combined with the continual shifts in his philosophical and historical perspectives may have caused confusion in the minds of some critics.

clinique, it was the sinister entry of death into knowledge which was the basis on which the individual could be created. In Les mots et les choses, "man in his positivity (a living, working and speaking being)" (MC:364) was the end product of an epistemic configuration which posited as an empirico-transcendental foundation, a humanist Man.

In the "new regime of truth" (SP:27) that was established at the end of the eighteenth century, the criminal was no longer simply the symbolic enemy of the king, he was the enemy of the entire social body, a monstrous aberration, abnormal, no longer quite human. Punishment was no longer the vengeance of the sovereign, but the defence of an entire society (SP:92-93). But in the figure of the delinquent, the occupant of prisons, this monster, could become the object of disciplinary power and knowledge. "In its functioning, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of healing or educating", comments Foucault (SP:310). The prisoner thus became the model for a "knowledge of individuals" which was to spread beyond the prison to the whole of society (SP:128-29). In "retraining" the prisoner as a useful member of society, power was exercised over him in the form of "discipline". This "microphysics of power" which discipline represented (SP:141) regulated the actions and behaviour of the body down to the most minute detail.⁴⁸ If

48. Discipline was embodied in "a politics of coercions which act on the body and form a calculated manipulation of its elements, gestures, behaviour. The human body enters into a machinery of power, which scrutinises it, takes it apart, then puts it back together again". SP p.139.

relations of power have always been with us, in Foucault's view, their microscopic, "multiple" and "multiform"⁴⁹ incarnation in "discipline" is a modern development. It is a power which insinuates itself into "the very texture of individuals, ... introducing itself into their gestures, their attitudes, their discourse, their experience, their daily life".⁵⁰ Disciplinary power can be exercised through institutions, states, the police or families, permeating the whole of society down to the most "infinitesimal" level (SP:218, 215). This disciplinary "technology" of power, says Foucault, first manifested itself in the operation and organisation of such institutions as schoolrooms, hospitals and army barracks. This organisation was initially, at the end of the eighteenth century, undertaken in terms of the "table", which in Surveiller et punir becomes a "technique of power and a procedure of knowledge" (SP:150), almost an intentional conspiracy imposed on things and people, rather than simply the (unconscious) mode of being of knowledge it had been in Foucault's previous books.⁵¹ Disciplinary

49. "Power and Strategies", interview with the Révoltes logiques collective, in Michel Foucault, eds. Morris and Patton, p.55.

50. "Entretien sur la prison: le livre et sa méthode", Magazine littéraire, no.101 (June 1975), p.28; cf. "Power and Norm", in Michel Foucault, eds. Morris and Patton, p.60.

51. Of Surveiller et punir, Jacques Léonard remarks "there is a knowing machination, but it is obstinately impersonal or abstract. Structuralists and existentialists are equally disappointed. What is a strategy without generals? Battle of who against who? Of the bourgeoisie against the people? Of Satan against the Archangel?" "L'historien et le philosophe", p.15.

procedures also led to an evolutionary, linear view of time oriented towards progress and a fixed end. In Les mots et les choses, this appearance of "historical" time had been linked to a fundamental separation of words and things, a shift away from a language which represented things in the two dimensional space of the table.

Disciplinary power was also to be enforced by continual surveillance, of which Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is the model. "There is no need for weapons, physical violence or material constraints, only a gaze. A gaze which watches attentively and which each person feeling its weight, ends up by interiorising to the point of watching himself".⁵² If this surveillance is exercised on the individual, it is dependent for its effective operation on every individual watching every other individual. Alongside "surveillance", "normalisation" also became "one of the great instruments of power" at the end of the Classical Age (SP:186). One of the objectives of disciplinary power was to ensure that every individual conformed to a certain "norm" or idea of normality, to become uniform, therefore manageable for the purposes of power. The judges of normality are everywhere in this system: in schools, prison, hospitals. All the individualising mechanisms of our civilisation Foucault says, have come to be concentrated on the people at the margins of

52. Foucault, "L'oeil du pouvoir," interview/preface to Le panoptique by Jeremy Bentham (Paris: Belford, 1977), p.19.

society, and when the sane, normal and law abiding adult is individualised, it is always in reference to those secret elements of madness, disease, criminality and childishness he bears within him (SP:195). Again, this echoes certain themes in Histoire de la folie where the madman becomes the alienated truth of man in the nineteenth century.

However, not content with this long list of controlling "strategies": discipline, surveillance and normalisation; Foucault goes on to suggest that the "examination" where power and knowledge intersect to form a "normalising surveillance which allows qualification, classification and punishment" (SP:186-87), is at the centre of disciplinary procedures which form the individual. Foucault almost reaches a point of overkill at this stage. "Discipline" is everywhere, it explains everything: the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. The "police inquiry" forms a model for the procedures of empirical science, and the birth of the human sciences is to be found in the "unglorious archives" of the rise of disciplinary power.⁵³ This, of course, is quite a different explanation from the ones offered in his previous books in which he had located the birth of the human

53. "The archaeology of the human sciences has to be established through studying the mechanisms of power which have invested human bodies, acts and forms of behaviour. And this investigation enables us to rediscover one of the conditions of the emergence of the human sciences: the great nineteenth century effort in discipline and normalisation". "Body/Power" (1975), in PK p.62.

sciences in the silencing of madness, in the study of death in medicine, and in an anthropologisation of knowledge. Society becomes an extension of the prison, that "concentrated and austere figure of disciplines" (SP:259).

By the time he came to write La volonté de savoir, however, Foucault had lost interest in discipline, although not in power, which, if anything, had become even more all pervasive. In this book, Foucault argues that far from repressing sex, modern Western civilization has done nothing but produce endless "talk" on this topic. Western society, he says, has perfected the work of creating "subjects" (in both senses of the word) who aid the task of power by confessing all. Sexuality according to Foucault, occupies a very important place in what he terms the "science of the confession", as it has become the ultimate secret which must be revealed. If the "truth" about sex is known, then we will know "who we are", we will know our own truth.⁵⁴ Over the centuries, as a result of this conjunction of confession and sexuality, he says, "the project of a science of the subject began to gravitate around the question of sex", not because of some natural property of sex itself, but because of the workings of power.⁵⁵ But why, Foucault asks, has sex acquired such capacities for containing the truth. Why not some other object or experience? This is a question that to which he fails to

54. VS p.93; cf. Foucault, "Non au sexe roi", Le nouvel observateur, 12 March 1977, p.93.

55. VS p.94; cf. Foucault, "L'occident et la vérité du sexe", Le monde, 5 November 1976, p.24.

provide any convincing answers in La volonté de savoir. And when asked later, in 1983, in relation to volumes 2 and 3 of Histoire de la sexualité, whether he still thought that the understanding of sexuality was central to an understanding of who we are, he declared that he was "much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex ... sex is boring". But when asked why, in that case, he had written these further two volumes on sex, he did not really enlighten the enquirer.⁵⁶

The main focal point of discussion in relation to La volonté de savoir, however, was Foucault's revised theories of power. Not only does power become "productive" rather than "repressive",⁵⁷ but "discipline" is ousted from its central spot and becomes one of the two forms of "biopower". The second form of biopower is the control of population, acting through such disciplines as demography, studies of resources and population, and economics. Biological life, he goes on to argue, became the object of knowledge, control and power in the nineteenth century. "The political significance of the problem of sex", Foucault concludes, "is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection between the discipline of the body

56. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp.340-41. For a similar point see Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986), p.234.

57. The reversal scarcely helps because, as Jean Baudrillard points out, the end result (an all pervasive control) is much the same and it becomes merely the matter of a word. Oublier Foucault, pp.21-22.

and the control of the population".⁵⁸ Not content to reinterpret discipline in terms of bio-power, he also reinterprets the "normalising society" which, no longer the result of disciplinary power, becomes the result of a "technology of power centred on life" (VS:190).

Almost as soon as these ideas appeared Foucault abandoned them, and in the same year as the publication of La volonté de savoir, we find him declaring that "The task of an intellectual today [is] quite simply the work of truth", or in other words unmasking the "truth" which is created by power for its own ends.⁵⁹ One also notes his complaints in 1977, concerning his characterisation as "the melancholic historian of prohibitions and repressive power", when in reality his problem had always been "the effects of power and the production of 'truth'".⁶⁰ By 1978, his "problem" had become "knowing how men govern themselves and others through the production of truth".⁶¹ By truth, Foucault means here, the way in which the truth and

58. Foucault, "Truth and Power", p.41.

59. Foucault, "Preface to L'affaire Mirval ou comment le récit abolit le crime (Paris: Presses d'aujourd'hui, 1976), p.X; cf. "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", pp.72,74; see also "Verité et pouvoir", p.25; "Truth and Power", p.44, where he remarks: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is of types of discourse which it welcomes and causes to function as true". See also "Two Lectures", in PK p.93.

60. Foucault, "Non au sexe roi", p.105.

61. Foucault, "Débat avec Michel Foucault: table ronde du 20 mai 1978", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot p.47, Foucault redefines his "problem" or his "project" at least three or four times in this same interview. See also pp.51,55.

falsity of propositions are defined in a given society. The will to forge new relations between "government" and "truth" is defined by Foucault as a "political spirituality".⁶²

In both Surveiller et punir and La volonté de savoir, and in a number of other writings, Foucault criticised traditional and essentialist views of power, and was careful to emphasise that power was not a "thing" but a relation: "Power is not an institution and it is not a structure, it is not a certain strength with which some are endowed; it is the name that is lent to a complex strategic situation in a given society".⁶³ It is interesting to note certain similarities between this definition and some of the definitions in L'archéologie du savoir. There he emphasises that the "formation of objects", the "statement", and the "discursive practice" are neither things, structures, nor the property of individual psyches, but are functions or relations.⁶⁴ In La volonté de savoir Foucault also argues that complaints that we can never escape power, and that there is no "absolute exterior" in relation to power, "misunderstand the

62. Ibid., p.51. As was pointed out in Chapter 6, this notion also appears in "A quoi rêvent les iraniens?", Le nouvel observateur, 16 October 1978, pp.48-49.

63. VS p.123; cf. also "The Confession of the Flesh", in PK p.198, "In reality, power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations"; "Power and Norm", pp.59-60 and; SP p.31.

64. AS pp.93,115,153. Incidentally Pamela Major-Poetzl compares archaeology with "field theory" or quantum physics on the basis of this shift from things to relations. Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Culture. Toward a New Science of History (Brighton, Harvester, 1983), pp.5,21.

strictly relational character of power relations", then after having made this rather tautological statement, he suddenly and mysteriously proposes a "multiplicity of points of resistance", which, it might be noted, are inextricably linked to the operations of power.⁶⁵ But this theory of a totally coextensive and pre-determined relation of the Same and the Other, does nothing to solve Foucault's problem. As Jean Baudrillard so correctly points out, even if power is not a "thing", it becomes in spite of everything, a "final principle" of intelligibility and reality in Foucault's work:⁶⁶

"Power is an irreversible principle of organisation, it manufactures the real, always more of the real. Quadrature, nomenclature, dictatorship without redress, nowhere is it rendered void, nowhere does it twist back on itself and become entangled with death. In this sense, even if it is without finality or a last judgement, it becomes itself a final principle - it is the last term, the irreducible texture, the last fable that is told, what structures the indeterminate equation of the world."⁶⁷

65. VS pp.125-26; cf. "Power and Strategies", p.55.

66. See SP p.196. "One must stop always describing power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'quells', it 'censures', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'hides'. In fact, power produces; it produces the real. It produces areas of objects, and rituals of truth".

67. Jean Baudrillard, Oublier Foucault, p.55. See also Cornelius Castoriadis who observes that for Foucault "this mysterious entity" power, forms "an impersonal instance of absolute rationality" in history. "Les divertisseurs", Le nouvel observateur, 20 June 1977. reprinted in Le nouvel observateur: témoin de l'histoire, ed. Nicole Muchnik (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1981), p.288; Dominique Wolton remarks "Speaking about a plural and omnipresent power does not in the final analysis transgress the idea of the unity of power". "Qui veut savoir?", Esprit 7 (1977), p.46.

In other words, Foucault's power-centred analyses form a system, an all explaining vision from which nothing escapes. A cohort of hopeful revolutionaries have condemned Foucault's views as "pessimistic", arguing that the oppressed are doomed to eternal defeat by the inexorable system. Heinz Steinert comments, for example,

"From reading these accounts one gets a feeling of inevitability; one is confronted with a monstrous social machine that grinds along relentlessly and very intelligently at the top, making no mistakes, anticipating all possible opposition, which it does not crush, but rather draws in, involving it in its own destruction".⁶⁸

Other critics find that Surveiller et punir induces a "deep despair" in the absence of any "utopian alternative",⁶⁹ or that "a paranoid tone" permeates the whole of La volonté de savoir,⁷⁰ or that "there appears no way that human agency can transform this 'permanent, repetitious, inert and

68. Heinz Steinert, "The Development of 'Discipline'. According to Michel Foucault: Discourse Analysis vs Social History", Crime and Social Justice, no.20 (1984), p.95. He also adds "The seemingly closed inevitability of the system is the product of a certain kind of analysis", p.96.

69. Mark Poster, Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production Versus Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p.150.

70. Anthony Storr, "Bourgeois Sex", Spectator, 31 March 1979, p.20.

self-reproducing' power".⁷¹ Jacques Léonard remarks to Foucault that Surveiller et punir, produced a somewhat sterilising and an anaesthetising effect on penitentiary educators in the sense that his "logic had an implacability which they were unable to escape".⁷² Cornelius Castoriadis is particularly critical of Foucault's ideas on resistance and the "pleb".⁷³ "Resist if it amuses you - but without a strategy, because then you will no longer be pleb, but power".⁷⁴

Other critics however saw things somewhat differently. For them, the very inclusiveness of Foucault's vision of the

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71. Ken Plummer, "Review of The History of Sexuality", Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association 14, no.2 (1980), pp. 313-14; cf. a similar remark by James Clifford, "Review of Orientalism by Edward Said", History and Theory 19 (1980), p.213. "Foucault's recent writings leave one with the impression of a brilliant bleakness, savagely pessimistic if, in some ultimate sense, true". For other English language remarks on Foucault's failure to take "resistance" into account see: Colin Lucas, "Power and the Panopticon", Times Literary Supplement, 26 September 1975, p. 1090; Anthony Giddens, A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, vol. 1: Power Property and the State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.173; David J. Rothman, "Society and its prisons", New York Times Book Review, 19 February 1978, p.26.
72. Léonard, "L'historien et le philosophe", in L'impossible prison, ed. Perrot, p.51.
73. In "Power and Strategies", p.52, Foucault discusses resistance to power in terms of a "plebness" which exists in bodies and souls, in individuals, in the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Although it is not outside of power, it exists as the "limit" or "underside" of power constantly seeking to escape it. Foucault is very careful to emphasise that this "plebness" does not ever escape ultimately the order of power.
74. Castoriadis, "Les divertisseurs", p.287.

operations of power in our society was the condemnation of that system. Philippe Ariès describes Surveiller et punir as a "condemnation of the Enlightenment" and the "defence of a certain existential liberty of man" which is also a description of how the modern world strives to suppress any "aleatory space" in society.⁷⁵ An English speaking critic with a different view of the Enlightenment and freedom makes a similar point about the work of Bourdieu and Foucault (specifically Surveiller et punir). Both thinkers, he claims, "wear the gravebands of an intellectual culture still set in the Enlightenment, and the battlecry of rights which went up in 1789. Freedom is their absolute; and all about them, they see only its negation".⁷⁶

At the same time, however, that Foucault was constructing these systems of power, he was conducting a vigorous campaign against all forms of totality, favouring all that was "local", "specific" and "fragmented", all that was against received "truths". Two of the standard references for the multitude of critics who have eagerly rallied to this doctrine of the destruction of doctrines, are a discussion between Gilles Deleuze

75. Philippe Ariès, "La singulière histoire de Philippe Ariès", Le nouvel observateur, 20 February 1978, p.88.

76. Fred Inglis, "Good and Bad Habitus: Bourdieu, Habermas and the Condition of England", Sociological Review, 27, no.2 (1979), p.365; see also Richard Locke, "In the Cage", New York Times Book Review, 26 March 1978, p.3.

and Foucault published in 1972, and an interview titled "Truth and Power" which originally appeared in Italian in 1977 and then appeared in French the same year. Foucault begins by declaring that the days of the nineteenth century "universal intellectual", the "bearer of universal values" who spoke in the name of the oppressed, are over. In the place of this universal intellectual, we now find, according to Foucault, the "specific intellectual" who is involved in "specialised" and "local struggles", the specialist (such as a doctor or a nuclear scientist) rather than the generalist. The specific intellectual does not speak in the name of all and has no "grand theory" which will point in the direction of "truth" and solve problems.⁷⁷

"The role of the intellectual", continues Foucault in a popular passage, "is no longer to place himself 'a little in front or a little to the side' so as to be able to express the unspoken truth of all", rather it is to struggle against localised forms of power of which he is himself "both the object and the instrument".⁷⁸ This new intellectual, says Foucault, has a "three-fold specificity": this relates to his class position, to his position as an intellectual or researcher, and to the "politics of truth" in his own society. His "specific struggles" in his own field can affect the way "true" statements are

77. "Verité et pouvoir", p.22; "Truth and Power", p.46; Foucault and Deleuze, "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir", p.4.

78. Foucault and Deleuze, "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir", p.4; See also "The political function of the intellectual", Radical Philosophy, no.17 (Summer 1977), p.12. This article originally appeared in French in 1976.

produced in a society by mechanisms of power.⁷⁹ Foucault also notes that the figure of the "great writer" has disappeared to be replaced by that of the "absolute expert", dealing with "local" scientific truth. He describes the now superseded universal intellectual as having three functions: to pronounce on the destiny of mankind, to speak for man in general, and to say where the good is - what it is and what has to be done.⁸⁰ He argues that he is not himself a universal intellectual, because he does not have a vision of what the ideal society should be like and he has never spoken in anybody's name, even for prisoners or madmen. He has simply exposed the workings of the system and left it up to others to draw the logical conclusions and take action. Foucault believes that telling the truth about something poses much more of a problem than laying down a new set of laws on how things should be done.

At the same time Foucault develops his discussion on "theory". Again, his ideas on a "plurality of theoretical work", as opposed to "totalising philosophy", began to form in the late 1960s, when he declared that a certain type of "contemporary

79. "Verité et pouvoir", pp.25-26; "Truth and Power", pp.46-47. "The essential political problem for the intellectual, is not criticising the possible ideological contents of science or making sure that his scientific practice is accompanied by the correct ideology, but knowing that it is possible to establish a new politics of truth. The problem is not one of changing people's "consciousness" or what is in their heads, but changing the political, economic and institutional order of the production of truth".

80. Foucault, "Verité et pouvoir", p.24; "Truth and Power", p.43.

philosophy" as practiced by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty was null and void today.⁸¹ Later, in his discussion with Deleuze, Foucault defines theory as a practice but a "local and regional" and "non-totalising" practice.⁸² Gilles Deleuze agrees with this assessment and goes on to describe theory as a "tool-box", tools to be used at will for any useful purpose. Foucault later took up this idea himself and offered the following definitions:

"Theory as a tool-box means:

- . that it is a question of constructing not a system but an instrument: a logique appropriate to power relations and to the struggles taking place around them.
- . that this research can only be done step by step, on the basis of a reflection (necessarily historical in certain of its dimensions) on given situations".⁸³

This is the kind of research, Foucault considers himself to be undertaking, commenting further:

"All my books, Histoire de la folie or Surveiller et punir are, if you like, little tool boxes. If people want to open

81. "Foucault répond à Sartre", La quinzaine littéraire, 1 March 1968, pp.20-21.

82. "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir", p.4.

83. "Power and Strategies", (1977), p.57; cf. "Body/Power", p.62: "What the intellectual can do is provide instruments of analysis, and at present, this is the historian's essential role". Foucault's idea of the "Tool-box" can be compared to Ernst Cassirer's definition: "All theoretical concepts bear within themselves the character of 'instruments'. In the final analysis they are nothing other than tools, which we have fashioned for the solution of specific tasks and which must be continually refashioned". Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, trans. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p.76.

them, use a sentence, an idea, an analysis as a screwdriver or a spanner in order to short-circuit, disqualify and break systems of power, including if need be, those which have given rise to my own books, well, so much the better!"⁸⁴

In 1984, Foucault made it quite clear that he wished to reject "philosophy" and universal "systems" and practice "history" instead. Or more precisely he recommends that the philosopher should become a historian. He describes his thought of the limits as "archaeological - and not transcendental - in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events".⁸⁵ But this particular passage was written after a marked change had already become apparent in Foucault's work.

At a conference in 1981, he declared that his real intention was not to analyse "power" but "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, the human being is made

84. Foucault "Des supplices aux cellules", p.16; cf. also "Entretien" (with Jean-Louis Ezine), p.3. In this interview he portrays himself rather dramatically as "a seller of instruments, a provider of recipes, a register of symptoms, a cartographer, a surveyor of plans, a manufacturer of arms"; see also "Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie", p.73 and; "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", p.41.

85. "What is Enlightenment?" in The Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, p.46.

a subject".⁸⁶ His course at the Collège de France in 1982 was titled L'hermeneutique du sujet and examined a number of Greek texts in light of the problems of spiritual knowledge, Socrates' famous maxim "know thyself", and the relationship of the subject to truth. He also made a number of remarks (referred to earlier in this study) relating to the differences between pre- and post-Cartesian views on the relationship of the subject to truth. Also in 1982, in the second part of an "afterword" appended to a book by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Foucault offered some clear definitions of power which at last bring the issue into some kind of perspective. He explains: "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others".⁸⁷ Once again he emphasises that power is not a "thing", but this time, he says it can only be exercised over free subjects who are themselves capable of acting. It is at this point that Foucault's work undergoes a profound change,

86. Speech made at a conference titled "Knowledge, Power, History", organised by the Centre for the Humanities at the University of Southern California, 31 October 1981. Cited in Karlis Racevskis, Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp.15, 85. This speech appears to have been published in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Afterword by Michel Foucault (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp.208-215; cf. UP p.12 where he says "it was a matter of looking for the forms and modalities of the relationship to self by means of which the individual forms and recognizes himself as a subject".

87. "Afterword: The Subject and Power", in Michel Foucault, Dreyfus and Rabinow, p.219.

departing from the increasingly sterile huis clos of a frozen confrontation between power and its mirror underside, resistance. In introducing an "other" who is free and not simply the negative pole of power, no matter what violence or seduction those "structure[s] of actions" which make up power may choose to exercise, the object of power can ultimately escape and refuse the relationship of power, even if only through death.⁸⁸ In introducing this freedom, Foucault solves the problem of the increasing domination of the Same and system in his work, once again allowing room for the unexpected event to appear, an event which negates systems.⁸⁹ After this point, the concept of power virtually disappears from Foucault's work, and in a series of articles, he develops his ideas on "ethics"⁹¹ and the subject, suggesting that the modern ethical approach, in the

88. By "free subjects", Foucault means "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments must be realised". "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.350.

89. As Jean Baudrillard remarks in his criticism of Foucault's "system" of power: "We know that we never accumulate anything ... Any attempt at accumulation [of time, value, the subject] is devastated in advance by the void. Something in us wastes away to death, undoes, destroys, liquidates, dislocates, to allow us to resist the pressure of the real, and live". Oublier Foucault, pp.56-57.

90. Foucault defines "ethics" as "the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, rappor à soi ... and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions". "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.353.

absence of religious or legal systems of ethics, should be an "aesthetics of existence", to form our lives and ourselves as "works of art". He says:

"Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being', it compels him to face the task of producing himself".⁹¹

The Ancient Greeks, he says, had a similar approach in relation to ethics. But he is very careful to emphasise that the Greeks do not form a model for today. Indeed, he finds the Greek "ethics of pleasure" with its emphasis on virility and the exclusion of the Other, "quite disgusting"⁹² and his last two volumes on sexuality go a long way towards demonstrating how distant the Greeks are from us, and how repressive and male centred were their sexual mores and ethics.⁹³ These two volumes in addition, destroy the popular myth that the pre-Christian Greeks enjoyed a sexual freedom that the later Christian era was to do away with.⁹⁴ Perhaps what is most startling about these books to a reader acquainted with Foucault's other work is firstly the number of references to

91. "What is Enlightenment?", p.42; cf. "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.351: "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art".

92. "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p.346.

93. Cf. *ibid.*, p.344.

94. See, for example, UP pp.20-21,44-45 and Le souci de soi, pp.269-74.

modern secondary sources (in addition to the usual profusion of primary sources), and secondly, the simplicity of style. As Gilles Barbedette and André Scala remark at the beginning of an interview with Foucault less than a month before his death: "What is striking when reading your last two books, is a clear, pure and smooth style of writing, very different from what we have been used to".⁹⁵

It is not our intention to analyse these last two volumes by Foucault which deal with ethical discussions relating to sexuality, pleasure, diet and "self-government" in Classical Greece, and the first two centuries after Christ. This is for reasons of space as well as the fact that they constitute quite a marked departure in subject matter, style and approach from his earlier work. Instead, we will limit ourselves to finishing with a few remarks he made about his previous work in terms of his ethical preoccupations. Characteristically he treats his own past work almost as the work of someone else, and also quite characteristically he fits his past work into his current philosophical "system".

In L'usage des plaisirs he argues that three axes constitute the historical "experience" of sexuality: the "formation of sciences" which relate to it, the "systems" of power which rule its practices, and the forms in which subjects "recognise themselves" as the subject of sexuality (UP: 10). He is of

95. Foucault, "Le retour de la morale", Les nouvelles, 28 June 1984, interview with Gilles Barbedette and André Scala, p.37.

course (except in the last case) referring to his earlier work, and after describing the two "theoretical shifts" that this previous work had involved, says that to undertake his new project on the subject, a "third shift" is necessary (UP: 12). This "shift" involves the examination of the mechanisms of "truth" by means of which "being forms itself historically as an experience" (UP: 13). In a masterful reinterpretation of all his previous work Foucault says that it is a question of examining what "mechanisms of truth" are in action when man sees himself as mad, ill, a living, speaking and working being, or as a criminal or a man of desire. Or as he asks elsewhere, "how are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?"⁹⁶

In these statements all of Foucault's work has now become, in his view, a history of the formation of the subject, an interpretation that a number of writers are already beginning to adopt, when they speak of his work in its entirety. However, if we ignore such words as the "subject" and "the mechanisms of truth: and look at Foucault's remark that this work is the examination of the way in which "being forms itself historically

96. "What is Enlightenment", p.49; cf. a remark in "Polemics, Politics and Problemizations: An Interview", in The Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, p.387, where he says, "It is basically a matter of different examples in which the three fundamental elements of any experience are implicated: a game of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others"; cf. also "Le retour de la morale", p.38.

as an experience", then we are perhaps closest to an overall picture of his work: a philosophy which is at the same time a history. These were to be Foucault's last reinterpretations of his work. What is remarkable in them, is the fact that right to the last moment he continued to think critically not only about the ideas of others but, more importantly, about his own ideas. As he says in L'usage des plaisirs:

"There are moments in life when the question of knowing whether you can think differently from the way you think and see differently from the way you see is indispensable if you are going to continue to see or reflect on things".

We began this chapter by noting the disappearance of the exterior limits and the Other in Foucault's work; these last writings mark their final reappearance.

CONCLUSION

Since Foucault's death, the influence of his work has not ceased to grow, and controversy about his ideas remains unabated. Indeed, recently a new polarisation in the debate in English seems to be taking place. In opposition to the enthusiastic excesses of his (generally American) fans, and their pronouncements against "great theories" and "truth" and the "meaning of history", another group of writers has come to the fore. This group of writers, in a return to certain criticisms of the 1960s, (although criticisms of this type have certainly not been absent since that date) accuse Foucault of a cynical and perverse nihilism, an intellectual "political quietism".¹ But this time there is a difference, Foucault's followers are also included in this criticism. Indeed as J.G. Merquior's book on Foucault demonstrates, an increasing number of commentators are spending almost as much time discussing other commentators' interpretations of Foucault's work, as discussing Foucault's own work. This has led increasingly to a confusion between Foucault's ideas and the often less cautious interpretations of

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1. Iain Wright, "The Suicide of the Intellectuals", The Times Higher Education Supplement, 24 October 1986, p.16. What is worrying about both groups is a growing conservatism, an uncritical acceptance of the status quo, even if it is the status quo of "counter-culture". In other cases, a return to "rationalism" and "humanism" is advocated. Some of these writings are also marked by what appears to be a return to an empiricist and continuist view of history, heavily disguised as "genealogy".

his followers. This point emerges clearly in a polemic between Foucault and Lawrence Stone. In reply to a number of corrections by Foucault concerning Stone's misinterpretations of Histoire de la folie, the latter concedes that he did Foucault an "injustice" in failing to point out that he was "dealing with a large international body of thought covering many disciplines, namely Foucaultism".²

One of the major problems with this development is that it tends to impose a uniformity of interpretation on Foucault's philosophical and ethical discussions. This is not only because a number of readers read the critics rather than the original, but that these critics sometimes exert a certain "terrorism" and "territorialism" of authority when it comes to Foucault's work. Other writers or readers are loathe to infringe on this authority, and alter their own ideas to fit the current "interpretation". Surprisingly, this is currently more of a problem in the Anglo-Saxon field of criticism than in French criticism, usually noted for its intellectual fashions and dogmas. Far fewer books on Foucault have appeared in French than

2. Michel Foucault and Lawrence Stone, "An Exchange with Michel Foucault", The New York Review of Books, 21 March 1983, p.42. In his original article, Stone had in fact very clearly attributed these "foucauldian" ideas to Foucault himself. "Madness", The New York Review of Books, 16 December 1982, p.29.

in English since his death.³ It is possible that Foucault's invitation to use his books as "tools", has been taken more seriously by French writers than by their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Certainly the writings in French on Foucault appear to rely far less on Foucault to provide a framework for their own analysis. By far the largest number of readers of Foucault's work in both French and English, however, delve into his books not for a philosophy, but for isolated points of historical, sociological and literary interpretation.

At this point we might again ask the question which forms the title of this study: is Michel Foucault a historian or a philosopher? The answer to this question, as we have suggested on a number of occasions, is that Foucault is a philosopher who writes history transforming it into philosophy. As Paul Veyne remarks "Philosophy itself, in becoming a radical historicism, engulfs, recuperates or transforms history and this is at the heart of the meaning of the Foucault phenomenon".⁴ This

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3. Only two books, and a revised edition of a book originally published in 1974 have in fact appeared. See, Michel Foucault: une histoire de la vérité (Paris: Syros, 1985). This is a collection of writings put together on the occasion of a Foucault exhibition held in Belleville in November and December 1985; Jean-Marie Auzias, Michel Foucault, Qui suis-je? (Paris: La Manufacture, 1986) and the revised edition of Angèle Kremer-Marietti's book Michel Foucault: archéologie et généologie (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1985). As previously noted, translations of two books written in English have also appeared. Fata Morgana also published two of Foucault's articles in book form in 1986.
4. Raymond Bellour and Philippe Venault, directors, "L'histoire une passion nouvelle: table ronde avec Philippe Ariès, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Paul Veyne", Magazine littéraire 123 (1973), p.21.

the historical collectivities that Foucault examined as to the individual subject he dealt with at the end of the career. His work not only invites us to think for ourselves as "free beings" beyond our historical limits, wherever possible, it also warns us not to accept any system without thinking about it very carefully first. Unfortunately Foucault's own work, particularly when it was at its most systematic and most oppressive during the 1970s, is in danger of itself becoming yet another constraining system. This is a tendency which should be resisted at all costs, because as Foucault's own work shows, there are many ways of interpreting - and facilitating - the free dialogue at the limits between the Same and the Other, and they are certainly not all encompassed in Foucault's books. As one phase of his work demonstrates all too clearly, once that freedom is forgotten, the tyranny of the System and the Same, returns in force.

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